Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics, Vol. 3, No. 2, August 2006

THOUGHTS ON THE 'PARADOX' OF FICTION

KATHLEEN STOCK
SUSSEX UNIVERSITY

I.

This paper concerns the familiar topic of whether we can have genuinely emotional responses such as pity and fear to characters and situations we believe to be fictional[1]. As is well known, Kendall Walton responds in the negative (Walton (1978); (1990): 195-204 and Chapter 7; (1997)). That is, he is an 'irrealist' about emotional responses to fiction (the term is Gaut's (2003): 15), arguing that such responses should be construed as quasi-emotions (Walton (1990): 245), of which their possessor imagines that they are genuine emotions. This is not to deny that an experience in response to a fiction may have a phenomenology very like a given emotion, but to insist that, nonetheless, such responses are not real instances of the emotions which they resemble (Walton (1997)). So, in his most famous example, Charles, who experiences fear-like emotion in relation to a film which depicts the approach of evil slime, does not, despite appearances, experience genuine fear towards the slime, but only quasi-fear (Walton (1990): 195-204)[2].
Walton's view presupposes the following view about the nature of emotion[3].

> [JU] Where EN is some entity (for instance, an object, person, event, state of affairs, property, or action etc.) a genuine emotion towards EN requires the agent

[1] A different question is whether emotional responses such as pity and fear towards fictional characters and situations can be rational (Radford (1975)). I take it that this question is satisfactorily answered by Gaut (2003).
[2] Walton's positive account is a bit more complicated than this suggests, but the missing details do not affect my discussion.
[3] Later I shall question whether this is always the best reading of his view.

> who undergoes it to believe that EN i) exists and ii) has features such that the emotion is warranted.

In other words, he is a 'judgementalist' about emotions (again, the term is from Gaut (2003): 20)[4]. On this view, one holds that for an agent to display, for instance, a genuine instance of fear towards EN she must believe that EN i) exists and ii) has features such that it is dangerous, thereby warranting the emotion of fear. Since typically, a person engaging with a fiction does not believe in the existence of the characters and situations towards which she apparently responds emotionally, according to the judgementalist such responses cannot be instances of genuine emotions as manifested in ordinary, non-fictional situations.

One initially persuasive looking response to judgementalism, on behalf of the realist who wants to maintain that genuine emotional responses to fiction are possible, is to point to a range of cases where, apparently, beliefs in the existence of an entity EN and in its possession of certain features warranting a given emotion E are unnecessary for a genuine instance of E towards EN. This is an approach taken by Richard Moran (1994: 78-80), Noel Carroll (1990: 78-9), and Berys Gaut (2003: 19-20). I shall focus here on Gaut, who helpfully summarises the following range of cases from the literature, concerning fear[5]:

> Fred, who has a neurotic fear of dogs, fears toothless and harmless Fido and so flees him, though he doesn't believe that Fido is dangerous (Gaut (2003): 19; see also Greenspan (1981)).

> John knowingly stands at the top of a cliff, imagines falling onto rocks below, and feels fear (Gaut (2003):19).

> Mark imagines his hand being mangled by a machine and feels fear (Gaut (2003):19; see also Carroll (1990): 78-9 for a similar case)

[4] This is not Walton's only grounds for irrealism. He also places weight on the lack of connection between responses to fiction and the motivation appropriate to genuine emotion.

[5] I have added most of the Christian names.

> Kate is afraid when she imagines what would have happened if Hitler had won the Second World War, though (of course) she does not believe that Hitler won the Second World War (Gaut (2003):19; see also Moran (1994):78-80)[6].
>
> Jess is afraid as she walks across the glass floor of the CN Tower in Toronto, though she believes it safe to do so (Gaut (2003):19).

Later in his article, Gaut discusses a further sort of example: 'far from it being the case that fear must be directed to what one believes exists, fear is often felt toward what may happen in the future, not what one believes is presently so' (2003: 20).

Such cases are taken by Gaut to show that judgementalism must be false. In addition, many of them (i.e. the cases of John, Kate, Jess, and Fred) seem to be taken by him to show that a genuine emotion E towards an entity EN can occur where its possessor merely thinks unassertedly, or *imagines*, that EN i) exists and ii) has features such that it warrants E. In that case, what is feared is the object of one's unasserted, imaginative thought (Gaut (2003): 20). Prima facie such cases look persuasive both against judgementalism and for a view according to which mere imagining rather than belief may be a component of genuine emotion.

