

RESOLVING THE PARADOX OF FICTION: THE OBJECT THEORY

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By

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## Abstract

This project introduces the paradox of fiction and attempts to resolve the contradiction that the paradox presents. This problem concerns the possibility of experiencing genuine emotional reactions towards fictional characters, given that appreciators do not believe fictional characters exist. In an attempt to remedy the contradiction in the paradox, I argue that a resolution lies in the method of revising or replacing the false proposition in the paradox with a proposition that provides insight into our emotional responses to fiction while avoiding the contradiction in the paradox. To achieve this, I identify three possible strategies for the resolution of the paradox. The first strategy replaces proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) with Kendall Walton's solution to the paradox. The second strategy argues two separate views for the revision and replacement of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) – (a) Non-cognitivist solution to the paradox, and (b) Reality Cognitivist solution to the paradox. The third strategy replaces proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) by considering solutions offered by Colin Radford and a version of the Illusionist's Theory. Through the process of elimination, I argue that strategies 1, 2a and 3 are inadequate for resolving the paradox, and propose that strategy 2b (which argues the thought theory and object theory models) is a preferred solution to the paradox. Following strategy 2b, the object theory posits that appreciators of fiction believe the objects of their emotions are real but non-existent objects with emotion-inducing properties, which, coupled with the narrative techniques used in fictional works, argue that appreciators of fiction have genuine emotional responses to fiction. By stating that appreciators of fiction have emotional reactions towards fictional characters because they believe these characters are real but non-existent with emotion-inducing properties, the object theory not only avoids the contradiction which the paradox presents but also avoids attributing inconsistent beliefs to appreciators, while providing insight into appreciators' emotional response to fiction.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Toluwalase Mazedat Alli

and

Lolo Nnenna Beatrice Oriaku

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## INTRODUCTION

We often experience (what we think of as) feelings of fear, anger, sadness, fear etc. while reading/watching fiction. We feel our hearts racing and let out screams of terror while watching horror movies; we feel sad when something tragic happens to a character and sometimes shed a tear; we feel anger towards antagonists who commit evil deeds and still triumph. It is also a familiar experience to observe others displaying outward signs of emotions like crying, covering faces in fear, smiling in admiration, etc., while reading/watching fiction. These experiences suggest that appreciators often have emotional reactions while engaged with works of fiction. Moreover, these emotions seem to be directed towards fictional characters and the fictional events that unfold in the fictional works in which they appear.

As simple as this phenomenon may seem, it poses a serious problem. The problem concerns the possibility of experiencing genuine emotional reactions to fiction, given that appreciators do not believe the objects of their emotions exist. As stated above, the emotions in question are directed towards fictional entities. Since fictional entities do not exist, this problematizes the view that appreciators have genuine emotional reactions to them. For how can we come to feel genuine emotions towards that which does not exist? This problem has led some scholars to argue against the possibility of experiencing genuine emotions to fiction.

The problem is that a contradiction seems to arise from the supposition that appreciators have genuine emotional reactions to fiction. This problem can be expressed using the three propositions which make up the so-called “paradox of fiction.” While the following designations shall be used to identify the propositions in this project: (1) Emotions towards Fiction; (2) Emotion and Belief; (3) Non-belief in Fiction, the propositions that make up the paradox include:

**P1 (Emotions towards Fiction)** - Appreciators sometimes experience genuine emotions towards fictional entities.

**P2 (Emotion and Belief)** - A necessary condition for having a genuine emotion is that the subject believes the object of their emotion exists.

**P3 (Non-belief in Fiction)** - Appreciators know that the objects of their emotions are fictional and hence do not believe that they exist.

The propositions that make up the paradox are individually plausible and unproblematic. Nevertheless, they cannot all be accepted as true because they are inconsistent. As such, at least one of the propositions that make up the paradox must be false. Irrespective of this, while simply rejecting one of the propositions and accepting the others will avoid the contradiction, it will not solve the paradox because it doesn't itself yield insight into our emotional responses to fiction. Rather than just rejecting the false proposition, what is needed is a replacement or revision with a proposition that provides insight into our emotional responses to fiction.

The fundamental question is how is it possible that we can experience genuine emotions towards things that we do not believe exist? Several solutions to the paradox of fiction, which address this fundamental question, have been offered. In all of these solutions, one thing is clear: engagement with fiction arouses feelings. But whether such feelings can be considered genuine emotions remains a problem to be resolved. Some of these notable solutions to the paradox of fiction include the following:

1. We simply do not have genuine emotional reactions to fiction. Instead, we make-believe that the feelings aroused by fiction are genuine emotions.
2. The objects of our emotions are our mental images rather than non-existent fictional characters.

3. Our emotional responses give the illusion that fictional entities are existent objects, which requires a suspension of our disbelief in their existence.
4. Our emotional responses do not require belief in the existence of the object(s) of our emotions.
5. Our emotional reactions to fiction are irrational, given that they require that we both believe and disbelieve that fictional entities exist.

For an adequate understanding of these reactions to the paradox, as well as my solution to the paradox of fiction, it will be helpful to clarify some of the concepts which will be required for explaining these solutions. These concepts include the following:

The object theory: refers to the theory that states that there are real but non-existent objects. A broader discussion and defence of the object theory goes beyond the scope of my project.

Real objects: these consist of the class of things included in one's ontology. According to the object theory, the class of real objects is broader than the class of existent objects: (i) fictional entities count as real but nonexistent objects and (ii) non-fictional entities (normally) count as real and existent objects.

Existent objects: these consist of the class of real things that also exist. This class includes ordinary non-fictional objects, including concrete animate and inanimate things, mental entities such as thoughts and mental images, and perhaps even certain abstract entities.

Real feelings: these are physiological and phenomenological states of human subjects, such as the feeling of sadness or increased heart rate when one is fearful.

Fiction-directed emotions: these are the real feelings experienced by appreciators during their engagement with fiction. Fiction-directed emotions often seem to be directed towards fictional characters and events. Classifying a feeling as a fiction-

directed emotion does not presuppose it is a genuine emotion: it is simply the term used to differentiate emotional reactions experienced during our engagement with fiction from the emotions experienced in non-fictional situations.

Genuine/Non-fictional emotions: are the real feelings which count as genuine emotions. These normally include feelings that are experienced during non-fictional real-life events.

According to the solution to the paradox of fiction I will be defending, appreciators of fiction have genuine emotional reactions to fiction. But on my view, there is no contradiction between having a genuine emotional reaction and disbelief in the existence of the object of that emotion. To make this claim, I argue that genuine emotions require only belief in the reality of the objects of our emotions and not belief in their existence. In addition to being real but non-existent entities, on my view, fictional entities also possess emotion-inducing properties. And because appreciators need only believe in the reality of fictional entities to have genuine emotional relations to them, the contradiction of having emotional reactions towards things that do not exist is avoided. The emotions appreciators experience when engaged with fiction are just as genuine as the emotions experienced during their experience of non-fictional events.

In order to defend my solution, I have divided my thesis into 3 chapters. Herein, my arguments are aimed toward introducing the paradox of fiction and the method for resolving the paradox. Since my approach for resolving the paradox requires the revision or replacement of at least one of the propositions that make up the paradox, my overall argument involves first considering the revision or replacement of propositions 1, 2 and 3. Next, I argue against the strategies involving the revision or replacement of propositions 1 and 3, leaving only revising or replacing proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) as a viable strategy. I then distinguish between two ways of revising or replacing proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief): Strategy 2a involves

replacing proposition 2 (Emotions and Belief) with proposition 2a (Non-cognitivism) which argues that neither belief in the existence nor reality of the object of emotion is required for emotional reactions. While strategy 2b replaces proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism) which argues that belief in the reality – not existence – of the object of emotions is required for emotional reactions. Next, I argue against strategy 2a and conclude that only strategy 2b remains a tenable solution.

Chapter One consists of three sections. In the first section, the paradox of fiction is introduced and the requirements for its resolution are specified. In particular, I argue that the paradox of fiction is a problem that can be resolved by revising or replacing at least one of the propositions that constitute it. In the second section, the inadequacy of the strategy of revising proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) is established. To this end, Radford's irrationality strategy and the Illusionists' suspension of disbelief strategy are critically evaluated. In the final section, a distinction is drawn between two ways of revising or replacing proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief): proposition 2a (Non-cognitivism) claims that belief in neither the existence nor the reality of an object of emotion is required for a genuine emotion; and proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism) states that as a necessary condition for experiencing emotions, the subject believes the object of his/her emotions is real (and has emotion-inducing properties). And I argue against the strategy of rejecting proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) and replacing it with 2a (Non-cognitivism).

Chapter Two discusses the strategy of replacing proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction), focusing on Walton's solution to the paradox. In the first section of the chapter, Walton's account of appreciators' engagement with fiction as (passive) participation in games of make-belief is examined. In the second section, Walton's account of emotional reactions to fiction in terms of quasi-emotions is explored. The remainder of the chapter consists of

criticisms of Walton's solution to the paradox. In the third section, I argue against Walton's view that adults make-believe in the same way children do. Although the discussed disanalogies between adults' and children's games of make-belief do not discredit Walton's view, I argue that such disanalogies give a better perspective on the implications of Walton's analogy. In the fourth section, I present reasons to reject Walton's account of appreciators' lack of motivation to act on their fictional emotions. And in the fifth section, I examine the limitation of Walton's example of Charles and his fictional fear of the green slime, focusing on problems involving asides to the audience. The chapter concludes that the strategy of revising or replacing proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) is untenable, leaving revising or replacing proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism) as the only option on the table.

Chapter Three examines the strategy of replacing proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism). It also includes a defence of the object theory version of this strategy. This chapter consists of three main sections. In the first section, Lamarque's version of the thought theory is discussed. I argue that Lamarque's solution to the paradox of fiction is inadequate and discuss other limitations of the view. In the second section, I develop and defend my version of the object theory as a solution to the paradox of fiction. I argue that fictional entities are real but non-existent objects that possess emotion-inducing properties, which account for our experience of genuine emotional reactions to them. In the final section, I consider some advantages of my solution, arguing that the object theory avoids some problems that Radford's, Walton's and Lamarque's solutions run into.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PARADOX OF FICTION: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM AND PRESENTING A STRATEGY FOR ITS RESOLUTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

During our engagement with the fictional work *Game of Thrones*, we sometimes experience feelings which we think of as (the emotion of) happiness, such as when Lord Baelish finally gets his just deserts; feelings we think of as fear, felt in the scene where the Night King raises the dead dragon, Viserion, as an ice dragon; or feelings we think of as sadness, aroused when Eddard Stark is beheaded as punishment for crimes he did not commit. In these moments, we experience the physiological and phenomenological elements of emotions and, while our feelings are real, the corresponding emotions might not be. Since emotions are to be understood as feelings that meet certain conditions, it follows that not all feelings are emotions; it is only when feelings meet the relevant conditions that we have genuine emotions. While the nature of these conditions is up for debate in this discussion, normally, people take these conditions to be the requirement that (1) the feelings are caused in the right way and, (2) the feelings are directed at the right kind of object(s). To emphasize the difference between feelings and emotions, consider the analogy of the relation between a sunburn on one's hand and a burn on the same hand. It is not that the sunburn is distinct from the burn, but rather that the burn on one's hand counts as a sunburn only if it meets certain other conditions, in particular, that it is caused by overexposure to the sun. Similarly, not all feelings count as emotions, because not all feelings have the right sorts of causes and effects or are directed at the right sorts of objects.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although the standard view is that having the right sort of causes and effects, as well as being a directed feeling (i.e. having the right kind of object) are conditions necessary for genuine emotions, I will not be assuming this view is correct. As we will see, one of the solutions to the paradox involves abandoning the standard account of emotions. But this is how I intend to distinguish between feelings and emotions from the onset.

These feelings at issue, which are putatively directed at the fictional characters, are also observed in others as they display outward signs of the emotions they feel when they cry, smile, are moody or let out joyful screams in excitement. Despite our experience of these feelings, we are also knowledgeable of the fact that these fictional entities (Lord Baelish, Theon Greyjoy and Eddard Stark) do not exist. This understanding poses a threat to the possibility of experiencing genuine emotional reactions to fiction. A contradiction arises from the supposition that our emotional reactions to fiction are genuine, for how can we claim to feel genuine emotions towards that which we do not believe to exist?

In this chapter, I present this problem using the three propositions which make up the paradox of fiction: (1) Emotions towards Fiction; (2) Emotion and Belief; (3) Non-belief in Fiction. Because the propositions are inconsistent and, hence, cannot all be true, I also argue that the paradox must be resolved using a strategy that involves revising or replacing the false proposition. To achieve this, I have divided this chapter into three sections.

In the first section, I introduce the paradox of fiction as a triad of individually plausible, but jointly inconsistent propositions. As such, while simply rejecting one of the propositions and accepting the remaining two will avoid the contradiction, by itself, it will not solve the paradox because it does not yield insight into our emotional responses to fiction. As a result, I argue that as an alternative strategy, what is needed is that we revise or replace the false proposition in a way that resolves the contradiction and yields insight into our emotional responses to fiction.

