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Emotion in the Appreciation of Fiction

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Abstract: Why is it that we respond emotionally to plays, movies, and novels and feel moved by characters and situations that we know do not exist? This question, which constitutes the kernel of the debate on »the paradox of fiction«, speaks to the perennial themes of philosophy, and remains of interest to this day. But does this question entail a paradox? A significant group of analytic philosophers have indeed thought so. Since the publication of Colin Radford’s celebrated paper »How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?« (1975), the number of proposals to solve, explain, reformulate, dismiss or even revitalize this apparent paradox has continued to proliferate. In line with recent developments in the philosophy of emotion, in this paper I will argue against the sustainability of the paradox, claiming that the only reasonable way to continue our discussions about it consists in using it as a heuristic tool to shed light on problems regarding our involvement with fiction. Against this background, I will then focus on one of the problems related to how our emotional responses to fiction contribute to our appreciation of it.

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section shows the parallel evolution of the paradox of fiction and the analytic philosophy of emotion. Here I claim that, although the paradox is epistemically flawed, since one of its premises is rooted in a limited view on the emotions typical of early cognitivism, the discussions it provokes are still epistemically useful. As Robert Stecker (2011, 295), among others, has pointed out, the paradox was formulated during the heyday of cognitive theories of the emotions in which emotion necessarily requires belief. Today, however, only few authors would endorse this premise. If emotion does not always require belief (as the majority of authors in the contemporary debate admit), let alone belief about the existence of the object towards which it is directed, then there is no reason to speak of a paradox. From this first conclusion, however, it does not follow that the paradox is completely without use from the epistemic point of view. A glimpse at the topics touched on during the discussions about how to solve, reformulate, or negate the paradox reveals their value in shedding light on the interrelation between emotion and fiction.

The second section elaborates a phenomenologically inspired cognitive account of the emotions by focusing on their cognitive bases, their influence on

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cognitions, and their cognitive function. In this model, emotions are responsible for indicating values, for showing what matters to us, and for being appropriate to their objects. My claim is that this view applies not only to reality, but also to our involvement with fiction.

In the final section I draw on this account to focus on one kind of appreciation of fiction which necessarily requires our emotional involvement. Following an idea put forward by Susan Feagin (1996, 1), I employ the concept of »appreciation« to refer to a set of abilities exercised with the aim of extracting value from the work. There is a long tradition in aesthetics that condemns any focus on the emotions in the appreciation of art and fiction, and defends the necessity of aesthetic appreciation without emotional influence. To refer to this negative attitude towards the emotions, I will borrow an expression coined by Susan Feagin (2013, 636), who refers to »the intellectualized view of appreciation«. Against this widespread view, I will argue that some aspects of the fiction can only be appreciated with the help of our emotions. The cognitive approach developed in the previous section can explain how the emotions might in fact play a significant role in the appreciation of art and fiction. Attention will be paid to three activities involved in appreciation, for all of which emotion is crucial: processing relevant information about the fictional world, understanding aspects of it, and becoming acquainted with the values it presents. My aim here is to argue that there are particular aspects of the fictional world that can only be appreciated if recipients have the appropriate emotions.

Keywords: paradox of fiction, cognitivism, affective intentionality, appreciation, value

1 Introduction

Why is it that we respond emotionally to plays, movies, and novels and feel moved by characters and situations that we know do not exist? This question, which constitutes the kernel of the debate on »the paradox of fiction«, speaks to the perennial themes of philosophy, and remains of interest to this day. But does this question entail a paradox? A significant group of analytic philosophers have indeed thought so. Since the publication of Colin Radford's celebrated paper »How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?« (1975), the number of proposals to solve, explain, reformulate, dismiss or even revitalize this apparent paradox has continued to proliferate. In line with recent developments in the philosophy of emotion, in this paper I will argue against the sustainability of the paradox, claiming that the only reasonable way to continue our discussions

about it consists in using it as a heuristic tool to shed light on problems regarding our involvement with fiction. Against this background, I will then focus on one of the problems related to how our emotional responses to fiction contribute to our appreciation of it.

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section shows the parallel evolution of the paradox of fiction and the analytic philosophy of emotion. Here I conclude that, although the paradox is epistemically flawed, since one of its premises is rooted in a limited view of the emotions typical of early cognitivism, the discussions it provoked remain epistemically useful. The second section elaborates a cognitive account of the emotions by focusing on their cognitive bases, their influence on cognitions, and their cognitive function. In the final section I draw on this account to focus on one kind of appreciation of fiction which necessarily requires our emotional involvement.

