The Trade between Fiction and Reality
Smuggling across Imagination and the World

by Wolfgang Huemer, Daniele Molinari and Valentina Petrolini

Abstract: *The current debate on literary cognitivism in the philosophy of fiction typically assumes that we can rigorously distinguish between fictional and factual, and focuses on the question of whether and how works of fiction can impart propositional knowledge to the reader. In this paper we suggest that this way of framing the debate may be problematic. We argue that works of fiction almost inevitably include a reference to the real world and that – contrary to what is usually assumed – the exchange between fiction and reality is vivid as well as potentially fruitful. We shed a new light on these complex dynamics by building on the metaphors of trade exchange and smuggling between the two worlds. While the current debate exclusively focuses on cognitively relevant goods that "officially" cross the border through "customs", as it were, we show that exchanges between fiction and reality run deeper. Indeed, as we show, a substantial part of the cognitive impact that we derive from fiction goes "under the table" and is "smuggled" from fiction to reality. As such, it bypasses the audience's conscious control, which in turn explains the manipulative force that fiction can exert. Smuggling takes place when cognitively relevant contents are passed on to the reader in subliminal ways, as it happens when they imprint implicit biases or prejudices, shift perspectives or subtly modify habits or patterns of behavior. By elaborating on the metaphors of trade exchange and smuggling, we aim at presenting a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the relations between fiction and reality and on the impact that imagination has on our real-world beliefs.*

Keywords: *Imagination; fiction; implicit bias; literary cognitivism; censorship; smuggling.*

1. Introduction

We are used to thinking about the distinction between fiction and reality as one that is rigorous and has sharp boundaries.[1] After all, we have been trained to distinguish fact from fiction from early childhood onwards. Back then, we have learnt that we may believe that witches fly on broomsticks and that dragons spit fire – but also that we may do so only in our imagination. We have gotten used to the idea that our imagination is free and unlimited, at least as long as we make sure that the contents of our imaginings do not "spill over" and contaminate our real-world beliefs. In fact, our ability to distinguish the factual and the fictional is essential when it comes to broadening our understanding of the world. If we were ever to confuse the two, we would undermine all criteria that allow us to distinguish correct representations form false ones, truth from lies. And yet, if we take such a boundary too seriously, we risk creating an impenetrable firewall between the two realms. The very idea that contents of the imagination must not have any impact on our belief system entails that works of fiction cannot have any epistemic relevance and reduces their value to

---

that of mere ornaments, which may be entertaining but are ultimately useless (at least epistemically).

This, however, stands in stark contrast to the widespread assumption that great literary works of art are of cognitive value; they can – and in fact do – add to the readers' knowledge and widen their cognitive horizons. This fact alone suggests that the border between fact and fiction might not be as hermetic as it might seem at first glance. Consumers of fiction are routinely invited to "fill in the blanks", importing what they believe to be true in the actual world into a world of fiction. Things work similarly in the other direction. The way in which a work of fiction represents a character, a scenario, or a situation often *does* have an impact on our beliefs and perspectives on the world.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relation between works of fiction and our real-world beliefs through the metaphor of *trade exchange*. When we engage with works of fiction, we constantly import beliefs, desires, but also our own biases into the world of fiction while at the same time exporting ideas, role models, and perspectives from fiction back into the real world. To some extent, this exchange is subject to our conscious control, it officially passes through "customs", as it were. We suggest that a more substantial part of this exchange – the part that typically concerns the "goods" that are cognitively more efficacious – rather goes unnoticed; it never passes through customs, but finds its own, unofficial ways to cross the borders. In fact, only a limited number of beliefs and insights are imported or exported through official channels. The official exchanges constitute but the tip of the iceberg, and relevant insights are "smuggled in" as well as "smuggled out" of the world of fiction. In this paper we thus use the metaphors of trade exchange and smuggling to argue – contrary to a view that is widespread among philosophers – that works of fiction *do* have cognitive value. Yet, we also suggest that their cognitive impact is due to a form of exchange that goes "under the table" and often escapes our conscious control.

The metaphors that we develop can enrich our understanding of the cognitive value of literature and fiction in two significant ways. First, in the recent debate both cognitivists and anti-cognitivists often depict readers as perfectly rational agents who are in full and conscious control over what they import into the world of fiction and what they export from it. We show that this assumption is problematic and shows a clearly intellectualistic bias that dominates the debate. Against this prejudice, we argue that most of the time when a work of fiction widens our cognitive horizons, it does so in ways that are subliminal and bypass the reader's conscious control. Second, similarly to real-world smuggling, the cognitive impact of literature can be seen both as a threat and

as an opportunity. At times, smuggling can have beneficial effects as it guarantees the availability and circulation of essential goods that would be blocked by an overly rigorous custom office. Other times, however, smuggling becomes a risk when it prevents officials from monitoring the exchange of forbidden and potentially harmful goods. The same holds for the subliminal forms of cognitive impact works of fiction can have on their audiences: by showing new perspectives or portraying scenarios in a way that is biased (or makes an implicit bias manifest), they can advance the readers' understanding. By the very same mechanisms, however, they can also manipulate readers to adopt beliefs, worldviews, perspectives or biases without being aware of it and without consciously consenting to it. Surprisingly, despite a few exceptions, the philosophical debate so far has focused mainly on the cognitive benefits of works of fiction, almost ignoring their manipulative force. Exploring this dimension of smuggling will highlight both the cognitive value and the cognitive dangers of our engagement with fiction.

The paper is structured as follows: in section 2 we discuss the role of truth and falsehood in the arts and in the sciences. While the former, according to a widespread view, indulge in fictions, the latter aim at truth. In contrast to this view, we recall that also in the sciences, *felicitous falsehoods* such as models, thought experiments and metaphors routinely contribute to our understanding in ways that go beyond the adding of true and justified beliefs to our doxastic system. In section 3 we suggest that the debate on cognitivism in the philosophy of fiction is currently biased in favor of an overly intellectualistic conception of cognitive progress. In this paper we argue for a more nuanced perspective on the cognitive impact of fiction, which is often tied to processes that are not under the readers' conscious control. As we mention above, this also helps to explain why works of fiction can have, next to their cognitive value, also a strong manipulative force. Section 4 focuses on the worldliness of literature, that is, the mechanisms that connect the worlds of fiction to the real one. We constantly import beliefs and desires into the world of fiction and export ideas and perspectives back into the real one. This exchange takes place both in broad daylight and under the table. In section 5 we analyze the mechanisms of smuggling and briefly discuss their benefits and dangers. Section 6 explores ways to protect ourselves from potentially harmful effects of fiction and reflects on the related questions of censorship and responsibility.