Since this strategy has been adopted by various philosophers of art in their attempt to resolve the paradox, the second section of this chapter will establish the inadequacy of the revision strategy applied to proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction). To show this, I shall critically

evaluate Colin Radford's irrationality strategy and the Illusionists' suspension of disbelief strategy, arguing that both strategies are inadequate.

In the third section, I argue for a distinction between two ways of revising proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief): 2a (Non-cognitivism) – neither belief in the existence nor belief in the reality of an object of emotion is required for a genuine emotion, and 2b (Reality Cognitivism) – belief in the reality of an object of emotion is required for a genuine emotion, but belief in its existence is not. And I argue against the strategy of replacing proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with 2a (Non-cognitivism).

### 1.1 The Paradox of Fiction

In this section, I will do three main things: (i) discuss feelings and emotions experienced during engagement with fiction; (ii) introduce the paradox of fiction; and (iii) argue that a solution to the paradox requires revising or replacing rather than just rejecting the false proposition.

Many appreciators of fiction often have real feelings towards fictional characters, given the plights such characters undergo. Consider the detailed examples from the television series, *Game of Thrones*, which I have included to give a rounded understanding of the fictional scenes and the possible emotional reactions appreciators experience while engaged with them. Going further, I shall only be using the labels assigned to these examples when referring to them in my arguments and discussions. They include:

**Eddard's Death** – In this scene, the head of House Stark of Winterfell, Eddard Stark, having been wrongly accused of treason, is brought before the rulers and people of Kings Landing. Following the advice of Lord Varys, Eddard confesses to crimes he did not commit with the hope of avoiding death, keeping his daughters alive, and being sent to the Night's Watch after

being stripped of his titles and possessions, as a preferred punishment. But by the order of the wicked young King Joffrey, Eddard is beheaded in front of his daughters and the entire city, despite pleas of mercy from Queen Cersei, Sansa Stark, and members of the council. This scene was unexpected and challenging for most appreciators of the fictional work. This scene arouses feelings characteristic of the emotion of sadness in many viewers.

**Theon's Humiliation** – Another example is the torture and humiliation of Theon Greyjoy by Ramsey Bolton. In this scene, Theon is imprisoned, tortured, castrated and humiliated by Ramsey, so much so that Theon begs Ramsey to kill him. Rather than grant Theon this plea, Ramsey begins to call Theon terrible names and even goes on to rename him, Reek. Ramsey soon tortures Theon to accept this new name until Theon's will is broken and he shamefully calls out the name "Reek" when Ramsey asks him "what is your name?" This scene arouses feelings characteristic of the emotion of pity towards Theon.

**Baelish's Trial** – In this scene, Lord Baelish is outsmarted by the Stark sisters and brought before the entire court of Winterfell to stand trial for crimes of murder and treason. When found guilty by Sansa Stark based on evidence brought, Arya Stark executes judgement by slitting his throat. For typical viewers, this scene arouses feelings of happiness because the scheming Lord Baelish is finally getting his just desert and because Sansa Stark is finally reaching her potential, acting smart, and reuniting with her sister.

The real feelings appreciators experience in response to fiction and non-fiction include physiological and phenomenological states of appreciators – such as tears that are characteristic of sadness or an increased heart rate that is characteristic of fear.<sup>2</sup> In addition to having these feelings, individuals often engage in behaviours characteristic of genuine emotions including

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<sup>2</sup> These feelings differ from the pretend emotions or mimicked emotions that actors display in theatrical performances and movies. Actors need not necessarily feel the emotions in order to feign them and react in the appropriate way, although some actors do as part of their process.

verbal behaviours. For example, in the scenes showing Eddard's Death and Theon's Humiliation, appreciators can say things like "I was shocked when Eddard Stark died. It was so sad, I even cried"; "I felt pity for Theon when Ramsey imprisoned and tortured him." But while affirming the experience of these feelings towards Eddard and Theon, appreciators are also typically aware of the fact that these fictional entities do not exist.

Some individuals have argued that this phenomenon leads to the so-called "paradox of fiction". The paradox of fiction contains a triad of plausible but incompatible propositions (Radford 67-80):

1. Emotions towards Fiction: Readers and viewers of fictional works often experience genuine emotions – such as fear, sadness, happiness, pity, hatred etc. – towards fictional characters.
2. Emotion and Belief: A necessary condition for having genuine emotions is that subjects believe the objects of their emotions exist.
3. Non-belief in Fiction: Readers and viewers know that the objects of their emotions are fictional and hence do not believe that they exist.

The propositions that make up the paradox can be illustrated with an example. Let me elaborate using the example labelled Baelish's Trial above. Following the claims in the propositions that make up the paradox:

- A. If Proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) is true then typical viewers watching this scene might experience genuine emotions, such as happiness or excitement. The objects of these emotions would be fictional characters – Lord Baelish or Sansa Stark – and they would arise as a result of the fact that viewers believe that the scheming Lord Baelish is finally getting his just deserts or because they believe Sansa Stark is finally reaching her potential, acting smart, and reuniting with her sister.

- B. If Proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) is true, then in order for someone to experience this feeling of happiness and/or excitement towards the involved character(s) – Lord Baelish, Sansa and Arya – it is necessary that they believe that these characters exist and have undergone the events depicted in the fictional work.
- C. If Proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) is true, then appreciators of the fictional work, *Game of Thrones*, know that the characters Lord Baelish, Sansa and Arya are fictional and, hence, do not believe that they exist.

While each proposition of the paradox is individually plausible, they cannot all be true at the same time. Suppose, for example, 1 and 2 are true, this would mean that appreciators sometimes have genuine emotions towards fictional characters; and since genuine emotions require belief in the existence of their objects, this would mean that appreciators sometimes believe that fictional characters exist, which contradicts 3.

Although any two of the propositions can be held without contradiction, simply rejecting one of the propositions to avoid inconsistency is by itself insufficient to resolve the paradox. This is because simply selecting two members of the inconsistent triad does not by itself yield insight into our emotional responses to fiction. As such, I argue that resolving the paradox will require the revision or replacement of the false proposition. This will enable us to avoid the contradiction in the paradox and will also yield insight into our emotional reactions to fiction.

There are three basic strategies for resolving the paradox of fiction, each of which involves revising or replacing one of the propositions that make up the paradox. Strategy 1 replaces proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) and replaces it with a different account of fiction-directed emotions, such as, that they are fictional emotions. Strategy 2 has two versions: the replacement of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with 2a which states that belief neither

in the reality nor the existence of the object of emotions is necessary for those emotions to be genuine; and the replacement of 2 with 2b which states that a necessary condition for experiencing emotions is that the subject believes the object of his/her emotions is real (and has emotion-inducing properties). Strategy 3 revises proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) and also has two versions: Radford's irrationality argument and the Illusionists' suspension of disbelief approach.

My overall argument for resolving the paradox of fiction involves (1) the rejection of strategies 3 and 2a in this chapter, (2) the rejection of strategy 1 in Chapter Two, and (3) the defence of strategy 2b in Chapter Three.

## **1.2 Revising Proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction)**

In this section, I shall expand on the first phase of my strategy for resolving the paradox of fiction: an evaluation of the strategy of revising proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction). I will examine two implementations of this strategy: Radford's irrationality argument and the Illusionists' suspension of disbelief argument. My goal is to establish that this approach to the resolution of the paradox is inadequate.

### **1.2.1 Radford on Irrational Emotions**

In his article "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?" Radford revises proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction), the claim that appreciators do not believe that fictional entities exist and replaces it with the claim that appreciators disbelieve (propositions to the effect that) fictional entities exist (for convenience, I shall refer to Radford's revised proposition as proposition 3a: Disbelief in Fiction). By rejecting proposition 3 (Non-belief in fiction)

3: Appreciators do not believe that fictional characters exist

and replacing it with proposition 3a (Disbelief in Fiction),

3a: Appreciators believe that fictional characters do not exist,

Radford avoids the contradiction that the paradox presents. Although propositions 1, 2 and 3a are not inconsistent propositions, together, they entail that appreciators who respond emotionally to fiction have an inconsistent set of beliefs. First, propositions 1 and 2 entail that appreciators believe that fictional characters exist, which conflicts with proposition 3 but not 3a (Disbelief in Fiction). Second, since propositions 1 and 2 entail that an appreciator of *Game of Thrones* has a belief set that includes, for example, the proposition that Eddard exists, proposition 3a (Disbelief in Fiction) entails that this belief set includes the proposition that Eddard does not exist. This is why the appreciator has an inconsistent belief set; 3a (Disbelief in Fiction) avoids the contradiction but together with propositions 1 and 2, attributes inconsistent beliefs to the appreciator.

To motivate his account of emotional responses to fiction, Radford cites the example of a non-fictional case where we experience emotional reactions from inconsistent beliefs (78). Through this analogy, Radford argues his view that appreciators have inconsistent beliefs even in non-fictional cases. Radford gives the example of the tennis player who involuntarily jumps to stop the ball from hitting the net when he knows that movement is futile. Based on Radford's view, the belief set of the tennis player includes the proposition that he can stop the ball (which is inferred from his behaviour) and the proposition that he cannot. Radford suggests that there is a similar inconsistency in our psychological states in our emotional reactions to fiction. Hence, his justification that our real feelings towards fictional entities can be understood as genuine emotions irrespective of the inconsistency we experience.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that this inconsistency is temporary as it occurs only while caught up in fiction. This is reflected in his claim that after our emotional reactions to fictional scenes – like Eddard's Death – we realise that

The first thing to note is that Radford's motivating example does not work. Radford is mistaken when he likens inconsistencies that arise from our actions and reactions in non-fictional situations to inconsistencies faced as a result of both believing and disbelieving in the existence of fictional entities. For one, the origins of these inconsistencies differ. In non-fictional situations, although our reactions may be considered irrational since we know that we cannot change the inevitable (given the situation at hand) yet we react to them, inconsistency and incoherence here do not arise as a result of both believing and disbelieving in the object of our reactions. To illustrate with his example, the tennis player does not both believe and disbelieve that he can reach the ball. Since the tennis player is aware that attempting to stop the ball is a futile effort, his movement to stop the ball is more of a reflex reaction (of conditioned neuro-muscular behaviour) and not the product of believing he can reach the ball. Hence, his analogy is not convincing enough to accept his view on inconsistent beliefs.

In addition, certain difficulties arise for Radford's solution in its own right. Radford attributes a special kind of inconsistency to appreciators which is not typical of our normal experience. This is because the inconsistency appreciators experience does not arise as a result of appreciators' epistemic flaws (caused by inattention or confusion), nor are appreciators unable to remedy their inconsistent beliefs when they become aware of them. As Alward puts it:

...although it is true that most of us do find ourselves with inconsistent beliefs from time to time, this is typically the product of epistemic difficulties of various kinds: inattention or confusion or simply a lack of information. Moreover, it is an inherently unstable state: when we discover an inconsistency in our beliefs we are normally moved to correct it. But engaged readers/listeners need not and typically do not suffer from such epistemic ailments. They know perfectly well that the stories they read/listen to are

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"...in retrospect, our behaviour differs. In the case of the [non-fictional] man, we [typically] continue to be moved and to regret what happened. With [Eddard Stark], we are unlikely to do this and, in talking about his death later, we might only be moved to say 'How moving it was!' For we are no longer at the performance or responding directly to it. We do not so much realise later as appropriately remind ourselves later that [Eddard Stark] is only a character" (77).

incompatible with actuality, nor are they moved by this fact to become disengaged or to stop reading/listening altogether” (38).

If we both believe and disbelieve in the existence of fictional characters, we would be in a state of uncertainty about (i) how to respond emotionally and (ii) whether to intervene, but we are not in such state of uncertainty on either count. In essence, Radford’s approach seems to suggest that appreciators’ engagement with fiction is more difficult than it in fact is, given that it requires that appreciators both believe and disbelieve in fictional entities. As Alward puts it, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, for one to “voluntarily and knowingly adopt a belief that is inconsistent with a belief one already holds and intends to retain” (39).

Also, it seems unlikely that appreciators of *Game of Thrones* often have inconsistent sets of beliefs about the existence of fictional characters like Sansa Stark or Theon Greyjoy without being conscious of such inconsistencies and wanting to end them. As a result, I agree with Alward when he states that the attribution of this unnoticed inconsistency to the beliefs of engaged appreciators is to be seen as “a strategy of last resort and, as such, should be endorsed only if all else fails” (39).

### **1.2.2 The Illusion Theory**

The Illusionists’ suspension of disbelief approach revises proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) by holding on to Radford’s solution to the paradox while avoiding Radford’s problem of inconsistent beliefs. The suspension of disbelief approach states that appreciators disbelieve in the existence of fictional characters, but this disbelief is suspended while engaged with fiction.<sup>4</sup> This Illusionist theory avoids the paradox in the same way as Radford by replacing proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) with 3a (Disbelief in Fiction). As an addition and an advantage, it avoids Radford’s inconsistent belief set by taking 3a to be suspended while caught

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<sup>4</sup> This approach to resolving the paradox was first explored by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), who stated that our proper engagement with fiction involves a “willing suspension of disbelief” (264).

up in fiction. This way, the Illusionists' suspension of disbelief approach avoids both the contradiction that the paradox of fiction presents and the problem of inconsistent beliefs while caught up in the story. The Illusionist theory holds that appreciators experience this temporary illusion that fictional characters exist while suspending their disbelief. For example, the Illusionist theory will argue that while watching Theon's Humiliation, appreciators get so engrossed and caught up that they experience the temporary illusion that Theon and Ramsey exist.