2 The Paradox of Fiction: An Epistemic Evaluation

The publication of Radford's paper forty years ago determined the basis for what would go on to become one of the most prolific discussions within analytic aesthetics. The »paradox of emotional responses to fiction« or, in its short version, just the »paradox of fiction« (henceforth »the paradox«) attracted the attention of those philosophers working on emotion and fiction and it has generated a considerable volume of literature. According to the authors of this debate, the paradox entails three premises, all of which are taken to be plausible, but when put together constitute a contradiction: 1) we have emotional responses towards what we know to be fiction; 2) we do not believe that fictional characters exist; and 3) to experience an emotion requires that we believe that the object of our emotion exists. Despite its apparent plausibility, in this paper I find the paradox to be unsustainable. As Robert Stecker (2011, 295), among others, has pointed out, the paradox was formulated during the heyday of cognitive theories of the emotions in which emotion necessarily requires belief. Today, however, only few authors would endorse the third premise. If emotion does not always require belief (as the majority of authors in the contemporary debate admit), let alone belief about the existence of the object towards which it is directed, then there is no reason to speak of a paradox. Should we just dismiss it? To answer this question we need to focus first on how the paradox emerged alongside analytic theories of emotion, how it came to be that the majority of philosophers no longer regard our emotional reactions to fiction as problematic, and what the fruits of this debate have been.

What is very symptomatic of the paradox (and should invite our suspicions about it) is that it was first formulated in the context of the early analytical theories of the emotions. The emotions first drew the interest of analytic philosophers during the 1960s, especially after the publication of Anthony Kenny's book *Action, Emotion and Will* (1963). As is well known, these early theories endorsed a cognitive view of the emotions, according to which they are intimately related to beliefs. The idea that emotions require beliefs was a common thread of the majority of theories of the emotions developed during early cognitivism. There are three popular versions of this view: a) emotion is a combination of beliefs and desires (cf. Marks 1982, 227–242); b) emotions are judgments (cf. Solomon 1993, 126); and c) emotions require belief as their cognitive basis (cf. Kenny 1963, 195; Taylor 1985, 3). The main preoccupation of these theories was to explain the intentionality of the emotions, thus leaving aside other aspects, such as their qualitative and bodily dimensions. These theories were convinced that if emotions are *about* something, i. e. if they are intentionally directed to the world, then this is because they inherit this intentional structure from the beliefs on which they are based. In this framework, it is not surprising that the emotional responses towards fiction appear to be problematic. The three premises of the paradox seem true (the third premise in particular was considered to be incontestable) and, thus, they are indeed in tension.

The solutions proposed during the first decades after the formulation of the paradox were consonant with those theories of the emotions associated with early cognitivism.¹ All of them shared an acceptance of a paradigm of the emotions in which belief is essential for rational and real emotion (as an ingredient or requirement). The two most popular solutions to the paradox are illustrative of this period. Whereas Radford (1975, 78), in the aforementioned paper, challenged doxastic and practical rationality, it was Kendall Walton (1993, 196; 271) who proposed that we consider our emotions towards fictional entities as quasi-emotions, i. e. as phenomena that, despite resemblances to full-fledged emotions, lack motivational power regarding deliberate actions, and are produced through a game of make-believe.

During the last few decades, however, and coinciding with a change of paradigm in the philosophy of emotion that criticizes the early cognitive view, some authors have questioned the tenability of the paradox. The idea that emotion requires or entails belief has been rejected in favor of a new form of cognitivism. This new cognitive approach maintains that the emotions have a *sui generis*

¹ Cf., for an overview of the solutions during early cognitivism, Levinson 1998, 20–36. For an overview that identifies two periods of the paradox cf. Vendrell Ferran 2014, 313–337.

form of intentional reference which is neither reducible to belief nor inherited from beliefs. The representative approaches belonging to this paradigm of »affective intentionality« (a name that underscores the idea that there is an original emotive intentionality that can give us information about the world) understand the emotions as »embodied appraisals« (cf. Prinz 2004), »feeling towards« (cf. Goldie 2002) or »value perceptions« (cf. Tappolet 2000). In the next section, I will develop a cognitive account of the emotions that considers these proposals. For now, it is important to note that these accounts inaugurated a new way of thinking about the paradox. On the one hand, some authors proposed what have been called »anti-judgementalist solutions« to the paradox, according to which emotions do not always require beliefs about the existence and features of their objects (cf., for instance, Matravers 2006, 254). On the other hand, in a more radical vein, some authors adopted a dismissive attitude towards the paradox. This negationist approach denies that the paradox is in fact a paradox: they speak clearly of the »fiction of the paradox« (Moyal-Sharrock 2009, 169), and state that it makes no difference for our emotions »whether I am responding to the real, the merely imagined, the possible, or the impossible« (Robinson 2005, 145).

If, contrary to early cognitive views, these recent developments in emotion theory are correct in their claim that emotion does not always require or entail belief, the third premise of the paradox is false. Ergo, we can conclude that *the paradox is epistemically faulty*; that there is no paradox at all. The parallel evolution of the debate about the paradox and the philosophy of emotion in the analytic tradition indicates that this pseudo-problem was motivated by a view on the emotions that has since become obsolete.² The paradox is therefore a typical problem of analytic aesthetics and the flawed approach to the emotions endorsed during its early years. It is revealing that only during early cognitivism has our engagement with fiction been regarded as paradoxical.