Walton discusses a couple of cases amongst those listed by Gaut, but responds to them rather unconvincingly. To the case of Fred, he responds that it is significantly unlike the case of Charles, insofar as Fred is motivated to flee Fido and to that extent his behaviour is indicative of genuine fear, while Charles 'does not have the slightest tendency' to exhibit such behaviour (1990: 201). This response looks odd in the light of Walton's commitment to judgementalism, since its failure to challenge either the claim that Fred feels genuine fear or the claim that Fred has no belief in Fido's dangerous nature looks like a concession to his critics. In any case, it is not clear that the difference he identifies

[6] Moran also discusses the sort of case where a person remembers some event that has previously befallen him – say, a car-crash in which he was a victim – and feels fear as a result. As Moran reads it, this supports the realist case against the irrealist insofar as it seems to be a case where genuine fear is felt towards an event which the agent does not believe to exist (at the time of imagining). I shall not discuss this sort of case because it seems to me significantly unlike the others listed, insofar as even pre-reflectively, intuitions are fairly mixed about whether this counts as a case of genuine emotion, or rather (say) as a vivid memory of its experience. This being so, the mere mention of the case does nothing much, even apparently, to support the realist cause.

in order to distinguish Fred's response from Charles's is really there. Charles's behaviour is supposed to be representative of what is typical for someone in his situation. The claim that cinema-goers (say) in the grip of fear-like emotion are not, even in the slightest, motivated to flee, is an empirical one, and is belied by the relatively common event of people walking out of scary films. Of course, most people in the grip of such emotion do not actually flee, but even so, this does not show that they are not motivated to do so, since motivations can exist in an agent but be overriden by other motivations of hers. One's motivation to flee can often be overridden by a desire to stay and see what happens, or a desire not to appear cowardly, for instance. In that case, it may be channelled instead into other behaviour expressive of fear such as shrinking from the screen, hiding one's eyes, blocking one's ears, and so on. Indeed, this sort of behaviour can be replicated in a 'real-life' context, where, for instance, one fearfully watches the aftermath of a road accident through one's fingers, motivated to turn away but simultaneously compelled to stay by a desire to see what happens next. Walton insists that the 'emotional' experience of Charles can be 'highly-charged' (potentially even more highly-charged than that which might be experienced towards a real-life situation of the same type) and 'provoke genuine distress' ((1997): 38-9); it is hard to see how we can take such claims seriously if we are also to suppose that they have no potential link to fleeing behaviour.

Meanwhile, to the case of someone, like Kate, who apparently experiences fear at the thought of 'something that might have happened but didn't', Walton insists that such a person's response is in all relevant respects like a response to a fiction, and so here too we should say that fear is not literally felt by the relevant agent ((1997): 45-6). In other words, he stresses the continuity of such a case with fictional cases and so denies that it is an instance of genuine emotion. This is counterintutive. The strength of the range of cases adduced by Gaut, and especially that of emotion experienced in relation to reflection upon counterfactual situations, is that undoubtedly they provoke in most readers the intuition that genuine emotion is felt in such cases, whether or not the same readers also have the intuition that emotion-like responses to fiction are genuine.

A different approach is required by the irrealist who wishes to neutralise such cases. Instead of assuming that many such cases are continuous with fictional cases in relevant

respects, and so counterintuitively denying that they represent instances of genuine fear, the irrealist committed to judgementalism should agree with the realist that most of them represent instances of genuine fear, but deny that such cases are continuous with fictional cases in relevant respects. I shall now suggest on what grounds she might do this.

II.

The cases can be divided into several different types, according to the sort of response the irrealist might give. The first includes the case of John who imagines falling onto rocks; and that of Jess who walks fearfully across the CN Tower's glass floor. To recap, Gaut takes these cases to show that judgementalism is false, insofar as they demonstrate that beliefs that EN i) exists and ii) has features such that it is dangerous are unnecessary for an episode of genuine fear towards EN.

However, on reflection, it is far from clear that the irrealist need interpret these cases in a way detrimental to her own position. Take the case of John. John looks down at rocks in front of him, imagines falling towards them, and feels fear. Perhaps he imagines the sensation of wind rushing past him as he falls, the noise and pain as he hits the rocks, and so on. He feels fear as a result of this imagining. The irrealist can admit all this, but add what is the surely plausible point that John's imagining his fall onto the rocks beneath him is likely to either i) generate beliefs in him about what would happen if he fell onto the rocks, and so about their dangerous nature or ii) presuppose such beliefs, which he already holds; or iii) most probably, do a mixture of both. John's imagining is directed, broadly speaking, towards a particular set of rocks which he believes exists, so that it counts as imagining falling onto *those* rocks (picked out by ostension). Imagining about an object, picked out by ostension, is usually intimately related to many of one's beliefs about that object, including about what would be the case, were what one imagined true; the latter either because such beliefs are generated by virtue of the imagining, or because the imagining presupposes them, or both.

This admission allows room for the irrealist to interpret the object of John's fear, not simply as his plunging off the rocks (in the indicative mood) but also as what would happen were he to plunge off the rocks (in the conditional mood). In other words, John's fear is directed towards the rocks' disposition to harm him, revealed or emphasised to

him via his imagining. John does not imagine that the rocks have this disposition; he believes it. Since ex hypothesi John believes that the disposition of the rocks to harm him i) exists and ii) has features such that it is dangerous and warrants his emotion of fear, the judgementalist can agree with Gaut that John's fear is genuine, without the admission providing any support for irrealism.