Problems with the Illusionist theory can be revealed by distinguishing between naïve audiences and informed audiences: informed audiences are aware of the status of a work as fiction, while naïve audiences are not aware.<sup>5</sup> Given their knowledge of the nature of a work as fiction, informed audiences also do not behave in ways that naïve audiences do. For example, while watching a stage performance of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the naïve audience who is not aware he is engaged with fiction might scream from the audience or charge onto the stage to stop Romeo from killing himself. The informed audience on the other hand knows they are engaged with fiction and does not attempt to act in similar ways. The informed audience rather just sits back and enjoys the performance. But based on the Illusionists' approach, having suspended their disbelief, informed audiences will be expected to behave as if they thought fictional characters exist and be motivated to act on their emotions towards fictional characters as they would act in non-fictional cases. Contrary to the suggestion of the Illusionists' suspension of disbelief approach, informed appreciators of fiction are not naïve

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<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this project, I understand informed audience as the class of appreciators who are aware of the fictional status of the work they are engaged with. Informed audiences typically do not mistaken fiction with non-fiction, neither do they react to fictional events and the plights of fictional characters based on the assumption that such fictional events and characters are non-fictional. The class of naïve audience include appreciators who are unaware of the status of a work as fiction, and mistaken fictional events and characters for non-fiction events and persons. I shall further analyse this class of audience in my discussion on the naïve backwoodsman.

backwoodspersons – figures “who jumps onto the stage trying to stop the characters in some Jacobean drama ... from perpetrating their evil designs” (Schaper 34). Arguing in this vein, Alward states that appreciators of fiction are not moved to act in whatever way available to them, in hopes of rescuing the fictional characters whom they read about or watch, from the plights in which these characters find themselves. Appreciators of fiction do not engage in such actions exactly because of their belief that the concerned characters do not exist (39).

Following our discussion thus far, we have good reason to believe that the revision of proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) as a strategy fails to resolve the paradox of fiction. This is because contrary to Radford, appreciators do not have inconsistent belief sets when engaged with fiction and contrary to the Illusionists, appreciators do not and need not suspend their disbelief that fictional characters exist to experience genuine emotions. Although there may be other versions of the strategy of revising or replacing proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction), these versions – Radford’s irrationality argument and the Illusionists’ suspension of disbelief approach – available in literature so far are inadequate for resolving the paradox of fiction.

### **1.3 On the Necessity of Belief: Revising Proposition 2**

In this section, I shall argue against the strategy of replacing proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with proposition 2a (Non-cognitivism): neither belief in the existence nor belief in the reality of an object of emotion is required for a genuine emotion. To do this, I shall examine two non-cognitivist approaches: (1) formal features non-cognitivism, according to which emotional reactions to characters are explained in terms of formal properties of fictional works; and (2) similarity non-cognitivism, according to which appreciators’ emotional reactions to fiction are explained in terms of similarities between fictional characters and non-fictional persons. Despite the inadequacy of these approaches as solutions to the paradox, I argue that

strategy 2b, according to which proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) is replaced by proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism), remains on the table.

### **1.3.1 Non-Cognitivism and the Irrelevance of Belief**

The non-cognitivist approach to emotions argues against the necessity of belief in the existence or reality of an object in order to have an emotional reaction towards it. Although cognition is applied in an attempt to check our responses to our emotional reactions (in terms of our motivated actions), for non-cognitivists, this occurs after we experience the emotional reactions. As a motivation for the non-cognitivist view, Jenefer Robinson, argues that in many cases emotions happen too quickly for cognitive evaluation; first we feel the emotions, and discussions about belief in the existence of the object of emotions are secondary and not needed for emotional reactions.<sup>6</sup> Many non-cognitivist approaches to emotions remain steadfast in their argument against the supposition that our emotional reactions must be necessarily accompanied by a cognitive attitude founded on the belief in the existence of the object of our emotions. When applied to engagement with fiction, while I agree with the non-cognitivists' view that belief in the existence of the object of emotions (fictional characters) is unnecessary for genuine emotional reactions, I do not agree with their account of the cause of appreciators' emotional reactions while engaged with fiction. Several non-cognitivists like Robinson, argue the view that the cause of appreciators' emotional reactions while engaged with fiction, are non-cognitive factors such as the formal features of fictional works or the similarity between the plights of fictional characters and existing non-fictional individuals, rather than cognitive factors such as beliefs. Like Robinson, several non-cognitivists maintain the view that the

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<sup>6</sup> Robinson argues that there is a core element of affective appraisal in every emotion, which precedes cognitive evaluation, and which is the real source of what we feel (84-85). I understand the affective appraisal to include the assessment of our feelings about things that have a bearing on our interests causing us to have real feelings (Robinson 86), while cognitive evaluation includes the monitoring of the object of these emotions and our motivating reactions to such emotions (Robinson 86).

objects of our fiction-directed emotions are the characters in works of fiction: the “claim is that we respond emotionally to people and events in novels in just the same way as we respond to people and events in real life” (Robinson 73). As such, for advocates of the formal features approach and the similarity approach, the object of emotions when engaged with fiction are the fictional characters.

Formal features non-cognitivism states that the formal features of works of fiction account for appreciators’ emotional reactions to fictional characters. By formal features of fictional works, I mean the features used by movie producers to create the right ‘mood’ and to influence emotional reactions. Although these features can be planned (like sound, cast, editing and lights) or unplanned (like traffic or animals passing in some scenes) they do not add to the plots of fictional works. These formal features differ from the narrative content of fictional works. In literature, the formal feature will be the style used by authors in writing.

When applied to the branch of non-cognitivism which accepts that the objects of emotions are fictional characters (Robinson 2010), by itself, the formal features approach will not suffice as an adequate explanation for the emotional reactions appreciators have towards fictional characters when engaged with fiction. This is because, if a work of fiction were to have these formal features present in the fictional work alone and lack the narrative content in addition, it would be impossible for appreciators to experience emotional reactions toward fictional characters. For example, if one is to watch Eddard’s Death or Baelish’s Trial without the narrative content, although the formal features may be present, they do not guarantee that appreciators will experience emotional reactions towards Eddard, Baelish or the Stark sisters. While the use of specific sounds may cause a general feeling of foreboding, excitement or sadness, such feeling cannot be directed at fictional characters. Rather, the formal features of a fictional work influence appreciators’ emotional reactions only in tandem with the narrative

content of the work. As such, the role of formal features of fiction is to (at most) add feeling or intensity to the emotions prompted by the requisite event or circumstance in a work of fiction (Choi 111). On the other hand, if one holds the view that there is no object of emotions, I argue that in order to experience emotional reactions one would be required to be able to make the necessary connections between various formal features in a fictional work and how these features cause emotional reactions. Contrary to the views of non-cognitivists, this process requires the cognitive attitude in the first place which non-cognitivists hold to be secondary in our experience of emotional reactions. In addition, there is the possibility of a contradiction given the feelings which the formal features promote in certain scenes, and the feelings appreciators experience in addition to their understanding of the characters. For example, while the lighting, setting and music during Baelish's Trial may cause feelings of anxiety or feelings of foreboding, the understanding of the narrative, the scene and the characters may cause a different feeling. It is also worth noting that during Theon's Humiliation where he is tortured and humiliated by Ramsey, the non-cognitivist is unable to show how their feelings of anger are directly caused by perceptions of certain formal features without the narrative as well as their perception of the character, Ramsey Bolton. Again, the idea is that the dramatic effects of sound, lighting and setting may only enhance the emotions caused by one's understanding of the plights of fictional characters in the narrative (Choi 113).

According to Similarity Non-cognitivism, the similarity of fictional events and the experiences of fictional characters to the lives and experiences of non-fictional persons are what appreciators of fiction react to. Since the experiences of fictional entities remind one of the experiences of non-fictional persons or portray the experiences of non-fictional persons we know, it follows that emotional reactions to fiction are prompted by the similarity between the plights of fictional characters and the real-life counterparts we are reminded of. To illustrate with an example, when appreciators feel pity during Theon's Humiliation where he is being

tortured and assaulted by Ramsey, advocates of the similarity approach claim that our emotions arise because we are reminded of non-fictional persons who have suffered humiliation at the hands of others. As such, the emotional reactions appreciators feel towards Theon are really emotional reactions to non-fictional persons who have undergone similar experiences. In the same way, when we feel fear during Viserion's Resurrection or happiness during Baelish's Trial where he is finally found guilty, these emotions are a result of non-fictional persons who we are reminded of through the fictional characters.

But contrary to the similarity non-cognitivist claim, the view that emotions are caused by similarities to non-fictional events and persons requires a cognitive attitude. In order for the similarity between the plights of fictional characters and real-life counterparts to arouse emotions in us, we must first believe that the plights of fictional characters and actual people are similar. In addition, while it may be true in some cases that the experiences of fictional characters correspond with or are similar to the experiences of non-fictional people, this is certainly not true in all cases. After all, there are movies about living in space, apocalyptic narrations of the end of the world, and fantasy movies in which the experiences of characters are highly dissimilar from the experiences of any non-fictional people.

Moreover, although appreciators are capable of being reminded by fictional works of similar events involving non-fictional persons, I am of the view that the emotion that the appreciator experiences is not directed at the non-fictional person they are reminded of. Arguing in this way, Radford notes that the emotions that appreciators have while engaged in fictional works are for characters and their plights in the work of fiction, not for non-fictional persons. According to Radford, "[w]e weep for [Anna Karenina]. We are moved by what happens to her, by the situation she gets into, and which is a pitiful one, but we do not feel pity for her state or fate, or her history or her situation, or even for others, i.e., for [non-fictional]

persons who might have or even have had such a history. We pity her, feel for her and our tears are shed for her” (75).

Because of the problems that arise for these non-cognitivist approaches to emotions, I reject the non-cognitivist solution to the paradox (i.e. strategy 2a) and argue for the necessity of belief in the reality of the object of emotions rather than the belief in the object of emotions.<sup>7</sup> In view of this, I shall defend in Chapter Three strategy 2b according to which proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism) is offered as an adequate revision of proposition 2 (Emotions and Belief).<sup>8</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have introduced the paradox of fiction and have laid out my strategy for the resolution of it. I have argued against the rejection and revision of proposition 3 (Non-belief in Fiction) based on arguments against Radford’s irrationality theory and the Illusionists’ suspension of disbelief strategy. In addition, I have also evaluated two versions of strategy 2a, in which proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) is replaced with proposition 2a (Non-cognitivism), and found them inadequate for resolving the paradox. In conclusion, I posit that the only remaining tenable strategies for resolving the paradox include the strategy of revising proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) and the strategy of revising proposition 2 (Emotions and Belief) and replacing it with 2b (Reality Cognitivism).

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<sup>7</sup> Although there may be other more adequate non-cognitivist approaches, I have limited my discussion to these approaches because they can be easily applied to fictional cases and address the question of how one can experience emotional reactions with just the non-cognitive attitude.

<sup>8</sup> In Chapter Three, I shall explain what it is that we must believe about fictional characters in order to feel pity during Theon’s Humiliation and our feeling of happiness at the destruction of Baelish during his trial (with Sansa and Arya).

## CHAPTER TWO

### EVALUATING STRATEGY 1 – ON WALTON’S MAKE-BELIEVE AND QUASI-EMOTIONS STRATEGY

#### 2.0 Introduction

The focus of this chapter shall be the evaluation of the revision or replacement strategy applied to proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) and, in particular, to show how this strategy is inadequate for resolving the paradox. To this end, the focus of my discussion here will be on the most prominent version of this approach which invokes Walton’s make-believe model of fiction. Walton’s resolution to the paradox of fiction involves the rejection of proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction): Readers and viewers of fictional works often experience emotions towards fictional characters. As a replacement, Walton posits proposition 1\* (Fictional Emotions) which states that it is fictionally true, rather than actually true, that readers and viewers of fictional works often experience emotions towards fictional characters.

This chapter will consist of five sections. In the first section of the chapter, I examine Walton’s make-believe model in general as a rule-governed activity involving props and its application to appreciators’ engagement with fiction. In the second section, I examine Walton’s solution to the paradox. In the third section, I raise concerns about Walton’s view that adults engage in make-believe in the same way children do. Although the discussed disanalogies between adults’ and children’s games of make-belief do not discredit Walton’s view, I argue that such disanalogies give a better perspective on the implications of Walton’s theory. The fourth section presents reasons to reject Walton’s account of our lack of motivation to act on our fictional emotions. And the fifth section includes an argument that the case of Charles and his fictional fear of the green slime is an inadequate example for explaining appreciators’ emotional reactions to fiction in general.