2. Truth, Fiction, and Falsehood

Imagining is an activity that plays a crucial role in nearly all situations of our lives; its importance becomes particularly evident when we engage in activities where creativity and innovation are

crucial, as in the sciences or the arts. In these contexts, it is through imagination that we succeed in going beyond merely registering what is going on around us. Indeed, imagination allows us to design and explore all kinds of hypothetical and counterfactual scenarios which, albeit being unreal, help us to improve our understanding of reality. They guide us in figuring out of how we would want the world to be, and present pleasant alternatives that allow us (if only in our minds and momentarily) to escape from the 'desert of the real'. Imagination can play these roles only because – unlike belief – it is not *reality-sensitive*. A person who holds a belief is committed to its truth; when she becomes aware that what she believes something not to be the case, she finds herself obliged to revise or refute her belief. This does not hold for imaginings: we are free to imagine any scenario we would want to. The world does not seem to impose any constraints on this freedom. While beliefs strive for truth, imagination does not; or, as it has been put by Tamar Szabo Gendler's, "belief is a *receptive* attitude; pretense is a *projective* one" (Gendler 2013: 163).[2]

Truth, fiction, and falsehood seem to play, at least at first sight, very different roles in the two fields of human endeavor we have mentioned above, i.e., the sciences and the arts. The former strive for truth; their goal is to come up with detailed, adequate and accurate descriptions of the world and the laws that regulate it. From here it is only a small step to suggest that truth is an absolute ideal for the sciences. Works of representational art, on the other hand, typically are not true to the facts, but represent fictional scenarios. The audience is generally well aware that literary authors, painters, or movie directors are not committed to the truth of their representations. Works of (literary) art are made to entertain or to arouse aesthetic experience in the beholder, rather than to faithfully portray what is going on around us.

This disanalogy can easily lead us to think that there actually *is* a neat divide between non-fictional and fictional representations that roughly reflects the one between scientific and artistic or literary representation. This view, which arguably results from an over-simplification, seems to suggest that unlike scientific theories, fictional works of art cannot impart knowledge to the reader – at least not the kind of knowledge that can be expressed by propositions that are true and stand in need of justification. By separating truth from fiction, such a strict boundary seems to suggest that the cognitive dimension, the dimension of knowledge and understanding, is essentially tied to the former. As soon as one gives up the commitment to truth, one's representation of the world – be it a theory, a story or a painting – becomes contaminated by falsehoods and loses its grip to

---

[2] Gendler here uses "pretense" and "imagination" as synonymous. Although there may be relevant differences between these two kinds of activity, these are not relevant to our present concerns.

reality; or so the story seems to go. As it is always the case with oversimplifications, the problem is not that there is no core of truth to the claim; it is rather that it occludes aspects that are relevant to better grasp our epistemic situation. Fictions and falsehoods can, in fact, be important devices when it comes to broadening our understanding and to unveil or grasp the truth – and this point can be made both in the context of the sciences and in that of the arts.

The sciences undeniably strive for truth, and yet philosophers of science have recently pointed out that in many cases "felicitous falsehoods" (Elgin, 2017) are indispensable when it comes to deepening our understanding or to broadening our cognitive horizons. It has been argued, for example, that models and thought experiments can be considered fictions (cf., for example, Frigg 2010, Toon 2012, Salis & Frigg 2020), but no one would deny that they play a crucial role in contemporary scientific practice. Works of fiction, on the other hand, undeniably represent persons who have never lived and events that have never taken place, and yet it is generally taken for granted that there is worldly knowledge to be gained from the great works of literary art. Poets might be "liars by profession" (Hume 1978: 121), but their fictional representations are apt to widen our cognitive horizons and to deepen our understanding.

This shows, first, that cognitive progress is not exclusively tied to truth; learning does not consist in merely adding bits of true information to one's own "knowledge-database". It is rather a dynamic process where truth, fiction and falsehood play a role. Moreover, it suggests that the demarcation line between fiction and non-fiction is not as strict and impenetrable as we often like to think.

3. Cognitive Value and Manipulative Force

In the history of our discipline, we find a long list of prominent philosophers who have challenged the idea that works of literature can impart knowledge to the reader.[3] It may be interesting to note that literary anti-cognitivism – at least in its radical form, which denies outright the very possibility that we gain relevant knowledge form literature – has hardly been argued in detail; often it is only hinted at in side-remarks.[4] Arguably, a great number of philosophers, especially those who work in

---

[3] For an overview of the debate on literary cognitivism, see Gibson (2008), Mikkonen (2013), Harold (2016) or Phelan (2021).

[4] Relevant remarks can be found, for example, in Plato (*Republic X, 598ff., 607f*), David Hume (1978: 121), Gottlob Frege (1892: 33) Bertrand Russell (1940: 294), just to name a few. An explicit defense of a radical form of literary anti-cognitivism, which denies *tout court* that works of fiction could impart relevant knowledge to the reader, can be found in Jerome Stolnitz (1992). More moderate forms of anti-cognitivism have been presented in Diffey (1995), Olsen and Lamarque (2004), or Lamarque (2006).

philosophy of language and epistemology, did not even deem it necessary to develop detailed arguments in favor of literary anti-cognitivism, as they regarded literary works of art as aesthetic rather than epistemic devices in the first place. Moreover, they might have tacitly accepted a line of reasoning that can be summarized with the following three assumptions: works of literary fiction (*i*) do not contain true propositions, (*ii*) do not provide evidence for their claims, (*iii*) nor do they support them with arguments.[5]

There are a few exceptions, though. A radical version of anti-cognitivism was proposed by Jerome Stolnitz, who denies that there are literary or "artistic truths", distinguished from scientific truths, that can be acquired through a specific, literary or artistic method. Moreover, if there were truths that emerge from a literary work of art, they would be very general ones. To give an example, Stolnitz suggests that what we can learn from Greek tragedy is: "'Pride goeth before a fall'. For such rewards, who needs art?" (1992: 195). The truths that emerge from literary works of art do not, according to Stolnitz, "point to a genuine advance in knowledge", as they are "distinctly banal" (Stolnitz, 1992: 200). Moreover, if a substantial hypothesis would emerge from a work of fiction, it is either so general that we likely knew it beforehand, or else needs to be confirmed by a scientific or psychological theory before we can regard it as knowledge. Moderate versions of anti-cognitivism do not deny that occasionally we may learn from literary works of art but insist that these potential cognitive gains are at best collateral benefits. Literary works of art are supposed to realize aesthetic, not cognitive values. Accordingly, any attempt to insist that only a "deep" or cognitively significant work can be aesthetically accomplished risks instrumentalizing literature.

