HOW CAN WE
FEAR AND PITY FICTIONS?

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I

DESDEMONA LIES innocent and helpless on the bed. Over her towers Othello who pronounces with solemn finality: 'Thou art to die.' The enormity and horror of what is about to happen fills us with anger and dismay. Desdemona pleads for her life. But ' 'Tis too late.' Othello has resolved to act and, deaf to his wife's most pitiful pleas, he suffocates and kills her.

As we watch this tragedy unfold, can we truly be described as feeling fear and pity? Are we really *in awe* of Othello's violent jealousy and *moved* by Desdemona's innocent suffering? But how could we be when we know full well that what we are watching is just a play? Such questions have a long history[1] but recent discussion has thrown up a number of puzzling suggestions. It has been argued, for example, that our fear at horror films is only a 'quasi-fear' occurring as part of a 'game of make-believe' that we play with the images on the screen.[2] It has been argued, too, that although our fear and pity might be genuine and quite natural they nevertheless involve 'inconsistency' and 'incoherence'.[3] And different again, it has been argued, in contradiction to Aristotle, that what emotional responses we do have to fiction are not only quite dissimilar from 'real life emotions' but are in no way integral to a proper literary response.[4]

At the heart of the issue there seems to lie a paradox about beliefs. On the one hand, it is assumed that as reasonably sophisticated adults we are not *taken in* by fiction; that is, we do not believe or come to believe, when knowingly watching a fictional performance, that the depicted sufferings or dangers involve any real suffering or danger. No one is in fact murdered in the performance of *Othello*, just as no one is in fact jealous or innocent. And we know that. On the other hand, we respond often enough with a range of emotions, including fear and pity, that seem to be explicable only on the assumption that we do after all believe there to be real suffering or real danger. For how can we feel fear when we do not believe there to be any danger? How can we feel pity when we do not believe there to be any suffering?

This apparent tension between the beliefs we hold about the nature of

fiction and the beliefs needed to explain our responses to fiction seems to threaten at least some common-sense intuitions.[5] But another intuition, I think, tells us that our beliefs about what is real or not fade into the background when we are watching a play. Belief and disbelief do not seem to do justice to the true nature of our attention. Why is this? I suggest that the best way to reconcile our intuitions and get a clearer perspective on the matter is to shift the focus of discussion away from beliefs to the fictions themselves and correspondingly from the emotions to the objects of the emotions. I hope that the paradox of beliefs will disappear when more basic issues on these lines have been sorted out. The central question I shall address is: What are we responding *to* when we fear Othello and pity Desdemona?

Kendall Walton has reminded us of the logical oddities of our relations with fictional characters.[6] For example, we can talk of them affecting us but not, in any straightforward way, of us affecting them. They seem to be able to induce in us sorrow, fear, contempt, delight and embarrassment. But we have no comeback with them. We cannot thank them, congratulate them or frighten them, or help, advise, rescue or warn them. There is a logical gap between us and them and those who think that fiction and reality are inextricably mixed should reflect on just how wide this gap is. Exploring the nature of the gap will be at the heart of this investigation.

Walton points out what looks like an asymmetry between physical and psychological interaction between the real world and fictional worlds. No *physical* interaction across worlds, in either direction, seems to be possible. Within their world, Othello can kill Desdemona and within ours I can kill you, but there is a logical barrier that prevents them from killing us and us from killing them. It looks as if the barrier against *psychological* interaction across worlds is more selective. Can we not be frightened, amused and angered by beings in a fictional world? That of course is the question at issue. Walton advises against accepting any cross-world interaction even in the one-way psychological cases where it seems to occur. His own ingenious suggestion is that when we appear to be psychologically affected by fictional characters this takes place not across worlds but *in a fictional world*. We are not *really* afraid or moved, but only *fictionally* so. The physical symptoms of our emotions, the clammy palms and prickly eyes, indicate merely a 'quasi' emotion in this world. For Walton, to interact in any way with a fictional character we must 'enter' a fictional world.