## 2.1 Fiction and Make-Believe

Walton uses the make-believe model to analyse how appreciators of fiction are similar to children engaged in games of make-believe. For Walton, games of make-believe are rule-governed activities, in which the participants, children, imagine various things in the game as the rule prescribes. A central role is played by props used in such games, objects that the rule prescribes to be imagined to be thus and so. As will be explained below, these props generate fictional truths in games of make-believe and help generate the fictional worlds where these fictional truths come about. Moreover, it is worth noting that participating children can themselves be props in their game and hence are prescribed to imagine being and doing various things (*Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 38).

For Walton, the props used in games of make-believe are diverse and can be used in a variety of ways in different games. In essence, more or less anything can be used as a prop to represent more or less anything in whatever game we choose to play. But irrespective of this, it is the case that (i) some props are better suited for certain games than for other games, and (ii) some props are designed for certain games rather than others. Put differently, what a prop works for and what it is designed for might not coincide. Take sticks and plastic toy swords for example; sticks can be used as swords in various games, but while they may be suited for such games, they are not designed to be used as such. The case differs for plastic toy swords: not only are they designed to be used as swords in games of make-believe, but they are also better suited than sticks for such use. While sticks and plastic swords are both suited to be used as swords in various sword games, only plastic swords are designed for such use. Although one may use a plastic sword as a gun in another game, such a prop is not really suited for such a game, nor is it designed to be used as such.

Since the design and function of props determine the games we play with them, Walton notes that we can either participate in authorised or unauthorised games of make-believe. The games played with props which have been designed specifically for the function of being props are authorised games of make-believe for the props. Examples of authorised games include sword-fighting games where the props used are toy swords, gun-fighting games where the props used are toy guns, and superhero games where the props used are superhero action figures. Unauthorised games, on the other hand, are the games which, while the props used may be suited for such games, they are not designed for them; the games are unauthorised for the props (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 397). Examples of unauthorised games include playing gun-fighting games with plastic toys or playing a game of cops and robbers with dolls as guns. To use the plastic sword as a gun in a gun-fighting game is to participate in an unauthorised game for the plastic sword. But if another participant in the same game uses a toy gun as a gun, then they are both participating in a game that is authorised for the toy gun.

We must note that while ad-hoc props (the props used in ways that depart from their function and design, like a pencil being used as a wand or a stick used as a sword) are suited for all sorts of things and all sorts of games, they are not designed for use in any games of make-believe (and the stick may not be designed at all). Therefore, there are no authorised games for ad-hoc props. Representational props on the other hand (props with the function of serving as props in games of make-believe, like plastic swords used as swords in sword fighting games) are designed and suited to be used as props in various games and therefore suggest our participation in authorised games.

Consider this example of a children's game of make-believe:

While playing a game of magical beasts and wizards, Zelda imagines that her mother is a magical beast and that plastic balls, storybooks and pencils are magical

orbs, grimoires and wands respectively. Within her make-believe game, and based on the rules of the game, the props generate fictional truths. As such, whenever her mother chases after Zelda and she runs around in fear, throwing balls frantically while waving her pencil in the air and speaking gibberish, the rules of the game prescribe that she imagines being afraid and being chased by a magical beast. It also prescribes imagining that she is throwing magical orbs at the beast while casting spells to protect herself and defeat the beast.

For Walton, the role children play goes beyond that of participation, as children are themselves reflexive props who generate truths about themselves in their games (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 209). By reflexive props, I mean the attribute of imagining oneself (from the inside) being and doing things in their games. Put differently, rather than participants imagining that they are thus and so in their games, they imagine being thus and so (as well as doing various things in their games). Zelda, for example, imagines being a wizard, being chased by a beast, and being afraid while battling the beast with magic. Walton distinguishes such appreciators from onlookers who do not participate in the games. An example of an onlooker in the above example might be Zelda's teenage brother watching her play with their mother while doing his homework. He does not participate in their game of make-believe, but he is an onlooker experiencing their game from the outside. Nevertheless, on Walton's view, onlookers can themselves be props in the game, and hence generate fictional truths, without participating in the game (*Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 209). An example of this will be when Zelda hides around her brother or when he passes her a stray ball, the rules of the game prescribe that she imagines being protected by a great wizard or that a great wizard aids her quest with a magical artefact. Even as an onlooker, he functions as a prop in Zelda's game and generates fictional truths in that capacity. But he does not imagine being or doing anything.

The imaginative prescriptions that participants are under in a game of make-believe generate fictional truths in such games. And the collection of these fictional truths generates a fictional world, where what is taken as fictionally true, is fictionally true in a certain game of make-believe (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 69). Hence, my earlier statement that the rules of the game generate the fictional truths in *Zelda's* game, including the truths generated by the props she uses.

Applying Walton's make-believe model to fictional works, they are to be understood as props specifically designed for the make-believe game that participants partake in while engaged with the fictional works. For example, the television series *Game of Thrones* is a prop in a game of make-believe that appreciators participate in while watching the show. According to Walton's view, appreciators' engagement with fictional works consists of participation in a game of make-believe: a rule-governed activity where appreciators, as participants, are prescribed by the rules of the game to imagine the events depicted onscreen including the various plights of the characters. In the *Game of Thrones* series, appreciators are prescribed by the rules of the game to imagine that Eddard dies, Theon is humiliated and imprisoned, Viserion is resurrected, etc. As props, fictional works generate fictional truths which make up the fictional worlds of those worlds.

Because fictional works are designed with the function of being props in games of make-believe of these kinds, they count as representational props and the games in question count as authorized. As such, the *Game of Thrones* series is designed with the function of being a prop in the game in which participants imagine the events depicted onscreen, and this is what it is to be engaged with the fictional work (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 69). Although the *Game of Thrones* series can be used as a prop in a different game – say a game of cops and

robbers – it is not suited for such a game, nor is it designed for such a game. Hence, such a game is not authorized for *Game of Thrones*.

According to Walton's make-believe model, appreciators of fiction who participate in the games of make-believe are themselves props of the reflexive kind. As reflexive props, appreciators imagine themselves (from the inside) being in the fictional world of games and participating as passive (invisible and impotent) participants.<sup>9</sup> This is similar to the experience of some actors who imagine being the characters they portray in order to give a good performance. In contrast to appreciators who function as reflexive props in authorized games of make-believe are appreciators who act as onlookers, reading or watching fictional works in an imaginatively detached way. Unlike reflexive participants, onlookers "do not think of themselves as subject to its rules [of the games]; the fictionality of a proposition is not taken to be a reason for them to imagine it" (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 209). Engaged appreciators, however, imagine being (invisible and impotent) inhabitants of the fictional world, reading reports about the life of a person in the world or directly observing the plights of some such person. It is in this sense that appreciators, as participants, generate fictional truths about the works and the games they participate in while using works of fiction as a prop in those games. For example, while watching the *Game of Thrones* series, appreciators imagine that Eddard dies – which makes it fictionally true that he does – and imagine feeling sad while watching Eddard's Death. As invisible observers, appreciators cannot intervene in the world of works (the world where the fictional events take place). They imagine the fictional events they

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<sup>9</sup> Walton posits that the similarity between the children's make-believe model and appreciator's engagement with fiction is evident in their verbal participation. Just as children make statements like "watch out for the dragon, use your wand" when playing wizards, or say "the monster is coming" when playing a game of monsters, while watching *Game of Thrones*, for example, appreciators make statements like "Oh Eddard, you shouldn't have confessed," and "good job Sansa, you're definitely learning now." As Walton notes, when appreciators make such utterances, "it is sometimes fictional that [appreciators are] recounting events or reporting on states of affairs" (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 221).

are watching are really occurring and imagine observing these events despite the fact that fictional characters cannot see them and they are powerless to intervene.

This, according to Walton, is different from what actors in fictional works experience. According to Walton, although appreciators inhabit both the world of works and the world of games, they inhabit the world of works in a way that is separate from the experience of actors. Actors inhabit the world of the works but not the game. According to Walton in the world of works, actors can engage in potent actions, changing the course of things or affecting the lives of other characters. As such, for Walton, although appreciators can inhabit the world of works, as invisible and impotent participants observing events and lives in the world of works, they are not capable of influencing or affecting fictional events as actors can.

While Walton acknowledges that there are differences between adult and children's participation in games of make-believe, he posits that such differences “must not be allowed to obscure the underlying similarities” (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 213). As we shall come to see in section 3 of this chapter, contrary to Walton's claims, the disanalogies in the make-believe model when applied to fictional works are a cause of concern and worth drawing attention to.

## **2.2 Understanding Quasi-Emotions**

Adopting strategy 1, Walton rejects proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) of the paradox and replaces it with 1\* (Fictional Emotions): it is fictionally true that appreciators experience genuine emotions towards fictional characters. His treatment of the paradox aims to explain how the lack of belief in the existence of the object of our emotions leads to the lack of genuine emotional reactions. To do this, he first classifies certain of our (real) feelings, the physiological and psychological aspects of our emotions, as quasi-emotions. He argues that these quasi-emotions (which are real feelings) occur in response to both fiction and non-fiction. Next, Walton notes that whereas quasi-emotions prompted in the right way by our non-fictional

experiences count as genuine emotions, quasi-emotions prompted by our fictional experiences count only as fictional emotions. This is because while our genuine emotions arise from beliefs about the existence and plights of the objects of our emotions, our fictional emotions emerge from our make-believe and imaginings about fictional entities and events.

Considering the example of Charles and the green slime, Walton argues for how appreciators' emotional reaction to fiction falls within the category of quasi-emotions prompted by prescribed imaginings in our games of make-believe. In Walton's example, Charles is watching a horror movie about a terrible slime destroying things, which causes him to cringe in his seat. While watching, the slime suddenly looks in the direction of Charles and picks up speed heading towards him and this causes Charles to scream, grasping his seat. Soon after, Charles admits to being terrified of the slime (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 196). In reaction to Charles' experience and confession, Walton notes that Charles was not really terrified of the slime:

Granted Charles's condition is similar in certain obvious respects to that of a person frightened of a pending [non-fictional] disaster. His muscles are tensed, he clutches his chair, his pulse quickens, his adrenaline flows. Let us call this physiological-psychological state quasi-fear. But it alone does not constitute genuine fear... Charles might try (seriously or otherwise) to convince us of the genuineness of his fear by shuddering and declaring dramatically that he was "really terrified"... but that is not the issue. It may have been a genuinely emotional experience. He may even have been genuinely frightened... [b]ut he was not afraid of the slime. (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 196-197).

Following Walton's make-believe model, since Charles' engagement with the slime movie suggests his participation in a game of make-believe in which the fictional work is a prop, the rule of the game prescribes that Charles imagine being in the fictional world of the slime movie and imagine that the slime is a terrifying monster ravaging the earth and is headed for him. In this fictional world of games, Charles is not only prescribed to imagine that it is fictionally true that the slime is destructive and that the slime notices him in the crowd but he

is also prescribed to imagine that it is fictionally true that the slime is heading towards him. Charles generates these fictional truths as he imagines from the inside being a passive (impotent and invisible) observer of the slime's destruction of things but being unable to stop it or influence the outcome in a way that counts (in the story). If Charles' imagined experiences produce quasi-fear, he is prescribed to imagine of his quasi-fear that it is genuine fear and, as a result, it is fictionally true that he is in a state of fear. While Charles may be convinced that he is afraid of the slime since the physiological/phenomenological component of his reaction to the slime movie suggests that he is afraid, what is required for these feelings to count as genuine emotions are the requisite beliefs (and desires) about the object of his emotions, which Charles lacks. It is fictional that Charles is in fear only if he is in a state of quasi-fear as a result of imagining he is in danger. As such, it is only fictionally true that Charles experiences genuine emotions towards the slime rather than its being actually true.

Since appreciators, in their games of make-believe are prescribed by the rules to imagine their emotional reactions to fiction, making it fictionally true that they experience genuine emotions while engaged in fiction, Walton is convinced that appreciators experience a non-motivating state when engaged with fiction. In addition to this, I argue that following Walton's understanding of appreciators as impotent and invisible participants in the world of works, it can be deduced that while engaged with fiction, appreciators (even if they want to) are unable to act on their emotional reactions as they would in similar non-fictional cases. Put differently, appreciators lack the ability to do something in a way that will count (in the story) as a motivated action, since they are merely invisible and impotent observers in the world of works. Using the example of Charles, Walton notes that despite Charles' confession that he was terrified of the slime, Charles "does not have even an inclination to leave the theatre or call the police" (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 201). Arguing further, Walton notes that since "fear emasculated by subtracting its distinctive motivational force is not fear at all" then Charles'

reaction to the slime cannot be considered a genuine emotional reaction (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 202). Not only does Charles lack the necessary belief of being endangered by the presence of the slime, but Charles also lacks the motivation to act on this fear as he would in non-fictional cases, like hiding from the slime, attacking it or calling for help. Therefore, as a solution to the paradox of fiction, Walton maintains that it is fictionally true that appreciators experience emotions towards fictional characters rather than its being actually true. By replacing proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) with proposition 1\* (Fictional Emotions), Walton avoids the contradiction of the paradox. This is because propositions 1\*, 2 and 3 together, are neither contradictory nor inconsistent propositions. And as an added advantage, proposition 1\* (Fictional Emotions) explains the feelings that fiction evokes in appreciators.