Notwithstanding these exceptions, it remains a (sociological) fact that (radical) anti-cognitivism is a position that is widely held among philosophers of language, although it is hardly argued in detail. Nonetheless, it has aroused many reactions from philosophers, who seem to acknowledge the plausibility of assumptions (*i*)-(*iii*) – at least to the point where they feel a need to react to them – and who want to defend the idea that works of literary art can be cognitively relevant. For this reason, anti-cognitivism is arguably best understood not as a position, but as a challenge.[6]

In response to this challenge, various different cognitivist strategies have been developed over the last decades. It has been argued, for example, that literature was a thought experiment (Elgin 2007, 2014); that literary works taught not through the propositions that are expressed in the

---

[5] This characterization of anti-cognitivism was given by Noël Carroll (2002).
[6] The idea that anti-cognitivism should best be considered a challenge is argued by Phelan (2021) and Huemer (2022).

work, but the ones that emerge from it (Kivy 2006); that works of literature could communicate forms of phenomenal knowledge (Walsch 1969, Schildknecht 2014, Vendrell Ferran 2018) or enhance our empathic capacities and illustrate the perspectives of others (Burri 2007, Camp 2017, Donnelly 2019); that literature enriched us not on the level of propositional knowledge, but on a deeper level of understanding, that of acknowledgement (Gibson 2003, 2007), that it added to our conceptual and expressive capacities (Wilson 1983, Huemer 2007), or that it can enhanced our sensitivity when it comes to moral perception (Nussbaum 1990). Literature is a vast and varied phenomenon and probably each of these approaches is better suited for some, and not-so-well suited for other, forms of literature. This is why considerations on genre are particularly important: artworks from very different genres can be more interested in addressing social and political issues in the real world than in merely entertaining their audience, but they do so in very different ways – think only about the differences in which Saviano's *Gomorra* or Celan's *Todesfuge* relate to reality.[7]

For our purposes, it is interesting to note that all the cognitivist positions share the following two points: first, they react to the anti-cognitivist challenge and start, thus, from a "defensive" position. Moreover, they argue that literature can enhance capacities in the reader that allow her to formulate and justify new beliefs. Some – although not all[8] – also suggest that true beliefs can emerge or can be extracted from, as well as justified by, literary works of art. In other words, the positions mentioned remain, in one way or another, faithful to the idea that cognitive progress consists in the capacity to acquire new bits of propositional knowledge. Second – and likely as a consequence of adopting a defensive position –, all the cognitivist proposals mentioned above develop a very optimistic outlook on the cognitive impact of literary works of art. They argue that literary works of art are cognitively *valuable*, that they impart *knowledge* to the reader or *widen* their cognitive horizons, or that they *deepen* their understanding. In short, most of the cognitivist positions seem to take for granted that the cognitive value of literature is inevitably positive,[9] and that - as a consequence - engaging with works of fiction promises a cognitive gain of some sort.

This outlook is *prima facie* plausible, especially when we consider that cognitivism is a reaction to the anti-cognitivist challenge and suggests that we should value literary works of art for the epistemic relevance they can have. If we give it a closer look, however, we come to understand that this attitude is also the expression of a curious blind spot that makes us overlook a dimension that generally is widely appreciated. A well-drafted work of literary fiction can easily mislead or

---

[7] We would like to thank Venanzio Raspa for raising this point about the importance of genre.
[8] Among the philosophers mentioned, Walsh, Schildknecht, Gibson and Camp are probably exceptions.
[9] There are exceptions, though. See for example, Goffin & Friend (2022), Huemer (2012).

manipulate its readers. Where there is light, there are shadows: if a literary work can add new beliefs to the readers' doxastic system, there is no guarantee that these beliefs are true. Similarly, if it adds to the readers' understanding and offers new ways of seeing things, it is not said that this new understanding is more accurate or appropriate, and that the new way of seeing things puts them in a more privileged epistemic position with respect to the one they previously held.

Curiously enough, it was one of the first anti-cognitivist philosophers, Plato, who not only rejected the idea that literature could be a source of truth, but also warned of its manipulative force. In the dialogue *Republic*, it is suggested that some passages of Homer's works should be censored since "their descriptions are untrue, and will do no good to our future warriors" (Plato, *Republic* III, p. 66, 386ᶜ). The relevant passages are dangerous

> […] not because they are unpoetical, or unattractive to the popular ear, but because the greater the
> poetical charm of them as poetry, the less are they meet for the ears of boys and men who are to be
> sons of freedom, and are to fear slavery more than death (Plato, *Republic* III, p. 67, 387ᵇ)

In this passage, Plato seems to suggest that poetry can be harmful not primarily because it contains falsehoods, but because it presents certain views in ways that make them attractive, independently of their truth-value. The more pleasant a work, the greater its power to bewitch the audience and manipulate them to adopt views or positions for which they do not have good reasons.[10]

In what follows we argue that it would be reductive to limit the cognitive impact of fiction to the transmission of true beliefs that a rational reader can decide whether to adopt and integrate into her own worldview. As Plato's example seems to suggest, cognitive impact can take place at different levels and in different forms, not all of which are under the reader's conscious control. We will suggest that in the debate concerning cognitivism this point is often overlooked, because it tacitly assumes certain theses that can turn out to be problematic. One of them is the idea that there is a sharp distinction between fiction and non-fiction. We debunk such an assumption in the first part of the following section.

4. The Worldliness of Literature

The debate concerning the cognitive value of literature, as we have seen in the previous section, is closely tied to the question of whether works of literary art can be vehicles for truth which, in turn,

---

[10] It is worth pointing out that Plato's position was probably more nuanced than we present it here. In other passages of the *Republic* (II & III), he talks about the value of literature for the education of citizens. On his view, although literary works of art are rife with falsehoods, they also contain substantially true messages – e.g., about the courage of heroes and the virtues they display.

is based on the assumption that we can draw a sharp distinction between factual and fictional. Accordingly, while works of non-fiction purport to faithfully describe the world – and can, thus, be said to be *true* or *false* – the latter create their own fictional worlds populated by characters and events that are but the product of the author's phantasy. The idea that there is a strict demarcation between fiction and non-fiction is mirrored in the philosophy of imagination, where it is argued that imagination is "quarantined" (Leslie 1987: 415ff; Nichols & Stich 2000: 120; Salis & Frigg 2020: 31) from our real-world beliefs. Thus, the hypothetical scenarios we imagine are "sealed off" from our doxastic system and do not have any impact on our real-world beliefs. The view that *quarantining*, together with *freedom* and *mirroring*, represents a basic feature of the "architecture" of imagination is widespread in current philosophy of imagination.