While I am sympathetic to much of what Walton proposes and heedful of his advice not to accept cross-world interaction if we can help it, I think there is a simpler and less paradoxical way out. Rather than having us enter fictional worlds, which involves problems about just which fictional worlds we can enter and whether we can ever enter the *right* worlds,[7] it seems more satisfactory to have the fictional characters enter our world. Against Walton, then, I will argue that it is *in the real world* that we psy-

chologically interact with them. If this is right then we can, as our intuitions suggested, be really afraid and really moved.

II

How can fictional characters enter our world? What is it in our world that we respond to when we fear Othello and pity Desdemona? My suggestion, which I shall work out in detail, is that fictional characters enter our world in the mundane guise of descriptions (or strictly the senses of descriptions) and become the objects of our emotional responses as mental representations or, as I shall call them, thought-contents characterized by those descriptions. Simply put, the fear and pity we feel for fictions are in fact directed at thoughts in our minds.

First a word about thoughts. Adopting something like Descartes's distinction between the 'formal' reality of a thought and its 'objective' reality, I will distinguish, in my own terms, between thoughts as states of consciousness and thoughts as representations. As states of consciousness, thoughts are individual and unique; they are properties of a person at a time, probably properties of the brain. As representations, thoughts are types; they can be shared and repeated. As such, they are 'intentional' in that they are directed towards an object; they are *of* or *about* something. To avoid confusion in the context of a discussion of fiction it is preferable to talk of the *content* of a thought rather than its *object*. Two thoughts as representations are identical if and only if they have the same content. The content of a thought is identified under some description such that two thoughts have the same content if and only if they are identified under the same description. Identifying descriptions of thought-contents can be of two kinds, which I shall call 'propositional' and 'predicative'. The thought that-the-moon-is-made-of-green-cheese has a content identified under a propositional description, the thought a-piece-of-cheese is identified under a predicative description. By allowing both types of descriptions I intend to admit as thoughts everything we might consider as mental contents, including mental images, imaginings, fantasies, suppositions, and all that Descartes called 'ideas'. It is arguable that epistemologically we have privileged access to our thoughts only as representations, with regard to content-identifying descriptions, not as states of consciousness.[8]

It is important to notice the relations between a thought-content, as here conceived, and truth-value and belief. Strictly speaking, a thought-content, even if identified under a propositional description, is not assessable as true or false. Certainly the very same propositional content could be incorporated in a judgement or assertion and as such have a truth-value.[9] But as an identifying property of a thought the propositional description involves neither judgement nor assertion. For this reason it might be misleading to report the

occurrence of a thought by the expression 'A thinks that p' for this would normally be taken to imply that A believes or is willing to affirm that p. In our required sense no such belief or willingness need be present. Having-a-thought-that-p means only being in a mental state characterized by the propositional description that-p. A thought-content is different from a belief. Belief is a psychological attitude held in relation to a propositional content. It is one among many attitudes, including disliking, rejecting, remembering and contemplating, that we might take to the contents of some of our thoughts. This distinction between thought and belief is important in what follows for the thought-contents derived from fictions do not have to be believed to be feared.

Thoughts as representations can be the proper objects of emotional responses such as fear and pity. What is it to be an object of fear? Not everything that we fear exists or is real; we might fear ghosts, Leprechauns or Martians. It is helpful to distinguish between being frightened *of* something and being frightened *by* something. 'A is frightened by X' normally implies the existence of X; it is X that in fact arouses the fear, though it might be unknown to A. 'A is frightened of ϕ' does not imply the existence of ϕ, though 'ϕ' would be one of the descriptions under which A identifies what he is frightened of. What we are frightened *by* I will call the 'real' object of our fear, what we are frightened *of* I will call the 'intentional' object.[10] It is my contention that the real objects of our fear in fictional cases are thoughts. We are frightened *by* thoughts, though we are not frightened *of* thoughts, except in special circumstances. There are parallels with the objects of pity. Our feelings of pity can have real and intentional objects. The real object of our pity, what we are moved *by*, is what arouses our emotion. As with fear, this too can be a thought. The intentional object of our pity will be the direct object of the verb 'pity' and will be identified under some intentional description. We do not pity thoughts: but thoughts can be pitiful and can fill us with pity.