From this first conclusion, however, it does not follow that the paradox is completely without use from the epistemic point of view. A glimpse at the topics touched on during the discussions about how to solve, reformulate, or negate the paradox reveals their value in shedding light on the interrelation between emotion and fiction. I cannot agree more with Stecker (2011, 308) when he claims that the paradox has been an important heuristic tool for understanding not only our emotional engagement with fiction, but also the nature of emotion and imagination. Indeed, the paradox served as a touchstone for improving and refining our accounts about how we engage emotionally with fiction and participate imaginatively in it. Thus, it is not only that the developments in the philosophy of

² Cf., for a recent attempt to revitalize the paradox, Cova/Teroni 2016, 930–942.

emotion have led to changes in the way we view the paradox, but also vice versa. The debates raised by the paradox have motivated a refinement of our views on emotion, providing each other with mutual feedback that has proven to be very generative.

We should not lose sight of this productivity when we return to the question with which I began this section, which considered the possibility of dismissing the paradox. After recognizing its instrumental value in the past, Stecker considers the paradox as a ladder: »The paradox of fiction has been a valuable tool for exploring the nature of both imaginative and emotional responses to fiction. Perhaps it has now fulfilled that function. We can now kick away the ladder, and continue to explore these responses in their own right.« (2011, 308) Unlike Stecker, I think that the epistemic utility of the discussions aroused in the context of the paradox has not yet been exhausted. In other words, although we should negate the existence of paradoxes where possible, the questions prompted by this particular paradox and the proposals developed to solve it continue to inspire discussions about our engagement with fiction. However, two strategies are necessary in order to make the discussions around the paradox useful for contemporary research. The first involves *broadening the debate* to include aspects other than those emotions that are typically examined within the paradox, such as fear, pity, compassion, etc. The strong focus on these emotional responses should be corrected by exploring the role of moods (e. g., melancholy, gladness), feelings (e. g., vitality), or attitudes (e. g., curiosity) in our engagement with fiction. The debate would also benefit from examining how our emotional responses differ in accordance to different types of fiction (e. g., movies, novels, theatre, poems, etc.) and genres (e. g., comic, tragic, etc.) with which we engage. And, finally, the paradox should take into consideration other debates, such as the debate about the nature of fiction and the relation between fiction and art. The second strategy is rather different and consists in *focusing the debate* on the typical emotional responses of fear, pity, compassion, etc. and analyzing their aesthetic, cognitive, and moral functions. Here I have in mind questions concerning the cognitive benefits of engaging with fiction (e. g., if our emotions towards fictions are rational, how does their rationality help to explain how we convey knowledge from fiction?), their moral implications (e. g., if they are real emotions, how is it that we seem to be allowed to experience a range of emotions towards fiction, some of which might not be considered morally appropriate?), or their aesthetic relevance (e. g., how is their rationality and authenticity related to aesthetically relevant values?). It does not follow from the first conclusion – namely that the paradox is epistemically unsustainable – that the discussions prompted by the paradox are also epistemically useless. A second conclusion can be extracted from this evaluation: The discussions raised in the context of the paradox *have been and*

remain epistemically relevant to the task of enhancing our knowledge about how we emotionally engage with fiction. Against this background, and following the second of the strategies mentioned above, the rest of my paper will concentrate on the necessity of emotional responses in our appreciation of fiction. This first requires a clarification of the relation between emotion and cognition.

3 Cognitivism for the Emotions Revisited

The previous section discussed two different periods of the paradox: a first period dominated by early cognitivism, according to which the emotions require belief or are themselves beliefs; and a second period marked by a different cognitive approach to the emotions whereby emotions are not always grounded in beliefs and their intentionality cannot be explained in terms of beliefs. This section presents a phenomenologically inspired cognitive account of the emotions with the aim of fleshing out their relation to cognition as well as their cognitive function.³

3.1 The Cognitive Bases of the Emotions

Emotions are about something; they are directed towards objects. These objects might be of different kinds: they might be physical objects, persons, animals, etc. but also situations and states of affairs (to refer to both I will use the term »object« in a broad sense). We can fear a lion and we can fear that the lion might escape and attack us. The objects of the emotions are presented to consciousness by cognitive phenomena. But what counts as cognitive phenomena?

A view widespread in early cognitivism maintained that the only cognitive phenomena able to fulfill this function are beliefs. Thus, to feel shame implies the belief that I have done something wrong; to feel fear implies the belief that something is dangerous, etc. As already stated, this claim comes in different versions but all have in common the idea that in order to have an emotion we must believe that something is the case. This view has been subject to several objections. It has been argued that the view implies an »over-intellectualization« of the emotions. Beliefs are complex phenomena which require cognitive abilities, and if these abilities are a requirement for the emotions, then it is difficult to explain how

³ In this paper I focus on the cognitive moments and functions of the emotions, but a general theory of the emotions should not disregard their equally essential qualitative, bodily, expressive, and practical moments (cf. Vendrell Ferran 2008).

animals, small children, etc., who do not have complex cognitive abilities, are able to feel emotions. It remains unclear what, if anything, may be felt without the capacity to judge. Moreover, in some cases the beliefs that accompany our emotions appear after the emotional response, so they cannot presuppose the emotions in either a temporal or logical sense. If I hear a loud noise and I feel fear, this fear is an immediate reaction to the trigger, and only afterwards can I judge that the loud noise implies a danger for me. Furthermore, while this view can explain the nature of some emotions (those based on beliefs), it cannot offer an explanation for emotions in which no belief is involved. Emotional responses such as disgust at a smell and fear of a fantasy do not involve belief. These objections make the early cognitive view unsustainable.