What if someone were to object that in this case John's imagining is not accompanied by beliefs about the disposition of the rocks to harm him? As a matter of fact, it is not inevitable that John's imagining falling onto the rocks beneath him, and the fear he then feels, must be accompanied by such beliefs. Perhaps the rocks beneath John are small, crumbling mounds of limestone, surrounded by forgiving scrub, at no great distance from John and unlikely to do him serious harm were he to fall. Perhaps John imagines those rocks as granite spikes thousands of feet beneath him, then imagines falling onto them and feels (something like) fear. Here it is not clear that John's imagining, and so his fear, is in any way related to his beliefs about the nature of the rocks (actually, it is not clear that John is any longer imagining something about *those* rocks, but let that pass). In this case, I think the irrealist should simply assume the stance taken by her in the case of fiction, and argue that John's fear is not real fear, but quasi-fear, since it is insufficiently related to any beliefs about the dangerous nature of the rocks. Of course, the realist may insist that John's fear in this case is real, but it is not clear why we should favour his view: the case is sufficiently unusual for us to have no strong intuitions either way. The strategy of Gaut in identifying these cases is to draw to our attention cases where, supposedly, our intuitions point strongly against judgementalism: thus specified, this is not such a case.

More briefly, the case of Jess can be treated similarly to that of John. Jess is scared to walk across the glass floor of the CN Tower because she imagines the glass breaking and her falling to her death. The irrealist should remind us that her imagining this either provides her with or is based upon beliefs she has already about a dispositional property the tower has to harm her, were the glass to give way; and that, in imagining that the glass gives way, her fear can be interpreted as directed toward this disposition. Again, judgementalism remains unthreatened.

Part of the reason that these cases of fear can be treated thus by the judgementalist is because they can be interpreted fairly easily as directed towards dispositions of historically real objects and people, which the relevant agent believes to exist simultaneously with the event of her imagining (the disposition of actual rocks perceived by John to harm; the disposition of the CN Tower to cause one to fall from a great height). Prima facie the other cases listed by Gaut look more difficult to interpret as consistent with judgementalism. Take the case of Kate, who imagines what would have happened, had Hitler won the Second World. Let us say that she imagines that there would have been an absence of Jews in the United Kingdom, had Hitler won. The apparent force of this sort of case for the anti-judgementalist camp is that, on the face of it, Kate's fear seems to be directed towards an event which has never actually taken place, and so about which she cannot have rational beliefs. Thus Gaut seems to think that the only option available to the irrealist who insists on judgementalism is to argue that Kate has as a component of her fear a subconscious and irrational belief 'that Hitler really did win the Second World War' ((2003): 19). Since plainly such an attribution is absurd, this suggests that judgementalism is false.

Nor can the irrealist respond by doing as we did with John, and analysing the object of Kate's fear in imagining what would have happened, had Hitler won the war, as a disposition to produce a certain state of affairs (for instance, to produce an absence of Jews in the United Kingdom), which she believes to exist. For one thing, it is not clear who or what the bearer of such a property could be. To attribute such a property to Hitler seems odd, to my ear. For another thing, assuming a suitable bearer could be found, in so imagining, Kate need not have any such belief. To attribute a dispositional property of T-ing to a bearer is to say that one believes the bearer *would* T under certain circumstances. Yet to *imagine* that Y *would* happen, had X happened, does not yet commit one to *believing* that Y *would* happen, had X happened. Kate can imagine that the UK Jewish population would have been wiped out, had Hitler won, without going so far as to commit herself to believing that this would have happened. She may be unsure what would happen in such a circumstance.

Let us assume however that these two problems can be dealt with. Even so, it would still be open to the realist to object that the dispositional property being posited is in fact

no longer existent in the world. Even if, for instance, it is true that Hitler once had the disposition to destroy the Jewish population of the UK, he no longer does. Since presumably Kate knows this, her fear cannot be analysed as directed towards this property in accordance with judgementalism.

However, there is another belief that the judgementalist can call upon with which to analyse Kate's emotion. Kate's imagining that Hitler won the war, and imagining what would have happened afterwards, and her subsequent fear, normally will be accompanied by *beliefs* about what *might* have happened, had Hitler won. For instance, where Kate imagines that Hitler wins and the UK's Jewish population is subsequently annihilated, she will also believe that the UK's Jewish population might have been annihilated, had Hitler won. Familiarly, such a belief will either inform Kate's imagining, or be produced by it, or a mixture of both. The judgementalist can argue that the object of Kate's fear, properly construed, coincides with the object of such beliefs: her fear is directed towards *a way things might have been*.

Now, a *way things might have been* can plausibly be treated as an uninstantiated property or state *of the world* (Stalnaker (1976): 68). Since as such it is an abstract object, it can reasonably be thought to exist at the time of imagining, even if there is no actual property or state which counts as an instance of it. More dramatically, *a way things might have been* might be treated as a possible world by a modal realist who admits such things into her ontology (see for instance, Lewis (1973)). Either way the irrealist may claim, apparently plausibly, that the object of Kate's fear in this case can be construed as something she believes to exist.

I suppose it might further be objected by the realist that, even if in some coherent sense Kate's fear is directed towards a way things might have been, which she believes to exist, there is no clear sense in which the way things might have been is *dangerous*, as is also required by judgementalism for her fear to be genuine. For an entity to be dangerous, the objection might continue, it must have the capacity to harm: an uninstantiated property, since it has no actual instances, does not have the capacity to harm.