The introduction of thoughts as the real objects of our responses to fiction arises out of our earlier paradox of belief. It is not meant as a general explanation of intentional objects. Suppose we claim to be frightened of Martians and Martians do not exist. If we believe that they exist then it is no help to introduce *thoughts* of Martians as an attempt to eliminate intentional objects. For the belief itself has already landed us with such objects. But if we do not believe that Martians exist but still claim to find them frightening then the introduction of thoughts as an intermediary has genuine explanatory value. This value stems partly from the independence of thought and belief. We can be frightened by the thought of something without believing that there is anything real corresponding to the content of the thought. At most we must simply believe that the thought is frightening. And that belief raises no paradox in relation to our other beliefs about fiction.

There are further points to be made about being frightened by thoughts. (1) The propensity of a thought to be frightening is likely to increase in relation to the level of reflection or imaginative involvement that is directed to it. There are two points here: thoughts can differ among themselves with respect to *vividness* and our reflection on thoughts can be graded with respect to *involvement*. Part of what I mean by involvement with a thought is the level of attention we give to it, which can be increased, for example, by bringing to mind accompanying mental images or by 'following through' its consequences. For this reason it is often not so much single thoughts that are frightening (though they might be disturbing or worrying) as thought-clusters. One has to be in the right 'frame of mind' to find a thought frightening and this is partly indicated by a tendency to develop thought-clusters.

(2) I can be frightened by a thought or thought-cluster at a time when I am in no actual danger and do not believe myself to be in danger. I am in no danger at the moment of being mauled by a lion. This is no doubt good reason for saying that it would be absurd and irrational for me at this moment to be afraid of being mauled by a lion. But it is not absurd or irrational, but natural and likely, that I might be frightened here and now by the thought of being mauled, should I bring to mind snarling teeth, thrashing of claws, searing pain, and so on.

(3) It need not be even remotely probable or likely that I will ever face the danger envisaged in a frightening thought, and I need not believe it to be probable. I might find the thought of being stranded on a distant planet or being a monarch deposed in a military coup frightening without supposing that this will, or even could, happen to me.

(4) The fear associated with a frightening thought is a genuine, not a 'quasi' or fictional fear. This brings us back to Walton for whom, as we have seen, the fears associated with fictions are not real fears. Does anything argued by Walton count against thought-contents evoking real fears? He imagines Charles, who is like you and me watching a horror movie about a terrible green slime.[11] Charles shrieks and clutches his chair as the slime oozes relentlessly towards him, beady eyes rolling. First of all, Walton argues that *because Charles is fully aware that the slime is fictional* we cannot say that he is genuinely afraid. At best Charles is fictionally or make-believedly afraid. The argument here, though, does not affect the fear of a frightening thought; this fear is the real thing. We have seen in points (2) and (3) that we can be frightened by a thought regardless of whether we believe ourselves to be in any danger and regardless of whether we believe the content of the thought to be either true or probable. Walton's argument might establish that Charles is not and cannot be, given his beliefs, afraid *that the slime is threatening him* or *that he is in danger from the slime* but it does not show that he is not frightened. We need to distinguish between Charles's being frightened *by the slime* and his being frightened *by the thought of the slime*. The former pre-

supposes the reality of the slime so it cannot be true; but neither the reality of the slime nor Charles's belief in its reality is presupposed by the latter. The thought of the slime, made vivid by the images on the screen, is a frightening thought for Charles and he is frightened.

The second part of Walton's argument to show that Charles is not genuinely afraid is that he does not manifest the behavioural evidence we would expect from someone who is genuinely afraid of the slime; he does not call the police or warn his friends. Indeed not, for he knows well enough that there is no real slime for the police to investigate. Nevertheless, there might be behavioural evidence that he is frightened by the thought of the slime. He might close his eyes, light a cigarette, and try to bring other things to mind. This surely is a common practice in audiences at horror films. It is a clue, I think, that we are on the right lines in identifying thoughts as the proper objects of our fear of fictions.

My conclusion at this stage of the argument is that mental representations or thought-contents can be the cause of emotions such as fear and pity quite independently of beliefs we might hold about being in personal danger or about the existence of real suffering or pain. This is the first step towards resolving our original paradox of belief.