In order to avoid these objections, some philosophers proposed that we consider phenomena other than belief as cognitive bases for the emotions. Besides beliefs, it has been argued that perceptions, imaginings, and memories might also work as cognitive bases for the emotions (cf. Greenspan 1988; Elster 1999, 250; Mulligan 2004, 177–225; Goldie 2000, 45). In line with these views, and following some phenomenological suggestions, I propose to consider perceptions, imaginings, beliefs, and suppositions as bases for the emotions (cf. Meinong 1969, 582). a) Perceptions might work as cognitive bases for the emotions when, for instance, the emotion is based on an audition (fear of the roar of a lion), vision (fear of the sight of a salivating dog), smell (disgust at the smell of cheese), tactile impression (disgust at sticky textures), or gustative impression (disgust at sweets). All these sensory perceptions are responsible for presenting us with the object of the emotions in question. b) Imaginings might also present to our consciousness the objects towards which we can then react emotionally. We can be afraid of a fantasized image of a monster, for instance. c) Beliefs can also work as cognitive bases for the emotions. Anger, for instance, might be based on the belief that my colleague has unfairly criticized me. d) Emotions might also be based on suppositions.⁴ My anger might be based on the supposition that my colleague has criticized me. In this case, I do not judge that this is true or false, nor *believe* that it has happened, but simply *assume* that this could be the case. On the basis of entertaining this proposition, I can then react to it emotionally. According to this model, not only do cognitive phenomena other than belief work as bases for the emotions (and thus, the third premise of the paradox is clearly false), but the cases in which emotions are not based on belief are in fact much more common than those in which a belief is required.

⁴ The term »supposition« here is employed for those propositions which are entertained, but whose truth-value is not assessed. In this regard, it has nothing to do with the concept of »hypothesis«.

The inclusion of different cognitive bases is important not only in explaining everyday emotional responses, but also in explaining our emotions towards fiction. Some types of fiction, such as film, present us with perceptions of sounds and images, but do not require a belief that they exist. Imaginings are also crucial to explain our involvement with fiction. This is especially (although not exclusively) true for novels. If I do not imagine what the novel describes, then it is going to be impossible to become involved in the narrative. We must also fill in the gaps in fiction with our imaginations: because fictions cannot present or describe the totality of the fictional universe, we need to imagine it. Suppositions are a third element to be taken seriously when considering our engagement with fiction. In order to engage with the fictional universe, we have to entertain the propositions of the narrative. These propositions – which we hold without believing – are the structure that sustains the fictional work. We entertain the propositions, we adopt them, we hold them, but we leave aside the question of their truth or falsity. Beliefs are also sometimes needed to respond to fiction. For instance, certain background beliefs are required: we have to believe that, if the narrative does not say otherwise, the laws of gravity are at work in the fictional universe. Also, beliefs about the type of fiction we are dealing with are important: my attitude will be different depending on whether I am reading a science fiction book or a historical novel (in the latter case I will believe the historical data with which the author presents me and I will expect that he or she is a reliable source for them). These considerations show that involvement with fiction does not always require that we believe in fictional content. We are able to react emotionally to objects perceived, imagined, and supposed, and not only towards objects presented in our beliefs and which we deem to actually exist.

3.2 The Influence of Emotion on Cognition

The second claim related to the version of cognitivism endorsed in this paper concerns the possibility that emotions influence cognition. Emotional experiences are able to mold the way in which we engage with the world cognitively. They influence our perceptions, imaginings, beliefs, and suppositions. a) Emotion can influence perception in at least three ways. It renders visible in the perceptual horizon features that are relevant for the subject; it attracts the subject's attention to these features; and it makes the subject focus on them. Imagine that you get lost walking around a new city, it is getting dark, and you fear that you may not be able to arrive at your destination. Indeed, this fear might paralyze you completely, but it might also influence your perception, making some features of your environment more salient. I will focus on the latter possibility. Your fear might make some percep-

tions more central than others (for instance, it makes signposts seem particularly relevant) while other features (such as a beautiful landscape) are perceived only peripherally. Once these features enter into our perceptual horizon, the fear makes us pay attention to them and focus on them as we attempt to gather salient information (we will try to understand the signpost even if it is written in a language we do not command). b) Emotions might also influence our imaginings. Our fear might lead us to imagine what could happen if we remain lost, and it might also lead us to imagine ways of escaping the situation and putting ourselves out of danger. We can also imagine different actions and test them in our imagination in an attempt to discover which one would be most successful in achieving a safe outcome. c) They might also lead us to endorse, modify, and alter beliefs. My fear of spending the night lost in a new city might lead me to modify existing beliefs about myself (for instance, my belief that I possess a good sense of direction) and to endorse new beliefs (such as my capacity to orientate myself without any technical device). d) Finally, our suppositions might also be influenced by our emotions. My fear might lead me to entertain certain thoughts about the new city, its environment, myself, etc. (for instance, I might suppose that the geography of the city makes it difficult to determine the right direction).