This objection depends on an overly narrow construction of what it is for something to count as dangerous. It is not the only construction available. The judgementalist might argue instead that for a property P to be dangerous, it is not necessary that P actually has

instances with the capacity to harm, but only that if an instance of P *were* to exist, it *would have* the capacity to harm. Supporting this construction is the thought that we often talk fairly naturally about things which have no actual instances in terms of thick concepts such as *dangerous*: for instance, we can say that particularly dangerous mutated strains of bird flu may yet develop.

I have argued that the judgementalist need not capitulate in the face of the sorts of cases discussed so far. Instead she can reinterpret them in relatively modest and reasonable ways to remain consistent with her view. I shall now move on to a different group of cases: those which concern fear apparently directed towards future events or objects. Examples of my own might include: fear of cancer returning; fear of getting old; fear of one's violent husband coming back from the pub. Again, in such cases, emotion is apparently directed towards entities which the agent acknowledges to be presently non-existent. This seems to be Gaut's interpretation, as he writes that:

> far from it being the case that fear must be directed to what one believes exists, fear is often felt toward what may happen in the future, not what one believes is presently so ((2003): 20).

This indicates that in such cases he thinks the emotion is directed towards some future particular which does not exist yet. Again, he takes such cases to show that judgementalism is false.

However, this is not the best interpretation of the object of one's fear in all such cases. For many of them, it seems more plausible to say, once again, that one's fear is directed towards an abstract object. This seems reasonable in the cases of cancer and old age, for instance: what one fears, in fearing cancer, for instance, is getting the kind of illness that other people have already got. If this is accepted, then, since kinds are abstract objects rather than spatio-temporally located particulars, room is made as before for the judgementalist to argue that fear of (say) cancer or old age is directed towards something the agent believes to exist, and to have dangerous aspects such that it warrants the emotion of fear.

In other cases – for instance, the woman who fears the return of her violent husband from the pub – the judgementalist might reasonably treat the case in a similar fashion to that of John, arguing that the woman's fear of the return of her husband can be construed

as fear of his disposition to harm her, which is based on beliefs about his violent and dangerous nature. On this interpretation, the case is not the unambiguous source of support for realism that one might at first think. Other examples which spring to mind will tend to be fruitfully treated as one or other of my examples has been here.

Let's turn now to the fourth sort of case: that of Mark who imagines mangling his hand in a piece of machinery. If this is treated as an imagining about a real piece of machinery, it can be dealt with like the cases of John and Jess were: that is to say, the irrealist can argue that Mark's imagining reveals or presupposes beliefs about a disposition of the machinery. Hence the object of his fear is not just the object of his imaginative thought (the event of his mangling his hand): it is also more broadly directed towards the machinery and its disposition to harm, about which he has beliefs.

Let us assume however, as I think we are supposed to, that Mark imagines that his hand is mangled by a piece of machinery, where he also imagines the existence of the piece of machinery. This makes the case interestingly different from that of John and Jess, since unlike in their cases, Mark's imagining is not directed towards an object he believes to exist. Hence it is not possible that his imagining about the machinery is accompanied by any beliefs about it. I suppose that an irrealist might try to object that Mark's imagining is accompanied by beliefs he has about the dangerous nature of the relevant *kind* of machinery generally, and about those aspects of it which are dangerous. They might then further object that a proper account of the object of Mark's fear is not just the event of his mangling his hand, but more broadly the kind of machinery he imagines doing the mangling, which he believes to exist and to have aspects which warrant the response of fear. However, this looks implausible as a proper account of Mark's thought, which (unlike in the case of fear of cancer) is apparently directed towards a particular (imaginary) machine, and not a kind of machinery in general.

Does this present victory to the realist? No. For the irrealist can protest that understood like this, as directed towards an object which Mark acknowledges as non-existent, Mark's response is identical in all relevant respects to a case of emotional response towards a fictional situation, the only difference being that Mark initiates the imagining himself rather than following the lead of a text or work. Hence it too should be analysed as an instance of quasi-fear rather than fear. Since Mark does not believe in the existence of the

machinery which he imagines mangling his hand, and (so) nor does he have beliefs about those aspects of it which are dangerous, his fear cannot be genuine. Of course, the realist will wish to disagree; however, she will need to find grounds other than the citing of the cases discussed so far to do so convincingly.

The final sort of case to be discussed is that of Fred and his fear of a dog he acknowledges to be harmless. It is explicitly part of the thought experiment that Fred's fear is not predicated on beliefs he has about the dangerous nature of the dog. Instead, we are told, Fred imagines that Fido is dangerous, and feels fear as a result. This seems to strongly undermine judgementalism, insofar as it is counterintuitive to deny that Fred is genuinely afraid of the dog, given our familiarity with instances of phobic and neurotic fear in everyday life.