III

What I must now argue is that when we fear Othello, or the slime, or pity Desdemona our fears and tears are directed at thought-contents. I must also show how these thought-contents are derived from the fictions and thus how the relevant thought-contents can be identified. In general, my claim here will be that the senses of fictional sentences determine and identify the thought-contents to which we react. A further claim will be that the contents of fictional sentences stand to truth and assertion in much the same relation as that of the contents of thoughts to truth and belief. I hope also that a clear understanding of the logic of fictional sentences will provide an explanation of the logical gap that exists between us and fictional worlds.

All that we know about the fictional worlds of novels and stories is derived ultimately from the contents of fictional sentences. What determines whether or not a sentence or description is fictional? We shall not find the defining characteristics among semantic or syntactic properties. The obvious candidates, literal falsity and the presence of non-referring names, are not sufficient, as non-fictional sentences can of course themselves be false and can also fail in reference. A sentence is fictional, I suggest, not in virtue of semantic features of its content but in virtue of pragmatic features of its use. And by 'use' here I mean what some philosophers have called the illocutionary force of its utterance. I will define a fictional use of a sentence in terms of a writer's illocutionary intentions and the conventions of story-telling.[11]

In normal, non-fictional, uses of sentences speakers and writers intend to perform illocutionary acts; that is, they intend to make assertions, give warnings, ask questions and so on. These illocutionary intentions will be satisfied in as much as the accompanying utterances conform to the social and linguistic conventions governing the intended acts. The writer of fiction, or the teller of a tale, has intentions that are parasitic on such illocutionary intentions. For in a fictional use of a sentence his intention is not to perform an illocutionary act but to *pretend* to perform an illocutionary act. Fiction is essentially a form of pretence, though pretence without intended deception, as in a charade or a child's game. A story-teller pretends to be reporting events that actually happened and the conversations of people who actually exist. That he is not doing so and yet does not intend to deceive is made possible by conventions of story-telling; story-telling is an established human practice.

I shall not develop this theory of fictional use here[13] but I shall draw from it certain consequences which are important for my argument. The theory rests on a distinction between the propositional content of a sentence and the illocutionary intentions with which it is used. Normal illocutionary intentions are suspended in fictional uses of sentences yet the content or sense of a sentence remains unchanged between fictional and non-fictional uses. This partly explains Frege's observation that our concern with fiction focuses on sense and away from truth-value and reference.[14] The writer of fiction does not assert facts, he pretends to assert facts; he does not describe events, he pretends to describe events; he does not refer to people, he pretends to refer to people. Furthermore, because he only pretends to make assertions in fact he makes neither true nor false assertions.

There is a parallel to be drawn between the propositional content of a fictional sentence and the content of a thought as previously described. As such neither is assessable as true or false and just as the latter is distinct from belief so the former is distinct from assertion. But of course the very same contents in other contexts could be asserted, could be assessed for truth-value and could be the object of belief. An analogy might be drawn from tennis. In a practice rally, or knock-up, before a game a player might run through some typical shots, like serves, volleys, half-volleys and so on. As far as the shots are concerned, the only difference between what the player does then and what he does in the game is that the practice shots cannot win or lose points. Likewise the contents of fictional sentences are not part of the assertion game. As with the contents of thoughts, they have no truth-value themselves yet have no intrinsic qualities which distinguish them from the contents of assertions or beliefs which do have truth-values. In a flight of fancy we might think of stories and fictions as a kind of imaginative and intellectual knock-up.

Fictional discourse is not distinguished from other discourse by sense but

at least partly by intended reference. Where does that leave fictional charac-
ters? Do the names and descriptions in works of fiction make *no* reference?
It is helpful to distinguish between reference *within a story* and reference
outside the story in the real world. What could be more obvious than the
observation that *within stories* names like 'Othello' and 'Desdemona', and
even 'the slime', secure reference in a quite unexceptional way. One charac-
ter's referring to another is no more (and no less) problematic than one
character's killing another. We might call this *internal reference*. But from an
external point of view what, in the world, do we refer to when we refer to a
fictional character?