This influence of emotion over cognition serves practical purposes (in the case of fear, it allows us to identify possible dangers and put us out of harm's way), but what is relevant for the argument I will develop in section 4 is that this influence can also be applied in the case of our emotions towards fiction. Consider a situation in which we fear for the life of a protagonist. This fear guides our perception of the fictional situation in at least the three ways mentioned above: elements that can be potentially dangerous enter in our field of perception. Of course, this does not just happen naturally, but largely because fiction employs certain devices to guide our perceptions, such as particular images and narrative strategies. Moved by our fear and guided by the fiction itself, we attend to those elements which have become salient and we focus on them in order to make our perception more fine-grained. The fear also influences our imaginings, allowing us to fantasize about the destiny of the protagonist and what will happen to her if she does not get to safety. It will lead us to hold and to modify certain beliefs about the situation, the characters involved in it, their intentions, etc., and it will lead us to suppose certain states of affairs that constitute the fictional situation (my fear will lead me to suppose that certain characters might have bad intentions, etc.).⁵

⁵ A further important aspect that I will not develop here concerns the possibility that our emotions towards fiction influence our cognitions not only about fictions but also about reality. This claim is much stronger than the one endorsed here and implies that our emotional responses

If our emotions are able to influence the way in which we engage cognitively with fiction, they do not take place »off-line« without influencing the rest of our psychic life. What seems clear from this exposition is that these emotions are not »disconnected« from the rest of our self. They are based on different kinds of cognitions and they are able to influence, mold, and determine our cognitions in multiple ways. They are fully embedded in our cognitive structure.

3.3 The Cognitive Function of Emotion

The third thesis concerns the cognitive function of the emotions. As mentioned above, emotions are directed towards objects (persons, animals, situations, etc.). These objects might differ strongly depending on each individual, society, culture, epoch, etc. Besides these »material objects«, emotions also have »formal objects«, i. e. each emotion is responsible for presenting its object to us in a certain light. In disgust, the object is presented as disgusting; in fear the object appears dangerous, etc. (cf. Kenny 1963, 195). Unlike the material objects, the formal objects of the emotions are restricted: disgust might only be directed towards something which is presented as disgusting, and fear towards something which is presented as dangerous, etc. While in contemporary literature it is common to speak about these formal objects as evaluative or axiological properties, the phenomenological tradition speaks of values.

The nature of such formal objects, however, is far from clear. It is also unclear how we might become acquainted with these objects. In recent decades, the perceptual model – whose proponents include, among others, those authors mentioned above: Goldie, Prinz, Tappolet – has gained force. Despite differences in their accounts, defenders of the perceptual model argue that, in the same sense that perceptions present us with sensory aspects of the world, emotions give us direct access to its axiological properties. However, the analogy between perception and emotion is imperfect. There is no one-to-one correlation between emotion and value. We might react to certain axiological properties with different emotions: thus, emotions might not be responsible for presenting them. For instance, we can feel angry, sad, outraged, indignant or even indifferent towards a situation perceived as unfair. Moreover, the model cannot explain how it is possible for us to be aware of evaluative properties without experiencing emotion. We can »see« that a situation is dangerous without being scared ourselves. If such

towards fiction can convey knowledge about reality. For the development of my argument, however, I do not need to prove this strong claim here.

cases are possible, then the question remains open as to how these evaluative properties might be grasped (cf., for arguments against the perceptual model, Scheler 1973, 259; Reinach 1989, 295 sqq.; 493; Mulligan 2004, 177–225; Dokic/Lemaire 2013, 227).

But, in my view, we do not need to struggle with all the problems associated with the perceptual model in order to defend the cognitive function of the emotions. For the proponents of the perceptual model, the emotions are themselves a kind of appraisal of a situation. However, given the counterarguments above, it seems more reasonable to distinguish between the appraisal and the emotion itself, and consider them as two different phenomena. Although logically related to one another (appraisals are a necessary condition for emotion), the phenomena should not be conflated. Appraisals are cognitive in the sense that they give us information about reality by making us acquainted with some of its relevant properties, but they are not necessarily a form of propositional knowledge. I can appraise a situation as unfair, but this form of apprehension is not a judgment: I see the unfairness, which is different from judging the situation to be unfair (which requires propositional thinking, reflection on particular elements, etc.). Appraisals constitute a very basic form of engagement with the world which is more primitive than any cognition or volition: indeed, it can be seen that appraisals already imbue all our perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, desires, emotions, and actions. Following the phenomenological tradition, I will refer to these cognitive but non-propositional appraisals as »value-feelings« (cf. Scheler 1973, 259; Reinach 1989, 295; cf., for a different theory of the appraisals, Robinson 2013, 652).