Here, I think, the best line of attack for the irrealist is to dispute the coherency of the thought experiment. In favour of this move is the following line of thought. As is acknowledged by Gaut, Fred has an occurrent thought that Fido is dangerous. Presumably this thought is either a belief or an imagining. Gaut interprets it as an imagining((2003): 29). Yet imagining is normally thought of as subject to the will, and to that extent unlike belief: that is, it makes sense to order someone to imagine, or not to imagine something, immediately, as a result of the order; but not to believe or disbelieve something (Scruton (1974): 94-96) [7]. Imagination, unlike belief, is typically under one's direct control. In a case like Fred's, who has a neurotic fear of dogs generally, it does not make much sense to order Fred to stop thinking of Fido as dangerous - though there might be things he could do to change his thought patterns indirectly, to change them immediately in response to an order is beyond his direct control. This suggests that Fred's thought is a belief rather than an imagining.

If this is right, then the irrealist may reasonably reinterpret the thought experiment as follows. Despite professing a belief in Fido's harmlessness, Fred does not have such a belief. Instead, it is more plausible to suggest that he acknowledges the existence of what others would normally count as compelling evidence for Fido's harmlessness, but does

[7] It might be objected that one cannot sensibly be ordered to stop imagining, say, that Superman has special powers or that Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Strictly speaking this is false, even if one accepts the theory of fictional names as disguised descriptions which the objection apparently presupposes: a better claim in the spirit of the objection would be that one cannot be ordered to think of Sherlock Holmes whilst thinking of him as lacking the property of being a detective. This is consistent with my point.

not acknowledge it *as such*. Hence he can accept statements such as 'Fido is toothless' and 'Fido has never hurt anyone' yet still reject, at least privately, the statement 'Fido is harmless'. Since he does not draw the right conclusions from what normally would count as good evidence for Fido being harmless, he is to this extent irrational. An ascription of irrationality to Fred is not uncharitable; indeed, it is one most people would make, given Fred's fear coupled with his acknowledgement that Fido is toothless, and so on. Gaut ((2003): 29) locates Fred's irrationality in his being motivated to act on a mere imagining (the imagining that Fido is dangerous) but it would seem more obvious to locate it in his holding an improperly formed belief not correctly related to evidence available to him.

The realist might object that Fred cannot have the belief that Fido is dangerous, for it is perfectly coherent to think of him as happy to see Fido play with his children; indeed it is part of Gaut's description of the case that Fred 'has no tendency to warn others about' Fido (2003: 19). This makes the situation more complex, admittedly, but it remains open to interpretation favourable to the judgementalist, for it is still possible to attribute to him a belief consistent with judgementalism: namely, the belief that Fido is potentially dangerous to *him alone*, rather than generally. In any case, given that Gaut explicitly states that Fred has no tendency to warn others about Fido, this leaves an irrealist who endorses Gaut's explanation of Fred's mental states in the same boat as the realist with regard to explaining this aspect of Fred's behaviour (or lack of it). Remember that, according to Gaut, Fred imagines that Fido is dangerous. This imagining supposedly both causes Fred's fear, and is responsible for his fleeing Fido, albeit that it makes such behaviour irrational. Given that on this account, imagining is supposedly responsible for Fred's behaviour, then if Fred is supposed to be imagining that Fido is *generally* dangerous, it is not clear why he only flees Fido himself and yet does not warn others about him. Presumably the explanation must be that the content of Fred's thought (his imagining) is that Fido is dangerous only to himself.

Where does all this leave us? If my arguments so far have been successful, then out of Gaut's list of cases, there is only one about which the irrealist cannot agree with the realist that genuine fear is present: that of Mark who imagines mangling his hand and so feels fear. This is not a problem for the irrealist, however, as she can treat this case just as she would the fictional case, and argue that, since the emotion is directed towards an

entity believed by Mark not to exist at all, let alone to have any dangerous properties, Mark feels only quasi-fear rather than fear. The intuitions we have about Mark's case are likely to replicate those we have about fictional cases, and so the introduction of the case does not actually advance the argument. Meanwhile, the rest of the cases concern responses which can plausibly be reinterpreted as having beliefs of the sort required by judgementalism as components; hence the discussion is brought no further forward by their inclusion.

III.

It might be thought that, in her turn, the realist could take a leaf out of my book and try to interpret our emotional responses to fiction as involving beliefs as components. One way to do this would be to analyse the object of fear (say) in response to a fiction as an abstract object. On this sort of view one might argue, for instance, that one's fear of Norman Bates in *Psycho* is properly analysed as a fear of the type of person Norman Bates is i.e. a psychopath. However, the main reason for rejecting this response is that it just doesn't seem to properly capture the intentional object of one's emotional response in such cases. As I watch *Psycho*, the object of my emotion is not *The Psychopath* qua type, but rather Norman Bates in particular. Indeed, to dwell on the dangerous nature of psychopaths in general would be to distract me from the proper focus of attention, which is *this* particular person with *those* particular traits.

Might one alternatively analyse fictions as 'ways in which things might have been', as we analysed the object of Kate's imagining/ belief above? For propositions using fictional names, the answer must be negative. Since, according to the standard story, names are rigid designators, whilst fictional names do not rigidly designate any entity, fictional propositions using them are necessarily false (false in all possible worlds). Hence it is not true that fictional propositions using fictional names describe ways in which things might have been.

IV.