Consider the sentence 'Othello killed Desdemona'. This sentence has a
fictional, non-assertive use as well as a non-fictional, assertive use. In circum-
stances which allow for the appropriate non-deceptive pretence, any speaker
can use the sentence fictionally. To do so is in effect to *retell* the story (or
part of it), continuing the pretence initiated by the creator of the fiction.[15]
Using the conventions of story-telling, the speaker, like the original author
before him, is pretending to assert that one person killed another. And like
the author he is in fact asserting nothing true or false. He is not playing the
assertion game. Similarly, he is not making any actual reference, only
pretending to do so. This involves pretending that there are real people who
are the objects of the reference. To ask, of such a fictional use, what the
names refer to *in the world* would be as out of place as to ask what the score is
in a practice rally at tennis.

There is, on the other hand, a non-fictional assertive use of this same
sentence where it is used to describe a state of affairs which obtains *within a
story*. Here we are not *telling someone a story*, as in the first use; we are *telling
someone about a story*. As an assertion, and a candidate for a truth-value, the
sentence must be taken as an ellipsis for a longer sentence of the form 'In
Shakespeare's play, Othello killed Desdemona'. This sentence is true and
can be the content of a genuine, not a pretended, assertion. Nor are the
references merely pretended references. What, then, are the referents of the
names 'Othello' and 'Desdemona' in this longer sentence?

Here we can appeal again to Frege. We can apply, I suggest, to these
fictional contexts his observations about the behaviour of names and descrip-
tions in contexts of the form 'A believes that ——'. For prefixes like 'In
Shakespeare's play', or Kendall Walton's more general idiom 'It is fictional
that', share certain intensional features with 'A believes that'. For example,
names and descriptions within the scope of these prefixes resist existential
generalization. It does not follow from the fact that it is fictional that
Superman can fly through walls that *there is* someone who can fly through
walls. Frege suggests that in such contexts names and descriptions refer not
to their customary referents but to their customary senses.

In spite of difficulties with Frege's terminology, and in spite of Quinean

scepticism on the matter, this suggestion of a shift from reference to sense seems to contain important insights which we should not too readily abandon. It takes into account that a normal referential function is suspended in such contexts but suggests that the reference is not merely 'opaque' but rather has altered its direction; it acknowledges that some substitutions for the singular terms might still be permissable. This seems to point the way to a clearer understanding of external reference to fictions even though in the short run it introduces its own complications. The suggested shift of emphasis towards the *sense* of fictional names and away from their fictional references parallels our earlier emphasis on the sense of fictional sentences and away from their truth-values.

In application to our own case, the Fregean suggestion would be that when we truly assert 'In Shakespeare's play, Othello killed Desdemona' the names 'Othello' and 'Desdemona' refer only to their senses and not to any non-existent referents. That is to say, the reference of a fictional name in a non-fictional use is precisely its sense in a fictional use.

It is not without controversy to talk of the 'sense' of a name but, as the need is all the more pressing in fictional cases, let us at least loosely follow Frege and take the sense of a fictional name to be the 'mode of presentation' of its referent within a story. That is, the sense of the name will be given by those descriptions used in the fiction, or derivable from the fiction, which characterize and identify its internal reference. The sense of the name 'Desdemona', for example, is given by such descriptions as the following: the person who is named 'Desdemona' in Shakespeare's play *Othello*, who loses her handkerchief, who talks innocently to Cassio, who is killed by her jealous husband, and so on. Only the sense of these descriptions survives in the real world, not the reference. Stated baldly, when Desdemona enters our world she enters not as a person, not as an individual, not even as an imaginary being, but as a complex set of descriptions with their customary senses.