In this phenomenological model, emotions are regarded as evaluative stances taken towards values (which are given to us in value-feelings). When we feel a value, we can react to it with an emotion. But, although the apprehension of values provokes us to respond in particular emotional fashions, these responses do not always take place. The apprehension of a situation as unfair »demands« that I react with indignation, and when this happens an emotion may be produced, but it is also possible that I simply appreciate that the situation is unfair without adopting any stance towards it. Unlike value-feelings, which are a primary form of involvement with the world, emotions, as already stated, are based on cognitions. Moreover, unlike value-feelings, emotions do not disclose the values they are directed towards. In what sense, then, might they fulfill a cognitive function?

Emotions might be considered cognitively valuable in at least in three respects: a) First, although they do not disclose values, they are able to gesture towards them. The fact that we experience an emotion is an indicator that a value has been felt and that we have taken a stance towards it. My indignation does

not instantiate the unfairness of a situation, but it does imply it. The emotion suggests that a certain value has been appraised (or, to put it in the language of sensory perception, »perceived« or »seen«, and – in the language of feeling – »felt«). The emotions are intentionally directed towards the appraised values, not because they apprehend them, but because they indicate that a value has been felt and a response on our part has been demanded. When this happens the emotion fits in the situation and is rational with regard to it. b) At the same time, the emotion indicates that a value is sufficiently important to us that we respond to it, that we care about it, and that it has relevance for our life (for instance, because it concerns our well-being, expectations, future plans, relations to others, etc.). When the values apprehended do not matter to us, we remain indifferent, but when they are significant for us, we react emotionally to them. In doing so, emotions not only point towards something in the world, but they also suggest what is important for us as individuals. Thus, it is also a sign of rationality that we react emotionally to that which we care about. c) There is a third aspect to be noted here: by considering our emotions, we might determine whether or not our reactions to a value are appropriate. Appropriate responses have sound cognitive bases (they are directed towards an object that is presented in a perception, imagining, etc.) and they align with the values they are directed towards (it would be mistaken to react with joy to something experienced as sad).

If this view is correct, then emotions might fulfill cognitive functions: they are responsible for indicating values, for showing what matters to us, and for being appropriate to their objects. This view applies not only to reality, but also to our involvement with fiction. The three cognitive dimensions are equally at work when we react to fictional situations. My fear for the life of the protagonist does not tell me that the situation is dangerous, but it indicates that I appraise the situation as such; it suggests that what happens to her matters to me, and it demonstrates that my response is appropriate to what has been described or shown. In this context, our emotional responses to fiction seem as rational as our emotions towards reality. This model is in line with many of the observations formulated by the detractors of the paradox, according to which our emotional responses to fiction are not irrational.

4 Appreciating Fiction

Drawing on this cognitive model, which underlines the non-paradoxical character of our emotional responses to fiction, this section is concerned with the emotions' role in appreciation.⁶ Following an idea put forward by Susan Feagin (1996, 1), I employ the concept of »appreciation« to refer to a set of abilities exercised with the aim of extracting value from the work. Attention will be paid to three activities involved in appreciation, for all of which emotion is crucial: processing relevant information about the fictional world, understanding aspects of it, and becoming acquainted with the values it presents. My aim here is to argue that there are particular aspects of the fictional world that can only be appreciated if recipients have the appropriate emotions. Some aspects of fiction in fact require our emotional involvement in order to be appreciated. This claim is presented here as a particularized one (I do not pretend to apply it to all cases of fiction): my aim is to argue for its validity in specific cases. Moreover, I do not claim that all kinds of appreciation require emotion.

Prima facie, there are two different forms of engagement with fiction. We can engage with fiction with or without emotion. Following a suggestion formulated within the phenomenological tradition, but introducing some refinements to it, I will refer to these two types of aesthetic participation as »inner concentration« (»Innenkonzentration«) and »outer concentration« (»Außenkonzentration«) (cf. Geiger 1974, 664). With »inner concentration«, the subject addresses herself towards the »inside«, focusing on the emotional experiences aroused by a work of art with the aim of enjoying them. With »outer concentration«, the subject addresses herself to the »outside« and focuses on the work, its features, and its values. This form of participation is »disinterested«: the subject remains in control of her emotions. Usually our engagement with fiction involves both kinds of participation; thus, these terms are in fact an abstraction and function as ideal types. Still, this differentiation is useful in the presentation of my argument.