This raises the question of how distant fictional worlds are from the real one. While some have argued that the worlds of fiction are best thought of as distinct possible worlds that have no causal relation to the real world (cf., for example, Lewis 1978), it seems plausible to suggest that this rigorous understanding creates a gap between the fictional and the factual that becomes too large to be bridged. Fictional worlds would appear as distant planets or as isolated lands and it is difficult to see how we could relate to them and how an engagement with works of fiction could have significance for our understanding of the real world. However, as Wolfgang Iser reminds us, "a piece of fiction devoid of any connection with known reality would be incomprehensible" (1993: 1). Every work of fiction needs to have some reference to our shared reality for readers to relate to it. Moreover, the view that we can isolate the world of fiction from the real one contrasts with a widespread understanding that is deeply rooted in our literary practices. It is generally taken for granted that works of fiction can and do have an impact on our understanding of the real world, insofar as they offer us metaphors to make sense of our lives and valuable insights that guide us when navigating reality. George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, for example, fruitfully represents the dangers of real totalitarianisms, and Shakespeare's famous metaphor "Juliet is the sun" is suited to make one understand the power that love can have in the real world and the significance the beloved one can have in the life of a real person.[11]

Wolfgang Iser suggests that the reference to reality is guaranteed by the fact that authors, in the act of fictionalizing, i.e., when creating their works, always select elements from our shared (physical and social) environment that allow readers to relate to the text. "Every literary text

---

[11] The scope of works of fiction goes beyond efficient rhetorical devices. The worlds we explore in our imagination transcend the literary dimension and inspire architecture, clothing design, and even election campaigns.

inevitably contains a selection from a variety of social, historical, cultural, and literary systems that exist as referential fields outside the text." (1993: 4). For Iser, selection always constitutes a moment of crossing a border, since "the elements selected are lifted out of the systems in which they play their specific function" (1993: 5). Every fictional world, thus, is furnished, at least in part, with aspects that are familiar to us from everyday life.

This is not the only way in which elements of reality can pour into the world of fiction. Readers also bring their worldly knowledge to the text and draw on it in the moment of reading. Kendall Walton, among others, has argued in his *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, that readers routinely import beliefs, along with expectations and habits, from the real world to the fictional ones. In this way we structure and understand imaginary stories and fill in their ever-present blanks. Walton discusses two core principles that we apply in these situations, the *Reality Principle* and the *Mutual Belief Principle*.

The former suggests that we develop fictional worlds by making inferences based on our worldly beliefs. We apply it when, reading a Sherlock Holmes' story, we imagine that the detective has a heart pumping blood through his veins even though Arthur Conan Doyle never wrote it anywhere in the text. What and how much we need to import from reality is determined by the work of fiction. Unless explicitly ruled out by the author – or by genre conventions (cf. Woodward 2011, Liao 2016) – we assume that "everything that is (really) true is also fictionally the case" (Friend 2017: 29). As it often happens, authors of fictional works understood these dynamics before philosophers and routinely use them to their advantage. Thus, Raymond Carver abruptly interrupts some of his short stories right before significant conclusions such as upcoming fights or long-desired reconciliations. These dynamics prompt the active participation of the reader, who has to imagine the unfolding of the story by importing beliefs about what would happen if these circumstances had actually occurred. Similarly, it may be argued that the masterful plot twist in *The Sixth Sense*[12] (written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan in 1999) is so effective precisely because it exploits

---

[12] Readers who have not yet seen the movie should stop reading this footnote. The following spoiler would ruin your enjoyment of a groundbreaking thriller film. For all others, here is a plot summary to refresh your memory. The child psychologist Malcolm Crowe deals with an apparently common case: Cole, a 9-year-old boy, feels strongly anxious in every life context. Dr. Crowe takes the child to heart, but Cole confesses that his problem is not psychological. He claims to possess the extraordinary capacity to see dead people. Crowe works hard to give the boy a life purpose and puts him in a condition to accept his special capacity. The film ends with a masterful plot twist: We learn that Dr. Crowe had already died – without himself realizing it – and has been dead throughout the movie. His conversations with Cole were possible only due to the latter's paranormal gift. Throughout the movie, the spectator was longing to find out whether or how Dr. Crowe was able to heal Cole from his anxieties – just to find out, at the end, that Dr. Crowe was dead and it was Cole who comforted the wandering dead all along. For a discussion of the role of spoilers in works of fiction and thought experiments, see Molinari (2020).

the *Reality Principle*, relying on the audience automatically assuming that all the characters we see in the movie are alive. Towards the end of the film, however, we realize that this assumption was actually false in the relevant world of fiction. This does not imply that it was wrong to import the respective assumption, though. For one, the film's author has to rely on this import to generate the plot twist that makes this thriller unique. Moreover, it is in these moments of breakdown that the mechanism of import becomes particularly manifest.

In other cases, import is guided by the *Mutual Belief Principle*. This is especially relevant when we engage with works of fiction that have been produced in different periods or cultures, or by authors whose background is very different from our own. If we read a story that was written in a historical period when people believed that the Earth was flat, we would not import our actual beliefs, but rather the ones that we take to be compatible with the respective historical perspective. After all, as Walton puts it, "our superior geographical knowledge need not ruin the excitement for us" (1990: 152).