At this point I should come clean and admit that, perhaps despite appearances thus far, I am attracted to realism about emotional responses to fiction. The discussion above should

not be taken to suggest a commitment to either irrealism or judgementalism, but only to show that neither is dislodged by proper consideration of the sorts of cases discussed above. To be clear: I take it that beliefs of the kind I have identified as present in each of the cases of Gaut's discussed are indeed to be found there. I am not, however, thereby committed to the claim that some such beliefs are necessary for an instance of genuine fear; that is, I am not committed to judgementalism.

In the rest of this paper, I would like to change tack, and sketch out a line which a realist might pursue in order to undermine judgementalism, or at least, judgementalism as held by irrealism's most famous proponent, Walton.

Walton's grounds for denying that a person G can feel genuine emotion towards the fictional situation picked out by 'p' (i.e. upon imagining that p) are often presented as the fact that G does not believe that p. That is, as has been assumed throughout the paper thus far, and is also assumed by Gaut, he is committed to judgementalism:

> [JU] Where EN is some entity (for instance, an object, person, event, state of affairs, property or action etc.) a genuine emotion towards EN requires the agent who undergoes it to believe that EN i) exists and ii) has features such that the emotion is warranted.

So, for instance, in 'Fearing Fictions' he writes:

> It seems a principle of common sense, one which ought not to be abandoned if there is any reasonable alternative, that fear must be accompanied by, or must involve, a belief that one is in danger ((1978): 6-7).

Yet in fact, what often seems to be taken by Walton as more important in ascertaining whether genuine emotion is felt by G towards p is the fact that, while G imagines, G is 'fully aware' that p is not the case. In the very sentence preceding the one just quoted, he writes:

> *The fact that Charles is fully aware that the slime is fictional is, I think, good reason to deny that what he feels is fear.* (*ibid*., my italics).

This sort of claim appears throughout his writing on the topic. Such statements apparently commit Walton to the following claim, which I shall call [OA]:

> [OA]: where EN is some entity (for instance, an object, person, event, state of affairs, property or action etc.) a genuine emotion towards EN requires that the agent who undergoes it cannot be occurrently aware that she does not believe that EN i) exists or ii) has features such that it is dangerous.

What is the relationship between [OA]and [JU]? Obviously, [OA] differs from [JU] in that unlike [OA], [JU] has a story to tell about the cognitive component necessary to genuine emotion. While [OA] has nothing to say about this, it is compatible with a range of views on this issue, including both judgementalism and 'thought' theory, according to which the cognitive component necessary to a genuine emotion may be a belief *or* an imagining of a certain content (Lamarque (1981); Carroll (1990)). Meanwhile, assuming that normally, where a person believes that p, she cannot be occurrently aware that she does not believe that p, it follows that normally if an agent satisfies [JU], she will satisfy [OA].

Since Walton ostensibly endorses [JU], his commitment to [OA], at least for normal agents, would seem to follow automatically. However, statements such as those just quoted suggest that he is not just committed to [OA] because it follows from [JU], but also because it captures a point which he takes to positively support the irrealist position.

Let us speculate that it is a commitment to [OA] rather than to [JU] that principally motivates Walton's irrealism. If this were true, it would make his view more comprehensible than it otherwise might have been. Taking his central thought to be that [JU] is correct, one might be puzzled as to why he thinks this. He apparently takes it as obviously true ('a principle of common sense'), and yet it is not a conclusion often drawn in ordinary pre-theoretical talk about the mental. However, if we take his guiding insight to be that [OA] is true, this is rather more persuasive. For it does seem to be true, at least according to folk psychology, that where a person is occurrently ('fully') aware that she does not believe that p, she cannot simultaneously occurrently fear the state of affairs which 'p' describes. For instance, an effective way of ridding a child of her fear of a

monster in the wardrobe is to demonstrate to her, and so bring the thought to consciousness, that there is no such monster. Alternatively, a way of assuaging a former cancer-sufferer's fear of the illness returning is for her to consciously reflect upon the results of a recent clear scan, assuming that she trusts the results[8]. Further examples are easy to find.

However, if, as I am speculating, [OA] is a major source of motivation for Walton's irrealism, this leaves him with at least two problems. The first is that, however plausible [OA] might look, it does not support [JU], and so any impression of support it might have given is a false one. A second problem is that, given a certain plausible-looking view of what is involved in propositional imagining, [OA] cannot support irrealism. If this view of imagining is right, as I believe it is, then Walton is wrong to rely on [OA] to support his irrealist case[9].

[OA] cannot support irrealism given the following plausible story about propositional imagining. Where 'p' stands for a proposition, in occurrently[10] imagining that p, one has as the focus of one's mental attention only the state of affairs picked out by 'p'. It follows that, among other things, mental attention to one's epistemic relation to 'p' is excluded for the duration of the imagining[11]. Hence in occurrently imagining that p, one is not occurrently thinking of the fact that one only imagines that p, or does not believe that p, or that 'p' is not true, for instance (see O'Shaunessy (2000): 362 for a related point). Where, for instance, I am occurrently imagining that I climb Everest, the object of my thought and so my awareness is me climbing Everest, and not that I am imagining that I am climbing Everest, or that I don't believe that I am climbing Everest, or that it isn't true that I am climbing Everest. More relevantly, where I am occurrently imagining, as Charles does in Walton's example, that slime is coming towards me, and how dangerous it is, the object of my thought is the dangerous slime, and not *that* I am

---

[8] Of course, such effects may be only temporary, and one's fear of the state of affairs picked out by 'p' may return as one ceases to occurrently reflect that not-p. The claim is not that conscious reflection that not-p removes one's *disposition* to fear that p, but only that it removes occurrent fear of it for as long as the reflection lasts.