There is a long tradition in aesthetics that condemns any focus on the emotions in the appreciation of art and fiction, and defends the necessity of aesthetic appreciation without emotional influence. Many philosophers were convinced that emotions might interfere in the appreciation of the work and distract us from what is really important: its features and its values. For instance, within the field of phenomenology, Geiger and Ortega y Gasset thought that if we focus on what

⁶ Although I use this concept in line with Feagin, the model developed here differs from hers in two respects. I defend a cognitive theory of the emotions inspired by phenomenology and I reject *tout court* simulationist accounts to explain how we understand others (real or fictional).

we feel, then we are enjoying our emotions and not the work itself. According to them, the pleasure experienced through »inner concentration« is a pseudo-aesthetic pleasure because the work is used merely as a pretext to feel emotions and to indulge in them. Genuine aesthetic pleasure requires the »disconnection of the self« as a means to focus on the object as such: this is only possible through »outer concentration« (cf. Geiger 1974, 664; Ortega y Gasset 2006, 852). To refer to this negative attitude towards the emotions, I will borrow an expression coined by Susan Feagin (2013, 636), who refers to »the intellectualized view of appreciation«. She defines this view as follows: »literary works of art are so complex that responding with feeling to what one reads *during the process of reading* risks taking attention away from what one ought to be attending to in the work: such things as the character of the writing, the structure of the plot, the subtle handling of themes, the vividness and intricacy of its detail« (ibid.). To put this succinctly: the intellectualized view claims that true appreciation must be devoid of emotion.⁷

Against this widespread view, in what follows I will argue that some aspects of the fiction can only be appreciated through »inner concentration«, i. e. with the help of our emotions. The cognitive approach developed in the previous section can explain how the emotions might in fact play a significant role in the appreciation of art and fiction. Let's consider three capacities for appreciating fiction, all of which involve emotion.⁸

- a) The emotions we experience while engaging with fiction contribute to our processing of information and our obtaining knowledge about the fictional world. As mentioned in section 3, emotions are responsible for presenting certain elements in our perceptual horizon and they lead us to pay attention to these elements in order to obtain as much information as possible. The features I have in mind are not the printed sentences of a novel, or the texture of the paper or screen, but elements of the narrative that concern the plot and its meanings (such as what happens to the fictional characters, the affective significance of the fictional situation, etc.). Emotions are linked to patterns of attention, so that once we feel fear (or disgust, or pity, etc.), our engagement with the world will attend to those moments that are relevant from the point of view of a person affected by the emotion in question. Thus, fear for the pro-

⁷ Feagin mentions Peter Kivy as a contemporary proponent of this view and she is interested in offering an alternative to the intellectualized view.

⁸ The claim that appreciation implies emotion is not to be conflated with the claim that appreciation is an emotional state. The emotions are necessary but not sufficient for the appreciation of fiction, since this phenomenon might involve different processes which are not emotions (cf., for objections against the view that appreciation is itself an emotion, Robinson 2013, 669 sq.).

tagonist will lead me to notice, attend to and focus on those objects, persons, situations, etc. described or depicted in the fiction as dangerous, in order that I might obtain information about them, witness their effects on the protagonist, and consider which resources she might have to escape the danger, etc. They might also influence our imaginings so that we are able to have a full picture of the fictional universe: in becoming imaginatively involved, we can imagine scenes which still constitute part of the fiction, even if they are not described or depicted. Emotional appreciation allows us to hold suppositions that help us to enter into the fictional world of the work: we construct the fictional world supposing that, in the fiction in question, particular things are indeed the way they are.

- b) Emotions towards fiction might also play a crucial role in understanding fiction. Certainly, we can understand some fictional works without considering our emotional response: for instance, by focusing on the causal connections between events. However, some works and/or some aspects of the work require an emotional involvement in order to be fully understood.⁹ In some cases, an affective participation in the lives of the characters is required: it is only by putting ourselves in their shoes that we can gain an internal perspective on their situations and understand their actions, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. If we are unable to achieve this shift of perspective, then we cannot fully understand how the world is for the character. Why is this? A »cold« participation in the life of a character, for instance, via a theory of the mind that helps us to explain that character's behavior, attitudes, feelings, and thoughts, is not the most natural and common way to engage with fictional others. In fact, it can result in extenuating theories about the characters and why they act, think, perceive, and feel the way they do. Our understanding of others might occasionally require some kind of theorizing, but under normal conditions this would take place spontaneously. A more powerful explanation is that understanding characters requires us to imagine »what it is like« to be in a certain situation, to undergo a certain experience, to be a person different from the one we are, etc. If we put ourselves in the place of another person and we want to be realistic about it, we usually do not have to develop a theory about that person, but we do have to get as close as possible to her experiences. Since emotions are those mental phenomena whose qualitative aspects are most relevant to us, it makes sense to interpret this experiential

⁹ Contemporary accounts are divided in respect of the role of emotion in understanding narrative. For some authors, it is necessary to understand the causal connections in order to understand a narration, while for others, narrations can only be understood in terms of their emotional patterns.

moment as an emotionally charged one. Thus, we need to somehow try to imagine what things are like for the other using the matrix of what we already know from our experiences.¹⁰