There is a communality between Walton's theory, which was developed in the field of aesthetics, and that of Nichols and Stich (2000), which contributes to the cognitive sciences. Both argue that relevant worldly beliefs are imported into the imagined scenario or, as Nichols and Stich put it, "the cognitive system puts [...] contents of the Belief Box into the Possible World Box" (Nichols & Stich 2000: 123). In addition, both insist that not all of a subject's worldly beliefs are carried over into the fiction: some are blocked because they would be incompatible with other fictional truths that are explicitly stipulated by the authors or are implicitly in place by genre conventions. Neither Walton, nor Nichols and Stich explain in detail how we can, in fact, individuate the beliefs that are to be blocked from being imported. The latter suggest that there is a specific mechanism that pertains to the architecture of the mind that is in charge of performing this role:

> Though we don't have any idea how the process of belief updating works, it is obvious that it *does* work and that it generally happens swiftly, reasonably accurately, and largely unconsciously. So there must be a cognitive mechanism (or a cluster of them) that subserves this process. We will call this mechanism the *UpDater*. (Nichols & Stich 2000: 124)

Regardless of the exact functioning of the mechanism, it is easy to understand why these philosophers focus on our inclination to import beliefs into fictional worlds. For one, it adds details and color to the sketches provided by the authors, who in principle are not able to determine the fictional scenario down to the very last detail. Moreover, it is through this mechanism that we can relate and gain insights from fiction. Without it, there would be no bridges between reality and

fiction. In terms of our trade metaphor, it is the goods that are imported from reality into the world of fiction that make the latter colorful and significant. This shows that the border between the factual and the fictional is penetrable in at least one direction.

Yet, we want to take a step further to show that the exchange between fiction and reality is unlikely to be a one-way street. This prompts us to expand the trade metaphor beyond the idea of import, and to pay closer attention to the ways in which fictional content spills over to reality. The reading experience typically does not occur in a void; readers are always embedded in a worldly situation when they engage with a work – and they often give in the temptation to carry over aspects of the world of fiction into the real world. In its most pure and detached form, this takes place when, in a process of interpretation, we extract a "moral" from the story and try to integrate it into our doxastic system. In other, more relaxed or everyday moments, we might just imitate forms of behavior or draw inspirations from the work.

In the wake of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, for example, young readers started to dress like Werther. The so-called "*Werther-Tracht*" (i.e., Werther's dressing style as described in Goethe's novel: yellow waistcoat, matching trousers, blue jacket and dark boots) became so popular among the younger generation that the city of Leipzig even found it necessary to ban it – together with the book – in the hope to minimize the work's potentially harmful impact. In some particularly dramatic cases, readers even went further and imitated not only the dressing style, but also the protagonist's tragic fate and committed suicide, often using the same type of pistol that was used by Werther in the fiction. In his autobiography, Goethe recalls the impact of his work with the following words:

> But, while I felt myself eased and enlightened by having turned reality into poetry, my friends were led astray by my work; for they thought that poetry ought to be turned into reality, that such a moral was to be imitated, and that, at any rate one ought to shoot one's self. What had first happened here among a few, afterward took place among the larger public; and this little book, which had been so beneficial to me, was decried as extremely injurious. (Goethe 1902, vol. 2: 218)

Export from fiction is not, of course, limited to superficial or dramatic aspects like Werther's dressing style or his suicide. At times, it is employed in more constructive endeavors. It often happens, for example, that symbols, slogans or voices, which have their origins in artworks, find their ways into political arenas. A timely example are the *Handmaid's Tale*-inspired protests all over the world, where pro-choice activists have shown up in scarlet cloaks and white bonnets to create a connection

between the dystopian society described by Margaret Atwood in her novel [13] and legislations aimed at restricting reproductive rights.

These examples – which are only two among many – illustrate that there is no strict and hermetic border between fiction and non-fiction or, for that reason, between imagining and believing; quarantining can never hermetically separate the world of fiction from reality. Rather, there is a vivid exchange between the two; the very expressions "import" and "export" suggest that there is a sort of "trade exchange" between fiction and reality. At times, this exchange regards "official" goods – for example beliefs that are imported or, with regards to export, beliefs, assumptions or perspectives that could be labeled the "moral" or the "intended message" of the work. The latter are extracted by the reader in a process of interpretation – which requires a certain effort and is under the reader's conscious control. Other times, it regards subliminal messages, which are passed on to the reader without her becoming aware of it, or "unauthorized" aspects, i.e., aspects that were not meant to be exported but are nonetheless taken up by the audience. While the former can be related to implicit biases that become manifest in the work, often without the author and (parts of) the audience becoming aware of it, the latter often are minor aspects that are incidentally mentioned in the work or play a merely ornamental role, like dressing styles or certain ways of behavior. All these aspects, we want to suggest, are "smuggled" across the border along unofficial routes.

Both levels of exchange, the official one and the one that goes under the table, play a crucial role for our engagement with literature: they allow readers to relate to the works and confer meaning and significance to them. If the exchange was blocked by strict quarantine, none of these aspects could "spill over" from imagination into our real-world beliefs, nor could the worlds of fiction be informed or furnished by the latter. As a consequence, works of literary fiction would remain hermetic, sterile and overly schematic; they would turn into an abstract ornament void of any cognitive relevance.

So far we have mainly focused on the explicit trade between fictional worlds and the real one, which usually takes place in a controlled manner that is subject to conscious control – authors are aware of the message(s) they want to express with their works, readers are in control of the process of interpretation, they consciously conduct their reflections on the work and its message

---

[13] Margaret Atwood sets her novel in a patriarchal totalitarian society in which women are brutally enslaved and the few remaining fertile ones are exploited as procreative "devices" in an attempt to stop population decline.

and assess whether to follow the author's guide or dismiss it. Not all entry and exit points can be consciously monitored, however, as we explain in the next section.

5. The case of *smuggling*

We all know that a good deal of trade exchange between two countries never passes through customs but finds its own unofficial ways to get in or out of a country. The same holds for our engagement with fiction. Only a limited number of beliefs and implications are imported or exported through monitored channels. Official exchanges are "standardized" by the sort of training that takes place at school or other educational settings. Here we acquire some degree of literacy and ability to imagine that helps us to appreciate the aesthetic and cultural value of fiction, as well as to gain new insights from it. Back to the trade metaphor, this training with fiction teaches us how to conduct import and export regularly, by showing us how to get through customs – that is, how to monitor and to control entry and exit points in which real and fictional contents interact with one another. However, these routes constitute but the tip of the iceberg.