Here, then, we have an explanation of the logical gap between our world and fictional worlds. Fictional, or internal, references are blocked as real-world references either in virtue of occurring as pretended references in fictional uses of sentences or in virtue of occurring within the scope of intensional prefixes such as 'In the play ——' which transform fictional references into non-fictional references and thus into senses. Fictional characters as such can never cross these logical barriers. In the fictional world they exist as people, in the real world they exist only as the senses of descriptions. The word 'character' is a convenient, but endlessly confusing, device for talking of senses under the pretence of referring to people. 'Referring to a character' just means *either* pretending, through the conventions of story-telling, to refer to a person, *or* actually referring to descriptions found in, or derivable from, a fiction.[16]

IV

Now we have all the logical apparatus needed to show that when we fear and pity fictional characters our emotions are directed at real, albeit psychological, objects. We do not have to postulate either that the emotions are fictional or that they are directed irrationally at nothing at all. Nor do we have to postulate beliefs which we know to be false in order to explain the emotions. We have, on the one hand, the notion of a thought-content which can be the proper object of emotion. On the other hand, we have the propositional ˌcontents of fictional sentences in which, through the mediation of suspended illocutionary intentions or implicit intensional operators, the senses of the fictional names have replaced the fictional references. The final hurdle is to show what relations obtain between the thought-contents in our minds and the propositional contents of the fictions.

What thought-contents must we be responding to for us truly to be said to be fearing Othello or pitying Desdemona? Not any tears are tears for Desdemona, not any thoughts are thoughts about Othello. Strict criteria must be applied to identify the right thoughts and thus the right tears. It is beyond the scope of this paper to spell out these criteria in detail. I can only point to a few considerations which seem to be important.

In general there must be both a *causal* and a *content-based* connection between the thoughts in our minds and the sentences and descriptions in the fiction. A causal connection is needed to rule out the possibility of our responding to descriptions identifying properties which as it happens belong to a fictional character but which have come to our attention from a quite different, even non-fictional, source. Not even tears for the thought of an innocent wife killed by a jealous husband who happens to be a Moor of Venice are *ipso facto* tears for Desdemona. It seems to be a necessary condition that there be a causal route back from the thought to Shakespeare's play. That is, Shakespeare's play must have some explanatory role in accounting for the genesis of the thought.

A causal connection, though, is not sufficient. There must be a closer link as well connecting the senses of Shakespeare's sentences and the thoughts to which we respond. The paradigm connection would be one of *identity of content* where the very propositions or predicates expressed by Shakespeare also identify our thoughts, such that in grasping the sense of his sentences we directly acquire corresponding mental representations identified through his own propositional or predicative descriptions. Such a direct link would be sufficient to secure the appropriate thoughts but is not necessary. More often than not we acquire the relevant thoughts from a combination of our own descriptions and a suitable subset of an author's descriptions.

There are different ways of deviating from this paradigm content-based connection. First of all, suppose we have never read, or even heard, a word

of Shakespeare's *Othello* and we come to learn of Desdemona's tragic plight only through a retelling of the story, or part of it, in summary or paraphrase, which perhaps involves none of the descriptions written by Shakespeare. Are our tears then tears for Desdemona? Much of course will depend on the retelling. I think we can say at least this: that if the descriptions are *logically* implied by some relevant descriptions in the play then the thoughts identified via these descriptions would qualify as thoughts *about Desdemona*.

However, we can go further than that, for much that we believe to be fictionally true about Desdemona will not be derived directly either from the sense of Shakespeare's sentences or from the sense of sentences logically implied by those sentences. For we read fictional prose, or poetry, against an intellectual and imaginative background and much that we call understanding a fiction involves supplementing the sentences in the fiction with information drawn from this background. So the imaginative reconstruction that readers, or producers, put on the events and personalities leading up to Desdemona's death might issue in mental representations far different from those directly, or logically, related to the propositional contents of the fictional sentences. Yet these divergences might be licensed through looser forms of implication arising from conventions governing the reading of fiction. There is no denying a genuine indeterminacy in some of our claims to be responding to *particular* fictional characters and events. At these more distant reaches from the paradigm, no simple formula can settle the question whether our fear and pity are for Shakespeare's Othello and Desdemona or merely for some imaginative constructs of our own. But our concern here is only to show how these responses are possible. On the view proposed, the question now becomes whether we are responding to thoughts identifiable under descriptions *appropriately derived* from those offered in the play. The connection back to the original sentences must be maintained. I shall not attempt to specify criteria for the appropriate supplementation of fictions;[17] in practice, it is a matter that can call for acute critical sensitivity as can the detailed unravelling of the senses of some fictional sentences. In general, though, we can say that we are responding to a fictional character if we are responding to thoughts, with the required causal history, which are identified through the descriptive or propositional content *either* of sentences in the fiction *or* of sentences logically derived from the fiction *or* of sentences supplementing the sentences of the fiction in appropriate ways.