## **2.1 Objections Against Walton's Solution to the Paradox**

In this section, I will be looking at criticisms against Walton's solution to the paradox of fiction. As objections against Walton's solution, I have three sorts of worries, none of which is decisive, but an accumulative effect of these various worries gives us ground to look elsewhere. These objections to Walton's solution include (1) Disanalogies with children's games (2) Motivated actions and, (3) Wrong type of examples.

### **2.1.1 Disanalogies with Children's Games**

Walton's make-belief model in general has several dissimilarities with children's games of make-believe which, I argue, makes it an awkward fit for a solution. Even if we were to accept Walton's view, since the solution presupposes the model, it shows that it is an awkward fit. These dissimilarities make the model centred around children's games of make-belief a kind of awkward fit for explaining adults' experiences when engaged with fiction. It is not that the model cannot fit (one can try to make it fit), but it doesn't fit neatly. Although this is the sort of issue that might not matter much if Walton's view lacked any other problems,

given that his solution has problems already, these dissimilarities count and give further grounds against the solution. Although this criticism is not decisive but considering that we have got several indecisive criticisms against Walton, together, these criticisms give us grounds to look elsewhere for a solution.

Irrespective of Walton's view that there are several similarities between children's games of make-believe and what appreciators experience when engaged with fiction, I have identified several dissimilarities between children's games of make-believe and what adults do and experience when they're caught up with fictional stories. Given the disanalogies, one may argue that granted that appreciators' engagement with fiction and children's games of make-believe share the feature of being imaginative activities of pretence, why then is this not enough to support the idea that appreciators' reactions are merely quasi-emotions? In reaction, I am of the view that while I agree with some features of the make-believe model, some other features of the model seem problematic. In particular, while I agree with the make-believe model on the relevance of imagination in our engagement with fiction, what seems problematic is the idea that appreciators have to be reflexive props. It is not just that appreciators have to have pretences, but that appreciators have to be reflexive props in which our feelings generate fictional truths, such that if the feelings appreciators have emerges as a result of us imagining the right sort of things then those feelings themselves generate prescriptions to imagine that our feelings are states of fear, anger or sadness. It is for this reason that I argue that the make-believe model, in general, is not a good fit for explaining appreciators' engagement with fiction and their emotional reactions, as it is a great model for explaining children's games and their emotional reactions. These dissimilarities give reasons to worry about the general strategy, making us pause as we decide if the model ruins Walton's solution. Collectively, the dissimilarities are a genuine cause to worry since they raise suspicion about how appreciators' experience when caught up with fiction is modelled on children's experience in their games of

make-believe. Some of these disanalogies include (i) physical versus psychological participation, (ii) active versus passive participation, (iii) difference in the props; and (iv) difference in worlds.<sup>10</sup>

First, Walton's make-believe model does not fit all kinds of games involving adult engagement. While there are several fictional games that adults take part in that are physical (like video games, virtual reality games, or role-playing board games like dungeons and dragons) and fit into Walton's make-believe model, the games which adults take part in with movies tend to be less physical than children's games of make-believe. Save for the limited physical acts adults take part in, like flicking through the pages of books while reading, the occasional visits to the cinema, logging into movie streaming applications or selecting movies and series to watch with a remote control, our appreciation of fiction is primarily dominated by our psychological participation (Wray 12).

Second is the difference in participation – active participation versus passive participation where appreciators of fiction are most often passive participants while children are active participants in their games. While engaged in fictional works like the *Game of Thrones* series, as reflexive props, appreciators imagine being in the fictional world of the work, experiencing the plights of characters there but being unable to influence things since they also imagine being impotent and invisible inhabitants of the fictional world. This

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<sup>10</sup> Similar to Charles' experience of the green slime, in *Mimesis as Make-Belief* Walton gives the example of the child, Timmy, playing a game of monsters with his father. Although Timmy screams and flees from the monster (his father) when it lunges at him, Timmy is seen smiling happily as he makes his way back to be scared some more. As Walton notes, Timmy is seen reacting this way because he "is perfectly aware that his father is only playing, that the whole thing is just a game, and that only fictionally is there a vicious monster after him" (242). Robert Yanal argues for the dissimilarity between the emotion experienced by Charles and Timmy, stating that Charles is not very much like Timmy. Yanal further states that 'pretend fear' as displayed by Timmy in his game of make-believe with his father, does not capture Charles' experience. This is because while in the case of Timmy, he engages in a kind of 'play-fear' where he is always conscious of the make-belief he takes part in, Charles does not experience this. Yanal describes this 'play-fear' as "the sort we undergo at the amusement park in haunted houses or from riding not-too-scary roller coasters. It is characterized by some gasps but with giggles too" (56).

experience differs for children in their (typical) make-believe games where they too are reflexive props who imagine being in the fictional world of games but are also active participants in their games, capable of being experienced by other fictional entities and effecting change in the fictional world. While it is true that Walton's make-believe model works for games like dungeons and dragons or video games since both types of games involve the active and psychological participation of appreciators, this experience is not the same for adults in every fictional game they play; hence, my conclusion that Walton's model does not fit all kinds of games involving adult participation. While appreciators playing dungeons and dragons and video games imagine being in the game and being characters in the game who take part actively (by rolling the dice, moving pieces, reading the plot, talking to other members while on quests, controlling characters with gamepads, etc.), appreciators of *Game of Thrones* only imagine being in the fictional world and are impotent and invisible participants at that.

Third, there are differences between the props used in children's games of make-believe and the props adults use while engaged with their fictional games. The props used by children – the ad-hoc props – are quite versatile and adaptable, such that one prop can be used as several things at varying times (even in the same game), depending on the needs of the participants and their game of choice. An example will be a stick being used as a sword in a game at one point and as a gun at another point in the same game, or in another game. This is not the typical experience for adults while caught up in fictional works. The props used by adults – books and movies – are designed such that they can only be used in a much narrower range of ways to be read/watched as fiction, at least if we restrict our attention to authorised games (games in which it is their function to serve as props). Although there are children's toys designed to be used in certain ways for certain games (like toy swords used for sword games), while these sorts of props may be specifically designed for a narrow range of games (sword fighting games) they can be successfully used for a broader range of games (there are numerous sword games in

which one can play with a toy sword). Adult props, as a result of their function, are not particularly useful for other sorts of games. Hence, while the props used by children allow for a broad range of authorised and unauthorised games, the props used by appreciators of fiction can only be used for a narrow range of authorised and unauthorised games.<sup>11</sup> For example, granting that the television series *Game of Thrones* could be used as a prop in a make-believe game about technological apocalypse, it is not authorised for such a game and might not be an effective prop in the unauthorised technological apocalyptic game.

Fourth, is the disanalogies in terms of the multiple worlds that emerge – in terms of the world of works and the world of games – while engaged in children’s and adults’ games. As stated earlier, in appreciators’ engagement with fiction, there is the distinction between the world of games (where appreciators are passive invisible and impotent observers) and the world of works (where the fictional events take place). This distinction does not occur in children’s games of make-believe, there is no distinction between the world of the stick (used as a sword in the game) and the world of the game played with the stick.

Although these disanalogies are not decisive in showing that the make-believe model ruins Walton’s solution to the paradox, they do show that the make-believe model does not necessarily fit appreciators’ engagement with fiction and what they experience when engaged with fiction. These dissimilarities, as I have argued, are a cause of concern as they show that some features of the make-believe model are problematic; in particular, it appears problematic that appreciators are reflexive props, whose feelings in reaction to fiction prescribe that such appreciators imagine that the feelings they are experiencing are genuine emotional states.

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<sup>11</sup> Where authorized games include make-believe games of the sort it is the function of the prop to serve in while unauthorised games are the sort of games in which it is not the function of fictional works to serve as props (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 397).

## 2.4 Motivated Actions

I have stated earlier that Walton's resolution to the paradox entails the view that appreciators do not have genuine emotional reactions to fiction. As a rationale for this claim, Walton argues that appreciators lack the motivation(s) one would generally find if they were having genuine emotions. In the case of Charles and the green slime, Walton argues that irrespective of Charles' claim that he was terrified of the slime, "[he] does not have even an inclination to leave the theatre or call the police" (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 201). Since Charles lacks the necessary motivation to act on the emotion he experiences as he would in non-fictional cases, then he does not experience genuine emotions, for "fear emasculated by subtracting its distinctive motivational force is not fear at all" (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 202). Given Walton's argument, I am of the view that there are two major issues here: (1) what appreciators are motivated to do and, (2) what appreciators are able to do – an ability to do something in a way that will count (in the story) as a motivated action. The first issue is expressed in Walton's view that appreciators experience a non-motivating state when engaged with fiction and the second issue can be deduced from Walton's view that as impotent and invisible participants in the world of works, appreciators – despite observing everything going on in the world of works – are unable to act on their motivations.

As a reaction to the first problem, contrary to Walton's view, there are ways appreciators can behave which count as motivated actions for the emotions they experience while caught up with fiction. First, since fear motivates evasive actions too, Walton is mistaken when he states that Charles is not really afraid because he fails to leave the theatre or call the police. It is possible that Charles chose to stop participating in the make-believe having been too frightened. Since Walton's view entails that genuine fear motivates behaviour designed to alleviate danger, I am of the view that by ending his make-believe, Charles exits the fictional

world where he was in danger. Appreciators of fiction experience the flight-fight-freeze motivated responses individuals have in reaction to non-fictional fear, but not in the conventional or expected ways people do in non-fictional cases. For example, while watching a horror scene about monsters which frighten her, Teevin may choose to leave the cinema room since she can't handle that level of fright. She could also choose to stop watching the movie at that time and concentrate on her phone instead, or simply close her eyes and wait out the horrors of the scene. The fact that Charles chooses not to leave (perhaps he chose to face his fear rather than flee from it), does not reflect on other appreciators as the desired or expected reactions.

One may claim that such reactions from appreciators are the wrong sorts of motivated behaviours. But while this may be correct, appreciators are unable to engage in the other kinds of motivated behaviours as a result of the metaphysical impossibility for appreciators to interact with fictional characters. This is because appreciators are only invisible and impotent participants in the fictional world and are unable to do anything there. Rather than lacking the motivational component of emotional reactions, appreciators rather experience the (metaphysical) inability to act on their motivations. As passive (impotent and invisible) observers in the fictional world of games, appreciators are incapable of interacting with fictional characters or influencing events in the fictional world of works. The idea is that emotional reactions to fiction are included among a broader class of cases in which subjects are motivated to act but unable to do so. Hence, there is a need to differentiate between being motivated to engage in emotionally inspired behaviours and having the ability to do so in ways that count (in the story). While individuals can be motivated to engage in emotionally inspired behaviours both in fictional and non-fictional scenarios, having the ability to engage in (the right kind of) those is normally only possible in non-fictional cases but not in fictional cases.

The likelihood of experiencing volitional impossibility in non-fictional cases – a state where one experiences the inability to act despite being motivated by their emotional state – supports my view that appreciators of fiction do not lack the motivation to act, nor are appreciators mandated to react in expected ways. There are moments where individuals, despite experiencing emotions and being motivated to act as a result, fail to act on their emotions. For example, while reading my grandfather's autobiography about how his siblings were sold as slaves and his mother had to protect him from the same fate even when she was in danger, the details about the injustice experienced may prompt me to be sad and angry. These emotions in turn lead to a corresponding motivation to act (for example, to save them from such experiences or fight for them), but I am aware that there simply is nothing I can do because I cannot change the past. Appreciators' motivations in reaction to fiction sometimes fall in this category. For appreciators, the metaphysical impossibility of physically interacting with fictional characters results in the experience of volitional impossibility. Hence, it is not that appreciators do not desire to react as they would in non-fictional cases, to fictional events and the plights of fictional characters. Appreciators typically lack the opportunity to react as they would in non-fictional cases because of the nature of the fictional object. As much as appreciators may want to save Eddard from dying, inform Sansa of how deceitful Lord Baelish is, or punish Ramsey for humiliating and torturing Theon, they are unable to act in these ways. The point is that since appreciators imagine themselves being invisible and impotent participants, they in turn are (metaphysically) unable to intervene in the plights of fictional characters in ways that will count (in the story) as motivated actions, the same way they do in similar non-fictional settings. As such, it is not that appreciators are not motivated to react, the idea is that their motivated reactions do not have to mirror the expected reactions they would have in non-fictional cases.

## 2.5 Wrong Kind of Example

Another difficulty with Walton's view is that his illustrative case of Charles and the green slime involves an "atypical unanticipated aside" and, as a result, is the wrong kind of example to build our understanding of appreciators' emotional reactions to fiction on. Walton's goal may be the treatment of the example of Charles and the green slime as a case of an aside, but his example suggests an atypical aside different from the kinds appreciators normally experience. In a normal case, asides are uncommon behaviours from fictional characters directed at appreciators which makes it seem like appreciators are part of the fictional world of works, as opposed to being invisible and impotent observers in the world of the game (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* 229). Typical examples of asides will be when fictional characters smile at the camera or look directly at the camera when speaking, making it seem like they are smiling with or talking to appreciators directly. At other times, fictional characters wink at the camera like they're winking at appreciators. In the case of Charles, a typical aside may occur when a character notices the slime is close by, looks at the camera and screams "run!" like she is talking to the audience and telling them to run.