While official exchange is under voluntary control, smuggling is wild, unregulated and multifaceted. What is smuggled – tacit assumptions, implicit biases, perspectives, role models, analogies, etc. – comes in different and intertwined formats (it can be propositions as well as imagistic mental representations, a combination of both, patterns of behavior, and habitual ways of seeing things, etc.). For example, Anna Mahtani suggests in her discussion of imaginative resistance that general moral principles can "only get true in a fictional world by being *automatically* imported" (2012: 427 [emphasis ours]), adding that readers will import only moral principles they take to be true. In light of our discussion, it is interesting to note that according to Mathani, moral principles can *only* get true in the fictional world by being imported because "general moral principles are simply not the sorts of things that we can imagine." (2012: 247). While we are not entirely convinced by Mahtani's explanation for this inability,[14] we think that her observation points in an interesting direction: when engaging with a work of fiction, we *consciously* import only a very limited number of our worldly beliefs – likely the ones of which we become aware in the act of reading, that is, beliefs that turn out to be relevant for the interpretation of the work. At the same time, we have the tendency to *automatically* project a great number of our dispositional or

---

[14] According to Mahtani, our inability to imagine general moral principles is due to the fact that "to imagine something—rather than simply suppose it—is to imagine experiencing it" (2012: 428). In our view, this does not do justice to the fact that there are many different forms of imagining, and that also in the games of make-believe that are relevant in our engagements with works of fiction, propositional imagination plays a relevant role.

unconscious beliefs and attitudes into the world of fiction – in a process that is typically beyond conscious control.

If smuggling would work exclusively at the import level, there would be no serious concerns. At most, one would not be able to properly enjoy works of fiction.[15] The problem is that by way of unauthorized export that goes under the table, a work of fiction can exert a manipulative force on the audience. A well-drafted novel or movie, for example, can have an impact on the readers' or the audience's perspectives, their political or religious outlook (in the largest possible sense), their views on the relations between the sexes or the races, etc., without them even noticing it. As these subliminal messages that "leak out" from the fictional world to the real one are hardly supported by reasons or arguments of which the readers become aware, it becomes difficult for them to react to them or to defend themselves against them. Adriana Clavel-Vazquez discusses an example that illustrates this point very well. In her article "Sugar and Spice, and Everything Nice: What Rough Heroines Tell Us about Imaginative Resistance" she argues that gender-stereotypical fictions end up subtly reinforcing our existing biases. This becomes manifest in our lack of alignment with "rough heroines" – that is, morally flawed female characters – during our engagement with fiction. In her example, smuggling between the world of fiction and the real world play a role in both directions. On the one hand, the import of already existing unconscious biases into the world of fiction makes it less likely for rough heroines to be featured in such works in the first place. Given that in the real world we tend to resist the idea of women being as morally transgressive as men, in fictional worlds we side with morally flawed characters quite unproblematically, as long as they are *male* characters. Our "real-world bias", thus, has an impact on the world of fiction. But things go both ways: the already existent bias is also reinforced through unconscious *export* mechanisms. The very fact that fictional worlds represent rough heroes way more frequently than rough heroines makes it more difficult for us to detect and overcome our existing bias; rather, the latter becomes more and more entrenched and taken for granted. As consumers of biased pieces of fiction, we, thus, risk interiorizing those worldviews into our reality without being aware of it.

Sometimes, the already existent bias can be so strong to stop any attempt to "smuggle" a supposedly subversive subliminal message out of the world of fiction. These are moments where the bias becomes particularly manifest. When reading or watching works that feature rough heroines as protagonists, for example, we easily find ourselves experiencing a resistance to imagine the scenarios prescribed by the work. If asked to account for these moments of imaginative

---

[15] In Walton's (1990) terminology, we would use the work as prop for an unauthorized game of make-believe.

resistance, we would likely confabulate something about the poor quality of the work or about the implausibility of the world of fiction it portrays. Yet, what guides our reaction would be a gender bias of which we are unaware and which, thus, could not play any role in the rational practice of giving and asking for reasons.

Smuggling, however, is not always disruptive. Ema Sullivan-Bissett, for example, discusses two experiments in which implicit racial and gender biases are reduced through the imagination of counterstereotypes (2018: 16f). The first shows that asking to imagine a strong woman can have a significant impact in lowering the level of implicit gender bias (compared to those who are asked to imagine a holiday) while in the second experiment it is shown that a virtual reality headset prompting the imaginative experience of having dark skin can reduce implicit racial biases. According to Sullivan-Bissett:

> The two experiments just overviewed show that imagining counterstereotypical examples, or being embedded into a target group member's body, can help combat implicit biases and mitigate their effects. […] We can be caused to imagine all sorts of things by the sexist, racist, and heteronormative culture many of us inhabit […]. When engaging in imaginative activities, like imagining a counterstereotypical exemplar, the existence of, or effects of, these implicit biases change. (Sullivan-Bissett 2018: 17)

All these examples clearly show that, in addition to the beliefs, assumptions and perspectives that are exported through the "official" channels, there are cognitively relevant contents that are smuggled from the fictional world to the real one. The cognitive impact of works of fiction, thus, is not limited to the "message" that is expressed by the work. Rather, works of fiction can have an impact on our beliefs and alter our cognitive horizons – often without authors and readers becoming aware of it. This can happen in many different ways. Subliminal messages that "leak out" of the world of fiction can imprint, reinforce or alter our implicit biases and prejudices, shift or adjust our perspectives, and even bring about changes in the complex system of our worldly beliefs. Moreover, fictional works present patterns of behavior that we might come to imitate without even noticing it.

One critical aspect of these forms of cognitive impact is that they are beyond the readers' conscious control. Changes in the subjects' cognitive system are brought about without their deliberating about them or explicitly endorsing them. For this reason, some philosophers have voiced concerns about fiction's manipulative force. It is important to note, however, that the described effect is not necessarily negative. After all, the *Werther effect* mentioned in the previous section finds its counterpart in the *Papageno effect*, named after the protagonist of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute*, who "becomes suicidal upon fearing the loss of his beloved Papagena; however,

he refrains from suicide because of three boys who draw his attention to alternative coping strategies" (Niederkrotenthaler et al. 2010: 234). In studies conducted over the last decade, "media portrayals featuring stories of personal experience of suicidal ideation and how to overcome and cope with adverse circumstances have been shown to decrease suicidality in some audiences" (Niederkrotenhtaler & Till 2019: 4). This suggests that it is not the mere scenarios that are represented in a work, but also the way how they are represented, that determine whether the subliminal messages that are communicated will end up having a harmful or a beneficial effect on the audience. Even though both effects are typically studied with respect to media coverage around real suicides, the fact that they are named after fictional characters is telling. In fact, "there are some studies that clearly indicate that fictional portrayals of suicides can also influence real-world suicidal behaviours" (Niederkrotenthaler & Till 2019: 5).