The last claim requires further clarification: If a theory is not enough, should we then simulate the character's mental states? Certainly imagining and imagining emotions of the other is required here, but the use of the imagination cannot be reduced to simulation.¹¹ In order to understand the character, we must take as a point of departure what we already know about our emotions, modifying this information in order to adapt the imagined emotions to the fictional situation. Only when we are able to imagine how things are for the character, and adopt her perspective on the situation in which she is involved, can we fully understand her and her actions, feelings, thoughts, etc. The term »imagination« here means something distinct from the term »simulation«. The latter term implies that we recreate a similar state within ourselves, i. e. that we remain centered in ourselves and we imagine how it would feel for us to be in that situation (cf. Feagin 1996; Currie/Ravenscroft 2002). Moreover, some simulationists claim that the emotions we experience are experienced as disconnected from the rest of our psychic life. On the contrary, my use of the term »imagination« does not imply that we put ourselves in the place of the other by imagining how it would be for us (self-centered perspective-shifting), but rather by imagining how it is for the other (other-centered perspective-shifting). Second, I consider that the emotional responses we experience while engaging with fiction are as real as our emotions towards reality. They are not disconnected from the rest of our psychic life, but are embedded in it, and they mirror our beliefs, our expectations and our order of preferences. Thus, to feel saddened by a fictional situation in which someone gets hurt reveals that in fiction as in real life I care about bodily integrity and that this is an important value for me. Notice that in the model proposed here, we do not have to feel exactly what the character depicted is supposed to feel; rather we experience an emotion of the same type, i. e. an emotion whose *Gestalt* belongs to the same family as the

10 This focus on empathic understanding should not lose sight of other forms of understanding which also require emotional involvement. I am thinking here about certain forms of non-propositional moral knowledge. For instance, one might rightly judge lying as a morally wrong action, but come to see how under certain circumstances lying is morally acceptable. For this, it is necessary that the subject gets emotionally involved in the situation, that she is embedded in it and it becomes an internal perspective.

11 I do not rely on the imagination to explain all cases of understanding the fictional other, since there are cases in which the expression of the other (for instance, in a movie) might give me direct access to her emotional state.

emotion hypothetically experienced by the fictional character (we could use as a determinant for this *Gestalt* the following Wundtian features: pleasure, pain, excitement, depression, tension, relief, etc.).

- c) A further feature of the emotions, which makes them important for appreciation, concerns their capacity to make us acquainted with values. They refer to values, alert us to what we care about, and allow us to consider if our responses are appropriate. By engaging with fiction and responding to it emotionally we become aware of the particular values that it presents. Thus, in experiencing fear for the protagonist, I become aware that the fiction presents me with something dangerous, that I care about what happens to the protagonist, and this response might seem appropriate to me. We apprehend evaluative properties presented by the work by becoming aware that the work might elicit certain emotional responses in us. Attention to these emotional reactions might also give us information about the values of the work, allowing us to categorize it as deep, banal, funny, beautiful, enjoyable, etc. Emotions also work as indicators of what is relevant for us. When we react emotionally to a work of fiction, this shows not only that the work has a certain value per se, but also that this value matters enough for us to take a stance towards it.

From these reflections it is clear that emotions might be required for the appreciation of some works and/or some aspects of a work. However, I should also be fair to some of the suspicions against the emotions voiced by proponents of the »intellectualized model of appreciation«. There is something valid in the view that emotions might play a negative role in appreciation. Emotions experienced during the process of appreciation might indeed distract us from the work. Moreover, if our engagement with a work is simply a search for novel and intense emotions in which we might indulge, this does not suggest a genuine interest in that work. It is also true that we can appreciate a work without emotion, for instance, by applying rules learned about specific genres or styles, or by recognizing in it features that are considered valuable. This is correct, but if the cognitive model of the emotions proposed in this paper is sound, it is also true that there are some works and/or some aspects of a work that can only be appreciated by having emotions and by focusing on them. Through »inner concentration« we appreciate aspects of the work which can only be given to us by having emotions and attending to them (salient features, the inner perspective of the characters, the evaluative meanings of the work, etc.). Thus, I do not advocate for substituting the »intellectualized view« for an »emotionalized« one; instead I propose that we allow the emotions a functional role in our appreciation of a work. In fact, I think that often both kinds of appreciation – namely through »inner concentra-

tion« and through »outer concentration« – are intertwined and complement one another.

Becoming acquainted with the fictional world, understanding it, becoming aware of the values that it presents and the emotional reactions it elicits in us, all contribute to our appreciation of the work. This list of activities is not, in itself, completely sufficient, nor is it absolutely necessary for appreciation (because, as I have said, an appreciation without emotion is also possible), but it is illustrative of the importance that our emotional responses to fiction have for finding value in the work. Thus, our emotional responses to fiction are not only rational and real: sometimes they are also crucial for appreciating it.

5 Concluding Remarks

Although the question of why and how we are able to engage with fiction is a theme that has provoked perennial fascination from philosophers, the question does not entail a paradox. The paradox of fiction was motivated by a view of the emotions typical of early cognitivism, which, in my view, can no longer be endorsed by scholars. That said, we can dismiss the paradox as superfluous while preserving the value of the rich discussions it provoked. Given how generative the paradox has proven to be, these discussions have maintained their validity and can be used as an epistemic tool for shedding light on some key aspects of our engagements with fiction. In this paper, I have tried to illustrate how our emotional responses towards fiction contribute to our appreciation of it.

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