First, one might attempt to treat Walton's example as an aside that involves a jump scare where our feelings are caused by being startled rather than believing/imagining being in danger, but Walton's example is not a good model for genuine emotional reactions given that most of our emotional reactions are not due to jump scares. Also, it is not clear that jump scares involve experiencing quasi-fear caused by imagining one is in danger: after all, the feeling of fear one experiences during jump scares arguably does not require imagining being in danger. As a result, Walton's example of Charles and the slime present an inadequate model for the kinds of emotional reactions we are interested in.

Second, in reply, one may posit that Walton's illustrative example of Charles and the green slime counts as an unanticipated aside. Charles' example may be considered an aside (in general) because like other similar asides, the character (the slime) pays attention to the audience (the slime looks directly at Charles). But contrary to other typical asides where fictional characters simply acknowledge appreciators but do not engage them, after acknowledging Charles, the monster moves towards him at an increased speed which contributes to Charles' emotional reaction to it. While this unexpected behaviour of the slime suggests that Walton's example of Charles can be considered as an unanticipated aside, I argue that Charles' example is best understood as an atypical unanticipated aside. This is because while an unanticipated aside will involve perceptual illusions of the kind that appreciators are not expecting which can cause them to be frightened, this is not the case for Charles. An example of an unanticipated aside would be seeing butterflies fill the cinema room from a movie scene or soldiers marching through the screen towards the audience. As Mullaghy notes, "a fairly well-known instance of the type of aside [Walton] is talking about is when a train seems to come out of the screen and over the heads of the audience" (108). As such, the example of Charles fails as an adequate example of an unanticipated aside because Charles experiences no optical illusion of the slime unexpectedly coming out of the screen and causing him to be frightened as he claimed he was.

Treating Charles' example as an unanticipated aside entails that appreciators shift from being invisible and impotent participants to being visible (and perhaps potent) participants. And since the rules of the game have changed, appreciators have started playing a different game. But in some cases at least, appreciators of fiction who experience unanticipated asides in fiction do not have time to start participating in new games of make-believe before their emotional responses occur. As a result, appreciators experiencing unanticipated asides may react with genuine/non-fictional emotions; in the case of Charles and slime, this would mean

that Charles has genuine/non-fictional fear. In any event, this provides evidence for my view that Walton's example of Charles and the slime is inadequate for explaining our emotional reactions to fiction: appreciators, during unanticipated asides, temporarily cease participating in games of make-believe. In addition, most emotional reactions appreciators experience while engaged with fiction are not the products of unanticipated asides.

An anticipated aside, on the other hand, will be the kind illustrated in Walton's example of the child, Timmy, playing a game of monsters with his father. Although Timmy screams and flees from the monster (his father) when it lunges at him, Timmy is seen smiling happily as he makes his way back to be scared some more. Timmy anticipates that his father would scare him and chase after him again. As Walton notes, Timmy is seen reacting this way because he "is perfectly aware that his father is only playing, that the whole thing is just a game, and that only fictionally is there a vicious monster after him" (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* 242). It seems this is the type of aside Walton tries to demonstrate with his example of Charles but does not achieve it. Since Timmy expects his father to scare him out of the corner, what he experiences is an anticipated aside which does not stop him from being fictionally scared. But this is not the same as Charles' experience of the slime.

Another disanalogy is the fact that while most emotional reactions to fiction are other-regarding rather than self-regarding, the example of Charles is directed at our self-regarding emotional reactions rather than our other-regarding reactions. Walton overgeneralises Charles' self-regarding emotions as a model for explaining appreciators' other-regarding emotional reactions to fiction. Put differently, Walton moves from a scenario involving one's concern for oneself to scenarios where one is concerned for or about others, and in the process lumps the experiences together as the same, thereby raising a lot of questions (Mullaghy 112). Fictional works are mostly concerned with other people's lives and what the audience makes of the lives

and experiences of characters that represent other people's lives. But in the case of Charles, he is concerned for himself, not the fictional characters.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have evaluated Walton's strategy of rejecting proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) and replacing it with 1\* (Fictional Emotions), according to which it is fictionally true that appreciators experience genuine emotions towards fictional characters rather than actually true. In view of this, I have evaluated Walton's notion of games of make-believe and the role quasi-emotions play in them as a solution to the paradox of fiction. By examining what Walton means when he says that the fictional works we engage with are the props we use in games of make-believe, I have in turn examined his analogy between games of make-believe and engagement with fictional works, as well as his view on the similarity between adults and children's games of make-believe. This chapter has also examined the status of appreciators' quasi-emotions as fictional emotions. While I agree with Walton on the relevance and role of imagination in our engagement with fiction, I have raised concerns about Walton's solution to the paradox of fiction. The cumulative effect of these concerns leads me to conclude that Walton's solution is inadequate for the resolution. As such, I argue that the only plausible strategy for resolving the paradox is rejecting proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) and replacing it with a revised link between emotion and belief.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESOLVING THE PARADOX OF FICTION: THE OBJECT THEORY

#### 3.0 Introduction

As argued above, resolving the paradox of fiction requires the revision or replacement of at least one of the propositions which make it up. In previous chapters, I have argued that strategy 1 – the replacement of proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) – and strategy 3 – the revision of proposition 3 (Non-Belief in Fiction) – do not adequately resolve the paradox. I have also evaluated strategy 2a – which replaces proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with proposition 2a (Non-cognitivism) and states that belief in the object of emotion is unnecessary for genuine emotional reactions – and found it lacking. In this chapter, I defend strategy 2b which revises proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) by proposing that genuine emotional reactions require that subjects believe in the reality of the objects of their emotions rather than their existence. According to this approach to emotions, both fictional and non-fictional entities can be the object of one's emotional reactions if they are believed to be real objects.

While this chapter focuses on strategy 2b, I shall be considering two different versions of it: the thought theory and the object theory. Both approaches deny the view that belief in the existence of the objects of emotions is necessary for genuine emotions and argue instead that the objects of emotions must be (believed to be) real. In this chapter, I defend the object theory. In the case of fiction-directed emotions, the object theory classifies the object of emotions – fictional characters – as real but non-existent objects, possessing emotion-inducing properties, rather than existent objects. The thought theory differs from the object theory in that it takes the objects of fiction-directed emotions to be character-concepts which are existent (and hence real) and are derived from fictional works. Although one may have thought that the objects of fiction-directed emotions are fictional characters, on the thought theory, the objects of emotions

are the character-concepts – thoughts/mental images about fictional characters. But whether or not thought theorists identify characters with character-concepts is not clear. If they do identify fictional characters with character-concepts, the view would be a kind of anti-realism: people typically think realism requires taking entities to be mind-independent, but concepts are quintessentially mind-dependent entities. Since thought theorists are of the view that appreciators of fiction, in order to have genuine emotions towards fiction, believe that character-concepts are real, they also argue for the existence of character-concepts, but this by itself falls short of believing in the reality or existence of characters. By identifying the object of emotions with existent character-concepts, thought theorists seem to endorse the unrefined version of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief). But it counts as a version of strategy 2b because it requires only belief in the existence of character-concepts, and not characters themselves, for genuine emotional reactions. It is in this sense that the thought theory revises the proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) condition.

This chapter will consist of two main sections. In the first section, the thought theory will be discussed, focusing on Lamarque's version of the view. Although Lamarque's solution to the paradox on the surface aims at the revision of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief), I will argue that at bottom it endorses the unrevised proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) and is, therefore, inadequate for the resolution of the paradox. In the second section, I develop and defend my version of the object theory as a solution to the paradox of fiction.<sup>12</sup> By requiring belief in only the reality of the objects of our emotions, my solution incorporates elements of

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<sup>12</sup> The object theory/Meinongianism is the view that there are real but non-existent objects. My solution to the paradox involves taking fictional characters to fall in this category. A broader discussion and defence of the object theory goes beyond the scope of my project. My understanding of the object theory entails a broad and inclusive theory of being that focuses on things that are real rather than just things that exist. Just as ontology studies being as real things, the object theory accommodates an analysis of being which views objects as things that are real. This classification of objects accounts for both fictional (real but non-existent) objects and non-fictional (normally real and existent) objects. As such, capturing the object theory as a version of fictional realism illuminates my understanding of fictional entities as real objects and justifies how fictional entities fall into the general category of objects despite their lack of existence.

the Meinongian view on fictional entities – the status of being real but non-existent objects. It also agrees with Lamarque that fictional entities have emotion-inducing properties. Hence, I argue that fictional entities are real but non-existent objects and possess emotion-inducing properties which account for appreciators' experience of genuine emotional reactions towards them. I also argue that this view avoids the problems that other potential solutions run into.

### **3.1 The Thought Theory: Lamarque's Solution to the Paradox of Fiction**

In this section, Lamarque's version of the thought theory is examined as a solution to the paradox. Although Lamarque's solution to the paradox revises proposition 2 (Emotions and Belief) using strategy 2b, this section will also discuss the limitations of Lamarque's view as an inadequate solution to the paradox of fiction.

The thought theory, also known as the mental representation theory, has seen various versions over the years as a result of contributions made by Lamarque (1981), Boruah (1988), and Carroll (1990 and 1999), among others. The common element in these interpretations of the thought theory lies in the revision of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief). For Lamarque, there exists a tension between our beliefs about the nature of fiction and the beliefs needed to explain our emotional responses to fiction. This tension arises from appreciators' belief that fictional entities do not exist and their beliefs that their emotional reactions are directed at non-existent things (291-292). As a result, Lamarque suggests that "the best way to reconcile our intuitions and get a clearer perspective on the matter is to shift the focus of discussion away from beliefs to the fictions themselves and correspondingly from the emotions to the objects of the emotions" (292). The upshot for thought theorists is that appreciators need not believe that fictional entities exist in order to have genuine emotional reactions towards them. This is because what causes appreciators' emotional reactions are thoughts of fictional entities – i.e., character-concepts – rather than the characters themselves. For advocates of the thought theory,

to have genuine emotional reactions to fiction, appreciators only need to imagine propositions about fictional entities and be moved by concepts of fictional entities. In other words, emotional responses are triggered by thoughts (character-concepts), which mirror or represent the fiction (Belluomini 277). Since character-concepts are real, so are the objects of fiction-directed emotions. As a result, Lamarque argues that appreciators have genuine emotions during their engagement with fiction.

As a motivation for his solution to the paradox, Lamarque points out that there are times when individuals experience genuine emotional reactions to thoughts that they have. Put differently, there are times we experience fear, excitement, anger or sadness as a result of our thoughts about certain situations and persons. In these moments, we need not believe these events or the concerned persons exist to have the emotions we experience. An example might be when someone becomes annoyed as a result of imagining a roommate misbehaving. Consider Noel Carroll's account of what happens and how we feel when we entertain thoughts of falling over the edge of a cliff while standing on a precipice (80). One knows that there is no actual danger because the place is secure: there is no one around to push them over; the wind is not strong enough to blow them over; the structure is not collapsing, and one does not intend to jump over. Yet, if one vividly imagines falling over the edge of the cliff, one can genuinely scare oneself and even faint from that fear. Using this example of a non-fictional phenomenon as a guiding idea behind our emotional reactions to fiction, Lamarque argues that "[appreciators] can be frightened by the thought of something without believing that there is anything corresponding to the content of the thought" (194). So when appreciators imagine Theon's Humiliation, they are moved to feel sad as a result of the constituent of their thoughts without holding the belief that the character, Theon, exists.

The thoughts which individuals have of fictional characters and their plights are understood as propositional attitudes which individuals have towards fiction, some of which can be beliefs, desires, or imaginations. Rather than taking thoughts to be beliefs, Lamarque's understanding of thoughts includes propositions that one imagines while caught up in fiction. Just like the thought of falling off a cliff is a proposition that one imagines and which can produce fear, thoughts about fiction which generate emotional reactions, consist of imagining propositions derived from descriptions of them in fictional works.

Appreciators do not need to believe in the existence of Theon or his plights, they only need to imagine this particular helpless man being bullied, humiliated and tortured, to react genuinely to it. Since the thought theory holds that appreciators of fiction do not believe fictional characters exist but do believe that character-concepts exist, they imagine propositions regarding the plights of fictional characters where the constituents of such propositions are character-concepts rather than characters. Concepts denote or pick out the objects of thought, and what thoughts are directed towards or are about (Lamarque 293). And Lamarque argues that concepts, rather than the entities they denote, are the objects of some of our emotional reactions. In the non-fictional example where one imagines being attacked by a non-existent/imaginary robber, the object of fear is the robber-concept rather than any existing robber. And in the scene depicting Theon's Humiliation in *Game of Thrones*, the character-concept of Theon is the object of the appreciator's emotions.

In line with strategy 2b which argues against the view that belief in the existence of the object of emotions is necessary for genuine emotions, Lamarque argues that what is required for genuine emotional reactions is that the subject imagines that characters exist rather than believing they do. Lamarque's solution to the paradox is similar to Walton's solution in the sense that they both hold that while caught up in fiction, appreciators imagine that fictional

characters exist. But while Lamarque argues that appreciators have genuine emotions at the end, Walton holds that appreciators have fictional emotions. In addition, unlike Walton, Lamarque argues that in the case of fiction, the objects of emotions (character-concepts) exist.