Neither Goethe's nor Mozart's work aim at convincing the audience of a specific stance concerning suicide. Any interpretation that would suggest that Goethe's work was a defense of suicide, for example, or that it aimed at convincing the readers of the thesis that in some contexts suicide can be the only viable option, was definitely flawed. It is rather the fact that Goethe's work invites us to imagine a *fictional* scenario where the protagonist considers suicide as the only viable option, while Mozart's presents an – equally *fictional* – scenario where relevant alternatives are considered by the characters, that has a cognitive impact on the audience. Thus, both the *Werther effect* and the *Papageno effect* describe forms of cognitive impact on the audience that are not based on a message that is officially exported from the work in an act of interpretation, but rather on contents that "spill over" from the imagination and "contaminate" the audience in ways that have lingering effects on their doxastic system and their real-world behavior.

6. Cognitive Value, Manipulation and Responsibility

The line of reasoning we have developed over the last sections suggests that works of fiction can and do have strong cognitive impact on their readers or audience. With this, we have not yet shown, however, that works of fiction are cognitively *valuable* – after all, a work of fiction might make us adopt *false* beliefs, *inadequate* perspectives, *problematic* moral principles or enforce *harmful* biases or prejudices. We notice that most defenses of literary cognitivism that have been formulated in the recent debate are overly optimistic; they typically defend the thesis that works of fiction can add to our knowledge and advance our understanding. Also according to Sullivan-Bissett, whose position we have discussed above, we can counter the harmful effects of biased stereotypes by replacing the relevant unconscious imaginings that constitute them with "better" ones. Thus,

immersing in a well-written fictional story, where gender stereotypes are subverted, may prompt a hidden trade exchange of subliminal contents that can bring about relevant social improvements.[16] Against this optimistic outlook, our discussion suggests that cognitive progress and manipulation are two sides of the same coin. Imagination is a double-edged sword and the very mechanisms which, when used responsibly, are apt to *illuminate* the readers can also, when used in the wrong ways, *deceive* and *manipulate* them. Works of fiction can thus be used for epistemically virtuous or deplorable purposes.

This obviously raises questions regarding responsibility and censorship. Should authors be held responsible for the fictional scenarios they represent and the ways in which they represent them? Given the double-edged nature of the imagination, should we blame authors who invite their audience to imagine scenarios that are portrayed in a biased or questionable manner? Should we censor "harmful works" so as to make sure that only the "right" kinds of message spill over from fiction to reality? We don't think so. The call for censorship implies that the reader is a passive subject, a "victim", as it were, of fictional scenarios to which she is exposed when engaging with the respective works. Rather than appealing to quarantine, we think it necessary to explicitly acknowledge and create awareness of the double-edged nature of the imagination.

The trade metaphor has shed light on the fact that a hermetic quarantine is unlikely (or even impossible); the history of censorship shows there always have been contents that could be smuggled from the fictional world to the real one. Moreover, as cognitive advancement and manipulations are but two sides of the same coin, it seems reasonable to assume that you cannot have one without the other. Thus, censorship, if successful, would risk eliminating not only the harmful, but also the beneficial effects works of fiction can have on their audience.

The best strategy to maximize fiction's beneficial effects and minimize the harmful ones is to create awareness in the authors and the audience of their shared responsibility. The authors' responsibility goes beyond the aesthetic value of the work and concerns the choice of the topics that are treated and the ways in which they are represented. Authors cannot hide behind typical disclaimers such as: "This is a work of fiction and every resemblance to actual events is purely coincidental". Fictional worlds always have some reference to the real one and can, thus, trigger unexpected cognitive effects. The readers' responsibility, on the other hand, consists in their standing obligation to engage with works of fiction in a critical and perceptive manner. A reader

---

[16] Our own discussion of the Papageno effect in the last section might be read to hint in a similar direction. However, our purpose was not (yet) to suggest that some contents are more valuable than other ones; we merely meant to point out that the cognitive impact of imagined scenarios can be positive in some cases, and negative in others.

who is aware of the vivid exchange between the fictional world and the real one – including the smuggling mechanisms – can minimize the power the work can exert on them. Raising one's awareness of the "underground trade" between fiction and reality may work in a way that is similar to Freudian analysis: once you have uncovered the unconscious mechanisms that have led to harmful forms of behavior, and once you have learnt to acknowledge the existence of your own "dark side", they lose the negative power they had over you. In this way, you open the way to a new, more comprehensive understanding of yourself and a healthy practice of self-questioning.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that there is a vivid exchange between worlds of fiction and the real world. Readers automatically import (some of) their real-world beliefs and attitudes into the world of fiction and export contents that are contained in the work. We have suggested that this exchange is best described with the metaphor of "trade exchange", where most of the "official goods" are moved in a controlled way from the fictional world to the real world. A good part of the readers' background beliefs is imported into the world of fiction, while the "moral" of the story or its intended message is exported into the real world. We have suggested, however, that this official exchange is but of the tip of the iceberg. A more vivid – and likely more relevant – exchange goes through unofficial channels where cognitively relevant contents are smuggled over the border.

The metaphors of trade exchange and smuggling have allowed us to shed a new light on the cognitive impact works of fiction can have on their audience. We have suggested that a part of the cognitive value of a work lies in the message it offers and that can be extracted by the reader in a conscious effort of interpretation. A more substantial part, however, is passed from the work to the reader without taking the official routes and without, thus, being subject to the reader's conscious control. Works of fiction can influence and manipulate us – they can change the way we see the world, imprint, alter or enforce or biases or prejudices, shift or adjust our perspectives, bring about changes in the complex system of our worldly beliefs and alter our ways of behavior in the world. All these impacts often are beyond the subject's conscious control. It is important to note that this cognitive impact can be beneficial or harmful. By the very same mechanisms, works of fiction can illuminate or manipulate their audience.

Finally, *smuggling* shows that the cognitively relevant exchange between fiction and reality is much more varied that we often think. The "old model" of cognitive progress that focuses on explicitly formulated propositional content, along with clear inferences and a clear-cut distinction

between what is fictional and what is real, is obsolete. If we want to understand the relevance of literature, we need to get a more comprehensive view that can take into account the hidden impacts, both short-term and long-term, literature can have on us. More than focusing on the conscious export of propositions that can readily be embedded in our doxastic system, what fiction can teach us specifically may have the form of Rainer Maria Rilke's "locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language". Rather than providing answers, fiction prompts you to live the questions – "perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer" (Rilke 1962: 35).

Bibliography of works cited

Burri, A. (2007). "Art and the View from Nowhere". In: J. Gibson, W. Huemer & L. Pocci (eds), *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative, and Knowledge*, New York & London: Routledge, 308–17.