[9] It also makes the need for independent support for [JU] even more compelling.

[10] That is, consciously: occurrent mental states are contrasted with dispositional mental states, of which their possessor may be unaware.

[11] This claim is restricted to merely propositional imagining, and does not extent to visual imagining, where, given facts about mental images in comparison to the appearances of what they represent, the matter seems less clear cut.

imagining it, or *that* I do not believe in its existence. (More generally, where EN is some entity, and 'p' stands for 'EN exists and has features such that it is dangerous', in occurrently imagining that p, one mentally focuses only on the fact of EN's existence and on its having features such that it is dangerous, and not, for instance, on the fact that one is imagining this etc).

This is not, of course, to say that in occurrently imagining that p, one is somehow deluded about the nature of one's epistemic relation to p, or that one has no true beliefs about it. Rather it is to say that one is not aware of such beliefs for the duration of one's imagining. It also implies that where one has true beliefs about one's epistemic relation to 'p' in imagining that p, it is not via direct appreciation of features of the object of one's imaginative thought that one gains those beliefs. That this is so is independently suggested by the assumption, shared by most, that a belief that p and an imagining that p can have identical contents[12].

One might wonder how this view of imagining fits with the claims made in the first half of this paper. There I claimed that, for instance, John's imagining his falling onto the rocks beneath him would be likely to either generate, or depend upon, beliefs about the harm that would occur to him, were he to fall onto the rocks; and that the object of John's fear could be construed by the irrealist as identical to the object of such beliefs. One might worry that this sort of claim is undermined by the view that in occurrently imagining that p, one is occurrently aware only of the state of affairs picked out by 'p', since this view would seem to imply that one cannot simultaneously be occurrently aware of the object of other beliefs that one has, and so fear such an object. However, to stick with the example of John, this worry presupposes that the object of John's imagining that he falls onto rocks and the object of his beliefs about what would happen, were he to fall onto the rocks (that is, his beliefs about the disposition of the rocks to harm him) are different. In fact, they are the same: in imagining falling onto the rocks and of the resulting harm this would cause him, John *is thinking* of what would happen, were he to fall onto the rocks (that is, of the rocks' disposition to harm him); and *vice versa*. To take a different example, in Kate's case, in imagining Hitler winning the war and what would

[12] It follows from this view that in the case of believing that p, it is not via direct awareness of features of the object of one's belief that one acquires further beliefs about the nature of one's epistemic relation to 'p'.

have happened next, Kate *is* thinking of what might have happened, had Hitler won the war. And so on. What John and Kate are *not* thinking of, among other things, is about their epistemic relation to their respective objects of thought, whether this is construed by them as an imagining, or a belief, or both.

Here then is the rub for Walton. If all this is right, then a person who occurrently imagines that EN exists and has features such that it is dangerous cannot simultaneously be occurrently and 'fully' aware that she does not believe that it is true that EN exists, etc. Hence, *contra* Walton, for as long as she imagines this, she satisfies [OA], and so the possibility of her experiencing genuine fear towards EN is not yet ruled out. Even if it is true that occurrent reflection on a belief that not-p is inconsistent with genuinely fearing that p, since occurrently imagining that p is inconsistent with occurrent reflection on one's belief that not-p, this fact is irrelevant to what is possible with respect to occurrently imagining that p, and so does not support the view that occurrently imagining that p is inconsistent with genuinely fearing that p. In other words, [OA] is compatible with realism.

V.

It will be noted by the irrealist that I have not produced any sustained argument for the claim about imagining upon which my argument rests: namely, that in occurrently imagining that p one cannot simultaneously be occurrently aware of one's epistemic relation to 'p', including of the fact that one does not believe it[13]. Limitations of space and the complexity required to do such arguments justice preclude me from providing them here. This means that my ambitions with respect to this part of my argument must be limited. The most I hope to do here is to show that, given a not outlandish thought about what is involved in imagining that p, Walton's repeated claim that in imagining that p one is 'fully' aware that one does not believe that p can be rejected, and so a significant source of support for his irrealism removed.

To finish, I shall consider a couple of potential objections, inspired by comments of Walton himself. He considers a line not very distant from the one I am advocating when

[13] Furthermore, nor have I offered the arguments required to show that, say, John's imagining and the beliefs I am attributing to him take the same object. Again, limitations of space preclude the kind of detailed argument such a task demands.

he examines the possibility that, when faced with the fictional slime, Charles 'loses hold of reality' and for that period believes that the characters and events described are real ((1978): 9; see also (1990): 199-200). If this were right then, of course, there would be no problem in ascribing real fear to Charles, even given the demands of judgementalism. Though I am not claiming that Charles momentarily believes that what he imagines is real, I am suggesting that while Charles occurrently imagines that dangerous slime is threatening him, he is conscious for the duration of his imagining only of the slime (etc.), and not, for instance, of the fact that he does not believe that any such slime is really threatening him. Hence Charles apparently satisfies the demands of [OA], and so *contra* Walton, there are no grounds on this score for denying that what he feels is genuine fear.