It is worth noting that there is of course a higher-order supplementation of fiction in the form of literary interpretation. Literary interpretation is concerned with the aesthetic significance of the content of fictional sentences. It might be that the higher-order descriptions occurring in interpretations— as when we say, for example, that *Othello* is about Machiavellian sophistication and the destruction of innocence—could themselves give rise to thought-

contents which in turn evince further emotions. Our responses at this level are important but should not be allowed to obscure our responses at a more basic and more particular level.[18]

V

My conclusion, then, is simple: when we respond emotionally to fictional characters we are responding to mental representations or thought-contents identifiable through descriptions derived in suitable ways from the propositional contents of fictional sentences. I think this conclusion, given the arguments leading up to it, affords explanations of a number of puzzling features of fictions. It shows, for example, how we can know something is fictional but still take it seriously without having to believe or even half-believe it. We can reflect on, and be moved by, a thought independently of accepting it as true. This in turn accounts for the intuition that belief and disbelief stay in the background when we are engaged with fiction. It explains any apparent dissimilarity between our emotional responses to fiction and 'real life emotions'. Although, indeed, we do not react to the killing of Desdemona as we would to a real killing before our eyes, we do react much as we would to the thought of a real killing. The thought and the emotion *are* real. Also, although it incorporates a *de dicto* account of fictional characters, it acknowledges the pull of *de re* accounts; fictions comprise sets of ideas, many having correlates in reality, and these ideas invite an imaginative supplementation and exploration. In connection with fictional characters this 'filling in' process is not unlike that of *coming to know another human being*. Further, it explains the logical asymmetry in our psychological interactions with fictional characters, why we can fear them but not rebuke them, admire them but not advise them; their transformation into mental representations determines these constraints.

We can push the conclusion a bit further and use it to explain why our responses to fictional characters are so closely bound up with our responses to the whole work in which they appear. The answer lies partly in the shift from reference to sense in fictional names. It is not just that *someone* is killed by a jealous husband that gives the emotive power to *Othello* but that the description of the killing is connected in a quite particular way with a great number of other descriptions in the play, including those of Desdemona. The cluster of descriptions that give sense to the name 'Desdemona' will tend to issue in just those clusters of thoughts which I earlier suggested can increase our involvement with a thought and thus the intensity of our response to it. I think, finally, this point opens up a whole new area of interest where we see the structural ordering of language in a literary work as determining the ordering of thoughts in a reader. Much of the value of literature, I suggest, both aesthetic and cognitive, lies in its power to create complex structures of thought in our minds.[19]

REFERENCES

1 For an interesting discussion from the eighteenth-century see Samuel Johnson, Preface to *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765) and William Kenrick, Review of Dr. Johnson's edition in *Monthly Review* Vol. 33 (1765). Both are reprinted in Brian Vickers, ed., *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1979) Vol. 5, 1765-1774, see in particular pp. 70-1, 189 f.

Kendall L. Walton, 'Fearing Fictions', *The Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 75 (1978) (hereafter: Walton op. cit., I).

Colin Radford, 'How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina?' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Suppl. Vol. 69 (1975); Colin Radford, 'Tears and Fiction: a Reply to Weston', *Philosophy* Vol. 52 (1977).

4 Stein Haugom Olsen, *The Structure of Literary Understanding* (Cambridge, 1978), Ch. 2.

5 Eva Shaper, in 'Fiction and the Suspension of Disbelief', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 18 (1978), offers a detailed analysis of the relation between these two sets of beliefs and argues that, far from being contradictory, one set, when properly understood, can be seen to *presuppose* the other set. Some criticisms of this view appear in B. J. Rosebury, 'Fiction, Emotion and "Belief": A Reply to Eva Shaper', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 19 (1979). The present discussion is meant more to supplement than to arbitrate this debate.

6 Kendall L. Walton, 'How Remote are Fictional Worlds from the Real World?' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 37 (1978); also Walton op. cit., I.