Camp, E. (2017). "Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction". *Philosophical Perspectives*, 31(1), 73–102. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12102

Carroll, N. (2002). "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 60(1), 3–26.

Clavel-Vazquez, A. (2018). "Sugar and Spice, and Everything Nice: What Rough Heroines Tell Us about Imaginative Resistance". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76(2), 201–12. https://doi.org/10.1111/jaac.12440.

Diffey, T.J. (1995). "What Can We Learn from Art?" Australasian Journal of Philosophy 73(2): 204–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048409512346541.

Donnelly, M. (2019). "The Cognitive Value of Literary Perspectives". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 77(1), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/jaac.12621

Elgin, C.Z. (2007). "The Laboratory of the Mind". In J. Gibson, W. Huemer, & L. Pocci (eds.), *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative, and Knowledge* (pp. 43–54). Routledge.

Elgin, C.Z. (2014). "Fiction as Thought Experiment". *Perspectives on Science*, 22(2), 221–241. https://doi.org/10.1162/POSC_a_00128

Elgin, C.Z. (2017). *True Enough*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Frege, G. (1892): "Über Sinn und Bedeutung". *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100, pp. 25–50.

Friend, S. (2017). "The Real Foundation of Fictional Worlds." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95(1), 29–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2016.1149736.

Frigg, R. (2010). "Models and Fiction". *Synthese*, 172(2), 251–268. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-009-9505-0

Gendler, T.S. (2013). *Intuition, Imagination, and Philosophical Methodology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gibson, J. (2003). "Between Truth and Triviality". *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43(3), 224–237. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/43.3.224

Gibson, J. (2007). *Fiction and the Weave of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gibson, J. (2008). "Cognitivism and the Arts". Philosophy Compass, 3(4), 573–589. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2008.00144.x

Goethe, J.W.v. (1902). *Truth and Fiction Relating to My Life*. Trans. by J. Oxenford. London, Berlin & New York: Robertson, Ashfort and Bentley.

Goffin, K., & Friend, S. (2022). "Learning Implicit Biases from Fiction". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 80(2), 129–139. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaac/kpab078

Harold, J. (2016). "Literary Cognitivism". In N. Carroll & J. Gibson (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*, London & New York: Routledge, 382–393.

Huemer, W. (2007). "Why Read Literature? The Cognitive Function of Form". In: J. Gibson, W. Huemer, & L. Pocci (eds.), *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative, and Knowledge*, London & New York: Routledge, 233–245.

Huemer, W. (2012). "Cognitive Dimensions of Achieving (and Failing) in Literature". In: J. Daiber, E.-M. Konrad, T. Petraschka, & H. Rott (eds.), *Understanding Fiction: Knowledge and Meaning in* Literature, Paderborn: mentis, 26–44.

Huemer, W. (2022). "Fictional Narrative and the Other's Perspective". *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* XXII(65), 161–179. https://doi.org/10.52685/cjp.22.65.2

Iser, W. (1993). *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore: J. Hopkins University Press.

Kivy, P. (2006). *The performance of reading: An essay in the philosophy of literature*. Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell.

Lamarque, P. (2006). "Cognitive Values in the Arts: Marking the Boundaries". In: M. Kieran (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*. Malden, MA & Oxford: Blackwell, 127–139.

Leslie, A.M. (1987). "Pretense and Representation: The Origins of 'Theory of Mind.'" *Psychological Review* 94(4), 412–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.94.4.412.

Lewis, D. (1978). "Truth in Fiction". *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15(1), 37–46.

Liao, S. (2016). "Imaginative Resistance, Narrative Engagement, Genre." *Res Philosophica* 93(2), 461–82. https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.2016.2.93.3.

Mahtani, A. (2012). "Imaginative Resistance Without Conflict". *Philosophical Studies* 158(3), 415–29. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-010-9678-x.

Mikkonen, J. (2013). *The Cognitive Value of Philosophical Fiction*. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Molinari, D. (2020). "Spoiler Alert! Unveiling the Plot in Thought Experiments and Other Fictional Works". *Argumenta* 6(1), 81–97.

Nichols, S. & Stich, S. (2000). "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense", *Cognition* 74(2), 115–47.

Niederkrotenthaler, T., Voracek, M., Herberth, A., Till, B., Strauss, M., Etzersdorfer, E., Eisenwort, B. & Sonneck, G. (2010). "Role of media reports in completed and prevented suicide: Werther v. Papageno effects", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 197(3), 234-243. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.109.074633.

Niederkrotenthaler, T. & Till, B. (2019). "Suicide and the Media: From Werther to Papageno Effects – A Selective Literature Review". *Suicidologi* 24(2), 4–12. https://doi.org/10.5617/suicidologi.7398.

Nussbaum, M.C. (1990). *Love's knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Phelan, J.W. (2021). *Literature and Understanding: The Value of a Close Reading of Literary Texts*. London & New York: Routledge.

Plato (1881). *Republic*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett. 2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rilke, R.M. (1962). *Letters to a Young Poet*. New York: Norton & Company.

Salis, F., & R. Frigg, (2020). "Capturing the Scientific Imagination". In: A. Levy and P. Godfrey-Smith (eds), *The Scientific Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 17–50. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190212308.003.0002.

Schildknecht, C. (2014). "Literatur und Philosophie: Perspektiven einer Überschneidung". In: C. Demmerling & Í. Vendrell Ferran (eds), *Wahrheit, Wissen und Erkenntnis in der Literatur*, München: De Gruyter, 2014, 41–56. https://doi.org/10.1524/9783050065366.41.

Stolnitz, J. (1992). "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art". *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 32(3), 191–200. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/32.3.191.

Sullivan-Bissett, E. (2019). "Biased by Our Imaginings". Mind & Language 34(5), 627–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12225.

Toon, A. (2012). *Models as Make-Believe: Imagination, Fiction, and Scientific Representation.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vendrell Ferran, Í. (2018). *Die Vielfalt der Erkenntnis: eine Analyse des kognitiven Werts der Literatur*. Paderborn: mentis.

Walsh, D. (1969). *Literature and Knowledge*. Wesleyan University Press.

Wilson, C. (1983). "Literature and Knowledge". *Philosophy*, 58(226), 489–496.

Wiltsher, N. (2022). "*Imagination as a Process*". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Early View, 1–21.

Woodward, R. (2011). "Truth in Fiction: Truth in Fiction." *Philosophy Compass* 6(3), 158–67. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2010.00367.x.