Lamarque further advances his proposal on how imagination is capable of giving us genuine emotions through his differentiation between being *frightened by* and being *frightened of* (294). By differentiating between being *frightened by* and being *frightened of*, Lamarque in turn differentiates between our real (and existent) objects of emotions and our intentional (but non-existent) objects of emotions.<sup>13</sup> While the real (and existent) objects of our emotions are the character-concepts we have of fictional entities, the intentional (but non-existent) objects of our emotions, for Lamarque, are the fictional entities that we have imaginations about, but which do not exist. To illustrate with an example, Charles is *frightened by* the thought of the slime, but not *by* the slime. He is, however, *frightened of* the slime. The real (and existent) object of fear is the slime-thought (the concept) Charles has, while the intentional (but non-existent) object of fear is the slime – the fictional entity. Likewise, the intentional (but non-existent) object of appreciators' feelings of pity while watching *Game of Thrones* is what their feeling of pity is directed at – Theon – while the actual object of pity is the Theon-concept; the intentional (but non-existent) object of appreciators' feelings of sadness is what they are saddened about – Eddard – while the actual object of sadness is the Eddard-concept.

As a solution to the paradox, Lamarque posits that during their engagement with fiction, appreciators of fiction have genuine emotional reactions towards character-concepts, the constituents of their imaginations about fictional characters. These character-concepts, which

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<sup>13</sup> Lamarque's understanding of real objects differs from my understanding of real objects under the object theory. Real objects, as understood by Lamarque include only the class of objects that are real and existing. It is my understanding that Lamarque conceives of real objects of emotions as the existing objects of emotions, while the intentional objects of emotions include the non-existent objects of our emotions. As we shall come to see under my evaluation of the object theory, the class of real but non-existent objects include fictional entities.

are the real objects of appreciators' emotions, are not only real but are also existent as constituents of thoughts. As such, character-concepts differ from the fictional characters themselves who are the intentional objects of emotions. By holding the view that appreciators of fiction believe the real objects of emotions exist but not the intentional objects, Lamarque is convinced he has avoided the contradiction in the paradox. Based on Lamarque's solution, (i) appreciators of fiction have genuine emotions while engaged with fiction; (ii) these emotions are directed towards character-concepts which are the real objects of emotions and are existent, and (iii) appreciators do not believe fictional characters exist.

### **3.1.2 Limitations of Lamarque's Version of the Thought Theory**

In this section, I shall raise some objections to Lamarque's solution to the paradox of fiction. These objections aim to show that Lamarque's solution to the paradox is not general enough to be applied to every emotion we experience in both fictional and non-fictional scenarios. This is because I am of the view that since proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) of the paradox aims at emotional reactions in general and not just fiction alone, whatever one's replacement or revision of the proposition is, or their account of emotional reactions to fiction, it should be such that can fit into a broader theory of emotions and not just fiction alone.

First, Lamarque's model cannot be fully generalised because, in non-fictional cases, there are different sorts of things that may arise, making his model seem inadequate for explaining the emotional reactions individuals experience. For example, while at home I hear footsteps outside my door and imagine there are criminals outside my door, the thought of which leaves me terrified. Applying Lamarque's model, there are at least two possible outcomes when I open my door to verify: (1) I open the door and there are actual criminals present. Based on this outcome, Lamarque cannot say the same thing he says in the case of fiction as regards being *frightened by* and *frightened of*, as well as the real object of emotions

(thoughts) and the intentional object of emotions (non-existent entities). This is because (i) while it is clear that I am frightened by the criminals outside my door, it is not clear that I am frightened by the thoughts as well, and (ii) although the criminals are the real object of my fear, it is not clear if the thought is a second real object of fear. In addition, it is also not clear if the actual criminals at my door are both the real and intentional objects of fear. (2) I open the door and realise that there are no actual criminals present. Based on this outcome, Lamarque can argue the same thing he does in the case of fiction: not only am I *frightened by* the thought of criminals at my door, but I am also *frightened of* the non-existent criminals. In addition, based on this case, the real object of my fear is the thought I have (i.e. the criminal-concept) while the intentional object of my fear is the non-existent criminals. Hence, since non-fictional cases and emotions are more complicated, the distinction between the real and intentional objects of emotions is not general enough to be fully applied to a range of non-fictional cases and outcomes.

Second, the distinction between being *frightened by* and being *frightened of* something is limited in scope in that it cannot easily be applied to emotional reactions other than fear. For example, it is quite problematic to apply the same distinction to other emotional reactions like love, anger, pain, etc. While Lamarque defends the view that a proper understanding of the objects of appreciators' emotions of fear requires the distinction between being *frightened by* and being *frightened of*, appreciators do not have the luxury of a similar distinction when explaining other emotions experienced during their engagement with fiction. Parallel turns of phrases for other emotions simply do not make sense: e.g., being *saddened by* makes sense, but being *saddened of* does not.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I do agree that it is possible to make distinctions between the real objects of sadness – character-concepts – and the intentional object of sadness – a fictional character – without having to rely on the by/of distinction Lamarque introduces.

And third, Lamarque's view that appreciators of fiction react emotionally to thoughts is quite problematic. I can agree with Lamarque that the thought of 'imagining that p' may cause emotional reactions, but that doesn't mean the object of emotions is the constituent of the thought – the concept. Considering Carroll's motivating example of one imagining falling off a cliff while standing on a precipice, while the thought of falling might be the cause of fear, the object of fear – that is what one is afraid of – is falling. Contrary to this view, Lamarque argues that the real object of fear is the thought of falling and the intentional object of fear is falling. But taking the thought of falling to be the object, rather than merely the cause, of fear in any sense conflicts with the phenomenology of our experience. Similarly, in the case of fiction, the phenomenology of our experience and reaction to it makes it implausible that our emotional reactions are directed towards character-concepts. Appreciators do not feel pity for concepts, nor do they feel fear, anger, admiration, or happiness for them either. Walton agrees with this view when he argues that Charles, in his fictional engagement, does not consider the thought of the slime to be dangerous nor does he treat it that way by making moves to escape from the thought. In Carroll's non-fictional example, it is possible that having imagined falling off a cliff and being afraid, one decides to move away from the cliff to reduce the (admittedly slight) danger of falling, but not the danger of thinking of falling. In addition, for Walton, since Charles only admits to being afraid of the slime and not the slime-concept, it follows that his experience does not feel like fear of a thought, hence, "characterizing it as such flies in the face of its phenomenology" (203).

Contrary to Lamarque, I argue the view that the object of fiction-directed emotions is what the character-concepts are about. In other words, the emotional reactions appreciators experience during their engagement with fiction are directed towards fictional entities rather than the thoughts appreciators have of those entities. Appreciators feel sad for Eddard not the thought of Eddard (Eddard-concept); appreciators feel pity for Theon, not the thought of Theon

being humiliated (Theon-concept). I argue that holding character-concepts as the object of appreciators' emotional reactions seems to justify the claim that our emotional reactions to fiction are irrational (Radford 69). This is because while it is typically expected that what frightens one can harm them, character-concepts lack this ability; appreciators cannot fear thoughts because thoughts cannot hurt them, and neither can appreciators be sad for thoughts because thoughts cannot undergo suffering, pain, humiliation, etc. The point is that concepts are the wrong sorts of things to be understood as the objects of the emotions we experience during our engagement with fiction.

One way to overcome the above-mentioned limitation will be to identify thoughts about fictional characters with the fictional characters themselves. But while Lamarque and other thought theorists are known to view character-concepts as the objects of emotions, it is not clear whether or not they identify fictional characters with character-concepts. While it is possible to make such an identification, the implication of this will require that thought theorists argue against fictional realism. If fictional characters are identified with character-concepts, this would be a kind of anti-realism since people typically associate realism with mind-independent entities, whereas concepts (as thoughts) are essentially mind-dependent entities. By identifying characters with character-concepts, fictional characters become objects that only exist in the mind of appreciators. Although thought theorists accept character-concepts (which are the object of emotions) as real and existing entities, this understanding does not entail believing in the reality or existence of the fictional characters themselves.

But I am of the view that by identifying character-concepts as the objects of emotions, and arguing that appreciators believe these objects of their emotions exist, thought theorists fall back into a sort of unrevised version of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) which states a similar view that as a necessary condition for having genuine emotions, the subject believes

the object of their emotions exist. Holding this view, thought theorists still avoid the contradiction in the paradox because the objects of emotions are not identified as fictional characters and appreciators still retain the belief that fictional characters do not exist. But while the contradiction has been avoided, thought theorists have in some way, also revised proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction) a little bit. Since character-concepts and not characters are the object of emotions, then against proposition 1 (Emotions towards Fiction), appreciators do not experience emotions towards fictional characters, they rather experience emotions towards character-concepts. But as I have already argued, this is not how things work. Appreciators do not have emotional reactions toward thoughts. In addition, if thought theorists accept the view that fictional characters are to be identified with character-concepts, it remains problematic as the question arises whether appreciators believe this.

### **3.2 Resolving the Paradox of Fiction: The Object Theory**

In this section, I shall develop and defend my solution to the paradox of fiction – the object theory. Drawing on influences from the Meinongian account of fictional entities, I argue that fictional entities are real but non-existent objects which possess emotion-inducing properties that account for appreciators' experience of genuine emotional reactions to fiction.

#### **3.2.1 Understanding the Object Theory<sup>15</sup>**

The object theory/Meinongian account of fiction is, at bottom, the theory that for every set of properties there is a corresponding object. As such, to speak of an object is to acknowledge that it has properties. But some sets of properties are not possessed by any existent object: many of such sets are rather possessed by non-existent objects. According to the object theory, these non-existent objects are understood to include fictional objects.

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<sup>15</sup> The object theory originated from Alexius Meinong (Thomasson 5; Reicher 2019) and is also known as Meinongianism.

Fictional objects are real objects and they possess or bear properties, but having properties does not entail their existence (Panizza 49). For example, according to the object theory, the fictional character, Arya Stark, is a real but non-existent individual who possesses the properties attributed to her by *Game of Thrones*.

The object theory faces a risk of contradiction, however. While fictional characters are real but non-existent objects, authors and writers do not describe them as such: in fictional works, fictional characters are normally described as existent rather than non-existent. For example, although the object theory holds that Arya Stark is a real but non-existent object, in the *Game of Thrones* series, Arya Stark is described as an existent, flesh-and-blood, vengeful young woman with assassin skills. It is by taking Arya Stark to be a real but non-existent person who nevertheless exists that the object theory is in danger of running into a contradiction (Panizza 50).

Parsons' (1980) strategy for avoiding the contradiction, which I shall also adopt, appeals to the nuclear and extra-nuclear distinction originally introduced by Meinong. Nuclear properties can be understood to roughly include simple and ordinary properties of objects which make up such objects. Examples of these properties include being tall, having a scar, being skinny, being an assassin, being bespectacled, being beautiful etc. (Panizza 50; Motoarca 93). Extra-nuclear properties, on the other hand, are special properties of objects including being mythical or fictional, ontological properties such as existence and non-existence, and modal properties such as being possible (Motoarca 93; Panizza 50; Thomasson 10-18). According to Panizza, "it is only sets of nuclear properties that are correlated to objects; [hence], it is by virtue of nuclear properties that we individuate existent and non-existent objects" (50). One distinguishing factor between existent and non-existent objects is the fact that whereas existent objects are complete, non-existent objects may be incomplete. For

example, a non-existent person might have birthmarks on their back without having a specific number of birthmarks, which is not possible for existent people. As such, Parsons is convinced we can identify fictional characters following this method:

The fictional character of a story is the fictional object which may possess any nuclear property. The fictional object can be said to have nuclear properties if and only if the fictional character of the story is such that in the story it has the nuclear properties which the fictional object possesses (141).

For example, the character Arya Stark is the real but non-existent object that possesses all the nuclear properties attributed to her in the *Game of Thrones* series but is unable to possess any other nuclear property except the ones in the fictional work. Some of these properties include the property of being an assassin, being born in Winterfell, being a Lady, having a direwolf named Nymeria and a sword named Needle, etc. As such, when one makes a statement like ‘Arya has a sword she named Needle’, we can affirm that they make a true statement since the nuclear property of having ‘a sword named Needle’ is possessed by the fictional character, Arya Stark, in the *Game of Thrones* series.

The properties which fictional characters possess can be used to describe and refer to them in the fictional works they appear, and based on these properties and references, appreciators can make claims about fictional entities that can be regarded as true in the fictional work. This is evident in the internal claims and external claims we make about fictional works. Internal claims about fictional works include statements that make reports about the contents of fictional works. Internal claims include references to, as well as descriptions of fictional characters and the events that occur in fictional works. The truth of these claims is dependent on the contents of fictional works. To clarify with an example, the claim: “Lord Baelish is conniving and power-hungry, he is always plotting schemes to rise to power” is an internal claim about the fictional work, *Game of Thrones*, and refers to the fictional entity – Lord Baelish – who possess these properties. External claims about fictional works include

references and statements about fictional entities which are not concerned with what happens in particular fictional works. Examples of external claims about fiction include comparisons between fictional events and historical events, comparisons between fictional entities and existent persons, statements of negative existential like “Eddard Stark does not exist” which express the property of non-existence, etc. It is with respect to external claims about fiction that extra-nuclear properties come to play. Coupled with our knowledge of a work as fiction, by taking the truth of internal claims about a work of fiction seriously, appreciators avoid holding beliefs or making statements that suggest the view that fictional entities are taken to be real and existent objects. This is because our knowledge of such entities as fiction grounds our belief that they are real but non-existent objects with properties, but having properties does not presuppose existence.