7 See Robert Howell, 'Fictional Objects: How They Are And How They Aren't', *Poetics* Vol. 8 (1979), who raises difficulties for Walton's account along these lines.

8 For a discussion of related points, see Daniel Dennett, 'On the Absence of Phenomenology', in D. F. Gustafson & B. L. Tapscott, eds., *Body, Mind, and Method* (Dordrecht, 1979).

9 The notion of 'propositional content' here comes from J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge, 1969), Ch. 2. 4; also see J. R. Searle, 'What is an Intentional State?' *Mind* Vol. 88 (1979).

10 The account of 'intentional object' here is similar to that in G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature' in R. J. Butler, ed., *Analytical Philosophy* (1965), 2nd series.

11 Walton, op. cit., I.

12 Here I follow J. R. Searle, 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse', *New Literary History* Vol. 6 (1975), reprinted in J. R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge, 1979).

13 Apart from Searle, ibid., other similar speech act accounts can be found in: e.g., Richard M. Gale, 'The Fictive Use of Language', *Philosophy* Vol. 46 (1971); Richard Ohmann, 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* Vol. 4 (1974); Marcia M. Eaton, 'Liars, Ranters and Dramatic Speakers', in B. J. Tilghman, ed., *Language and Aesthetics* (1973); M. C. Beardsley, 'The Concept of Literature' in F. Brady, J. Palmer & M. Price, *Literary Theory and Structure* (1973).

14 Gottlob Frege, 'On Sense and Reference', *Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, trans. and edited by P. Geach and M. Black (1952), p. 63.

15 What determines whether it is the *same* story as the original will depend on the *sense* of the names, as explained later in Part III.

16 For interesting discussions of the logic of fictional characters, see Marcia M. Eaton, 'On Being a Character', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 16 (1976); D. E. B. Pollard, 'On Talk "About" Characters', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 16 (1976).

17 A criterion based on procedures for *counterfactual reasoning* is offered by David Lewis in 'Truth in Fiction', *American Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 15 (1978).

18 M. Weston, 'How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina?' *Proc. Arist.*

Soc. Suppl. Vol. 69 (1975) has been criticized in both C. Radford, 'Tears and Fiction: A Reply to Weston', *Philosophy* Vol. 52 (1977) and B. Paskins, 'On being moved by Anna Karenina and *Anna Karenina*', *Philosophy* Vol. 52 (1977) for trying to account for our responses at a thematic level. But the specificness of the responses looked for by Radford and Paskins is obtained on the present account.

[19] The topic continues to generate considerable interest. Since writing and submitting this paper, four other articles, recently published on the same topic, have come to my attention: Jerry L. Guthrie, 'Self-Deception and Emotional Response to Fiction', *The British Journal of Aesthetics* Vol. 21, No. 1, (1981); David Novitz, 'Fiction, Imagination and Emotion', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 38 (1980); H. O. Mounce, 'Art and Real Life', *Philosophy* Vol. 55 (1980); and Harold Skulsky, 'On Being Moved by Fiction', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 39 (1980). Guthrie sees a close connection between the problem of self-deception and the problem of emotional response to fiction. He does not commit himself to any one solution to these problems but makes the interesting suggestion that we might view self-deception as an 'art form' where 'the self-deceiver becomes fictional'. The present

article might provide a further context for exploring this suggestion, perhaps in terms of forming mental representations of oneself. Novitz and Mounce both agree that we can be genuinely moved by fiction. Novitz sees the explanation of this as rooted in the idea of 'imaginative response'; 'an imaginative response to fiction can generate beliefs about fictional events which are capable of moving us'. Mounce sees the solution rooted in a 'simple and obvious fact about human reaction' that 'like objects evoke like reactions'. Neither writer, though, takes the further step of explaining just what a fictional character is, such that it can become an object of emotion. Skulsky, on the other hand, who shares the intuition that there are genuine emotional responses to fiction, offers a detailed account of what it is to hold a belief about a fictional character or event; on his view, the belief to which we respond is a 'modal belief' about a set of possible worlds at which certain individual concepts are instantiated. Despite the difference of idiom, there is a great deal of common ground between Skulsky's view and that of the present article.