Walton has two rejoinders to the objection he explicitly considers, both of which might be interpreted as showing that emotion-like responses to a fiction cannot be genuine, since they may persist even while the relevant agent is able to reflect upon her lack of belief in what the fiction depicts. He objects, first, that the physiological effects of Charles's emotion-like response to the slime (fast-beating heart, prickling scalp etc.) last longer than the slime's appearance in his occurrent thoughts. He infers from this that Charles's emotion-like response lasts just as long as those effects do. To make this relevant to the current argument, we can add that the relevant physiological effects persist somewhat even throughout his reflection upon the lack of reality of the slime, which certainly seems possible. Given the assumption that [OA] is true, which I am not questioning, it seems to follow that Charles's response during such reflection cannot be genuine fear. Assuming then that what Charles feels during such reflection is continuous in nature with that which is felt by him earlier, in the grip of imagining that slime is threatening him, this would suggest that latter experience is not genuine fear either.

This objection should not trouble the realist, however, as she can reasonably deny that what Charles feels, during reflection on the fact he does not believe that there is any slime threatening him, must be continuous in nature with his emotional response when he occurrently imagines the existence of such slime. To this end, she can point out that it is well established that the feelings generated by a genuinely emotional episode can outlive that episode and persist after its demise: for instance, anger can leave residual feelings of disquiet even after one has recognised that the grounds for one's anger are mistaken, and

so one is no longer angry, properly speaking, since the requisite cognitive component is lacking. [OA] does not imply that the physiological effects of a given genuine emotion towards a state of affairs picked out by 'p' may not outlive reflection on one's lack of belief that p, but only that the emotion itself may not do so. Hence it is still admissible that what Charles feels is real fear.

Walton's second rejoinder to the point being considered is that people tend to report emotional responses to fictional works even after they have ceased to engage imaginatively with those works, by which time their 'sense of reality' is firmly re-established. For instance, a reader of *Anna Karenina* can coherently say that she pities Anna, even after she has put the book down. Again, given the assumption that [OA] is true, this seems to suggest that what is felt on such occasions cannot be genuine emotion. Again, Walton apparently assumes that what is felt on such occasions is continuous in nature with what is felt by a reader in the grip of occurrent imaginative engagement with the fiction; hence his conclusion that here too, no genuine emotion is experienced.

Again, the realist can deal with this fairly easily, for here too she can deny that what is felt by a reader after imaginative engagement has ceased is continuous with what is felt by her during it. She can do this by interpreting talk of pitying Anna Karenina after the book is finished, and the like, as harmless shorthand for the claim that the reader is *disposed* to feel the relevant emotion towards the relevant fictional object, insofar as when she *is* imaginatively engaged with the relevant parts of the work, she occurrently feels the emotion in question. This is consistent with what I have claimed.

VI.

My aims in this paper have been relatively modest compared to those usually present in papers on the paradox of fiction. I have not sought to directly argue either for or against irrealism about emotion towards fictional entities. Instead, in the first half of this paper I have adopted the perspective of an irrealist, to show that her view is not straightforwardly impugned by the mention of cases apparently similar to fictional ones where intuitively it seems clear that genuine emotion is present. In the second half, I have reverted to the position of the realist, to argue that a promising line of attack against Walton, as irrealist-in-chief, is to question the basis of his view, by suggesting that much of his commitment

to irrealism may be founded upon a much weaker claim than judgementalism, which is actually consistent with realism, given certain further plausible-looking assumptions about imagining[14].

[14] I am grateful to Peter Goldie and Aaron Meskin for extremely helpful comments on a first draft of this essay.

REFERENCES

CARROLL, N. (1990) *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, London: Routledge.

GAUT, B. (2003) 'Reasons, Emotions and Fictions' M. Kieran and D. Lopes (eds.) *Imagination, Philosophy and the Arts*. London and New York: Routledge.

GREENSPAN, P. (1981) 'Emotions as Evaluations' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 62:158-169.

LAMARQUE, P. (1981) 'How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 21.4, 291-304.

LEWIS, D. (1973) *Counterfactuals*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

MORAN, R. (1994) 'The Expression of Feeling in Imagination', *Philosophical Review* 103: 75-106.

O'SHAUNESSY, B. (2000) *Consciousness and the World*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

RADFORD, C. (1975) 'How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina? I' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 49: 67-80.

SCRUTON, R. (1974) *Art and Imagination*. London: Methuen.

STALNAKER, R. (1976) 'Possible Worlds' *Noûs* 10, No.1, 65-75.

WALTON, K. (1978) 'Fearing Fictions.' *Journal of Philosophy* 75.1, 5-27.

WALTON, K. (1990) *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Harvard University Press.

WALTON, K. (1997) 'Spelunking, Simulation, and Slime: On Being Moved By Fiction'. In *Emotion and the Arts* , M. Hjort and S. Laver eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press.