I am of the view that this category of real but non-existent objects with emotion-inducing properties accounts for the subject’s emotional reactions to imagined realities (like imagining having an annoying roommate), possible events (like experiencing a tornado), future events (like having a new baby) as well as past events (like the coronation of a famous king). In essence, the class of real objects is broader than the class of existent objects. What these events have in common is the fact that the objects of emotions involved possess properties that appreciators imagine. These properties account for the emotional reactions that appreciators experience when engaged in imaginings about these events. As such, appreciators need not believe the object of their emotions is existent and non-fictional to have genuine emotional reactions towards them. I am of the view that coupled with the narrative technique of fictional works, it is as a result of these properties that appreciators feel more emotionally connected toward some fictional characters and works than they are toward others. The properties which some characters have (including their emotion-inducing properties) and the narrative style used

in a fictional work, account for how certain works are more effective at arousing emotions than others.

### **3.2.2 Understanding Similarities between Lamarque's Thought Theory and the Object Theory.**

Both Lamarque's version of the thought theory and my version of the object theory agree that to resolve the paradox, our interest should be the nature of the objects of emotions. But while the thought theory holds that the objects of emotions are real and existent character-concepts, the object theory holds that the objects of emotions are real but non-existent fictional characters. Irrespective of this, both the thought theory and the object theory seem to suggest that the properties of fictional characters form an integral part of appreciators' emotional experiences. This is because, according to the thought theory, character-concepts are derived from character descriptions (in visual fiction) and depictions (in literary fiction). According to the object theory, the emotion-inducing properties which fictional entities possess (amongst other factors like narrative content), influence appreciators' emotional reactions to the plights of fictional characters.

As earlier stated, Lamarque and other thought theorists are similar to object theorists in the sense that both views reject the notion that belief in the existence of the object of emotions is necessary for genuine emotional reactions. Both the thought theory and the object theory agree that strategy 2b presents an adequate solution to the paradox. By applying the reality cognitivist approach to emotions, strategy 2b argues that what is necessary for our emotional reactions is the belief in the reality of the objects of our emotions rather than their existence. As a broader view, strategy 2b accounts for emotional reactions to fiction, non-fiction, imagined possible events, future and past events and a continuum of similar cases. By focusing on the belief in the reality of the objects of emotions, strategy 2b rejects proposition 2 (Emotion

and Belief) and replaces it with proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism). While Lamarque's solution to the paradox supports strategy 2b, by arguing that the object of emotions during appreciators' engagement with fiction are character-concepts which are mind-dependent existent objects (i.e., thoughts), it soon falls back into the camp of the unrefined version of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) which requires that appreciators believe the object of their emotions exist. According to the object theory, in contrast, the objects of appreciators' emotions are fictional characters which are real and non-existent.

The object theory avoids classifying thoughts as the object of emotions. As earlier stated, appreciators do not feel sad for thoughts, nor do they feel pity for thoughts or feel angry at thoughts. So, when Charles says he was frightened by the slime, it simply means that (he believes) the slime possesses fear-inducing properties which Charles recognises and reacts to, despite knowing for a fact that the slime does not exist in any way. As such, according to the object theory, to feel genuine emotional responses, appreciators only need to believe that fictional entities possess properties necessary for their emotional reactions.

### **3.2.3 The Object Theory – Resolving the Paradox of Fiction**

Having replaced proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) with proposition 2b (Reality Cognitivism), the object theory avoids the contradiction which the original paradox presents and therefore resolves the paradox of fiction. As a version of strategy 2b, the object theory is compatible with appreciators' emotional reactions to fiction and non-fiction, as well as a continuum of cases where the object of emotions may be: (i) real but non-existent objects; or (ii) real and existent objects.

My version of the object theory posits that every emotion must be caused by appropriate beliefs, which in the case of fiction include beliefs in the reality of fictional entities that are the objects of our emotions and beliefs that they possess the relevant emotion-inducing properties.

Based on the aforementioned, an appreciator feels admiration towards Cersei Lannister as a result of the belief that the fictional character is real but non-existent and possesses various admiration-warranting properties. An appreciator need not believe that the character exists in order to have genuine emotional reactions towards her. Charles experiences feelings characteristic of the emotion of fear towards the slime as a result of his belief that the slime is real, though non-existent. The slime possesses properties that define its status as a real object; these properties include fear-inducing properties, which account for the emotion of fear that Charles experiences towards the slime. Since fictional entities have as one of their (extra-nuclear) properties the attribute of non-existence as well as the other properties attributed to them in a given work of fiction, which also includes emotion-inducing properties, appreciators of fiction can experience genuine emotional reactions towards fictional entities.

Based on my revised version, the three true propositions become:

- 1) Emotions towards Fiction – Readers and viewers of fictional works often experience emotions such as fear, joy, happiness, pity, hatred etc. towards fictional characters.
- 2b) Reality Cognitivism – As a necessary condition for experiencing emotions, the subject believes the object of his/her emotions is real (and has emotion-inducing properties).
- 3) Non-belief in Fiction – Readers and viewers who know that the objects are fictional do not believe that they exist.

This revised version avoids the contradiction which the original paradox presents: since appreciators do not feel emotional reactions towards that which they do not believe exists, the contradiction is avoided. Based on this revised version, while engaged with fiction, appreciators have emotional reactions towards fictional characters (the object of their emotions) which they believe are the real but non-existent objects with emotion-inducing

properties. While holding such belief, appreciators can maintain their belief that fictional characters do not exist.

As an advantage over the other strategies and solutions presented in this project, the object theory not only avoids the contradiction in the paradox, but it also avoids attributing inconsistent beliefs to appreciators as well as the need to suspend disbelief while engaged with fiction. The object theory also explains the motivational component of appreciators' emotional reactions to fiction. Since appreciators are aware fictional entities are real but non-existent objects, appreciators are in turn aware that there is a metaphysical impossibility to act on the motivations that their emotions present the same way they act on emotions from non-fictional scenarios. In addition, based on the belief that the object of emotions is real with emotion-inducing properties, the object theory is suitable for explaining appreciators' continued experience of emotional reactions towards fictional characters after the engagement with fiction ends, as well as the changes in their emotional reactions towards fictional entities that appreciators experience during their engagement with fiction.

One may point out the implication of the object theory on the individual who holds a contrary belief that fictional objects do not exist, but they are not real. Given the object theory, the question arises: are the emotional reactions to fiction experienced by such an individual not genuine emotions? In reaction to this, I am of the view that every analysis has this kind of worry – the possibility of someone who holds a contrary view that limits the application of another view in specific cases – and it can be raised as an objection against anyone and any view. For example, consider individuals like Amie Thomasson, Nathan Solomon and other fictional realists who believe fictional characters exist and how they would respond to Walton's analysis. As such, this implication is a general sort of problem experienced when people have theoretical views of a certain kind, such that their theory might not apply to their opponent's

alternate views. In addition, in the case of the individual who believes fictional characters are not real and do not exist but experiences emotional reactions to fiction, I am of the view that since proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief) of the paradox aims at emotional reactions in general and not just to fiction alone, such an individual must be willing to accept the implication of their view on non-fictional cases involving past, possible and future events which involve characters that would count as non-existent and not real for them.

In the section discussing the limitations of Lamarque's version of the thought theory, I argued that thoughts cannot be the object of emotions because thoughts are not the sort of things that can hurt us (except in special cases), and neither can we feel sad or happy for thoughts. While I insist that thoughts cannot hurt us (except in exceptional cases), I posit that what our thoughts are about can. Hence, the view that my criticism against Lamarque also applies to the object theory does not hold. First, this is because except in normal cases, thoughts are not the sort of things that can harm us or cause us pain and sadness but fictional characters are; they are the contents of our thoughts – what our thoughts are about. Second, in the special circumstances, although fictional characters cannot actually hurt us or cause us pain and suffering, regardless, they are the sort of things that can undergo harm and suffering of various kinds that might arouse emotional reactions in us towards them, but that is not true of thoughts – except in special cases.

Although it can be raised that my reliance on an ontology of non-existent objects is problematic, it should be noted, that this yields a solution to the problem of negative existentials unavailable to its competitors. The view that fictional entities are real but non-existent objects, which the object theory argues, is well-placed to capture the truth of negative existentials.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The problem of negative existentials states that “in order to deny the existence of a given individual, one must assume the existence of that very individual. Thus, it seems that it is impossible to deny the existence of an individual without getting involved in a contradiction” (Reicher, 2019). The Meinongian view resolves this

The problem of negative existentials arises as a result of the fact that some statements or sentences have the paradoxical feature of denying what they presuppose, hence undermining their own truth (Clapp 1422). Because this problem concludes that it is impossible to truthfully deny the existence of anything, it is a hard conclusion to accept, especially when we consider the fact that many statements which express negative existence are not only plausible but also true. For example, appreciators can make true statements like “Lord Baelish does not exist” because the name “Lord Baelish” refers to an entity that does not fall within the class of existent things. Also, by focusing on the properties of Lord Baelish as presented in the fictional work, appreciators can make true statements like “Lord Baelish is devious and untrustworthy, he is skilled at plotting schemes and putting ideas in people’s heads and this makes him a fearful and powerful enemy”. It is the point of the object theory that Lord Baelish can have these properties and arouse emotional reactions from appreciators without existing.

## **Conclusion**

As above, it is clear how the object theory resolves the paradox of fiction and differs from the thought theory. While the thought theorist attributes our emotions to character-concepts brought to mind during our engagement with fictional works, the object theory maintains that we feel genuine emotional reactions towards fictional characters which are real but non-existent with emotion-inducing properties. It is in this sense that appreciators conceive of characters in the *Game of Thrones* series (like Eddard Stark and Theon Greyjoy) as real objects. And react to their plights, given the emotion-inducing properties which these characters possess in the fictional work. By applying strategy 2b, in which proposition 2b

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problem by differentiating between real and existent objects. Based on the Meinongian view, statements like “Zeus does not exist; Pegasus does not exist; Hogwarts does not exist” do not only have referents – the mythical god, the mythical flying horse, and the school of magic and wizardry – which are real but non-existent, the denial of their existence is also true and avoids contradictions and inconsistent beliefs.

(Reality Cognitivism) is offered as a revision of proposition 2 (Emotion and Belief), the contradiction which the paradox presents has been resolved.

## CONCLUSION

Discussions of appreciators' emotional reactions to fiction bring together contributions of scholars from various domains. These contributions have led to the emergence of novel ideas and perspectives for understanding fictional entities, emotional reactions to fiction, and the relationship between appreciators' emotional reactions to fiction and the value of fictional works. In this essay, I have argued that our experience of genuine emotions is as a result of our belief that the objects of our emotions (fictional entities) are real and possess emotion-inducing properties.

In my thesis, I have presented the paradox of fiction. I have also raised arguments against Radford's irrationality theory and the illusionists' suspension of disbelief theory. While these theories have been insightful and contributed to the general understanding of the relationship between appreciators' emotional reactions to fiction, the status of belief, and the nature of fictional entities, they have failed to resolve the paradox. Radford's irrationality theory relies on the implausible state of both believing and disbelieving in the existence of fictional characters, while the illusion theory proposes that appreciators willfully suspend their disbelief in the existence of fictional entities in order to have genuine emotional reactions to fiction. These contributions fail to capture the nature of fictional entities and focus instead on the experiences of the subject. I have also shown how Walton's version of the pretence theory makes great contributions given his analysis of the role of imagination. Although I disagree with Walton's analogy between appreciators' engagement with and emotional reaction to fiction and children's games of make-believe, I am appreciative of the notable similarities in how adults and children are capable of making-believe. I have argued against Walton's view that fiction-directed emotions are not genuine because appreciators are unable to act on their fiction-directed emotions as they would in similar non-fictional scenarios. I am also of the view

that Walton's choice of example – Charles and the green slime – is inadequate as a standard example for a general account of appreciators' emotional reactions to fiction.

As a solution to the paradox of fiction, I have highlighted positive elements of the thought theory necessary by way of motivating the object theory. The thrust of these positive contributions is focused on the properties that fictional objects possess. These properties are an essential component of the explanation of the emotional reactions appreciators experience based on their beliefs in the reality of fictional entities and their plights. As a solution to the paradox of fiction, I have argued for the application of strategy 2b which argues for the necessity of belief in the reality – rather than the existence – of the objects of our emotions. In turn, I defend the view that as a necessary condition for experiencing emotions, appreciators believe fictional entities are real but non-existent objects with emotion-inducing properties. In addition, I have argued that this solution to the paradox avoids the contradiction which the paradox presents, avoids the problem of inconsistent beliefs and also avoids suspending disbelief during engagement with fiction. It is for these reasons that I argue that the object theory is a preferred solution to the paradox of fiction.

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