9

Consuming Fictions Part I

Recovering Fictional Truths

9.1 Imagination and the Many Puzzles of Fiction: Plan for the Next Three Chapters

The three chapters to come concern the role of imagination in our encounters with fiction. When we enjoy a fiction, our thought processes fulfill the criteria by which I defined A-imagining: we are engaging in rich, elaborated thought about the merely possible, fantastical, or unreal in an epistemically safe manner. As in earlier chapters, my question is not whether we really engage in A-imagining when we enjoy a fiction. I am sure that we do. My question is whether such imagining can be explained in more basic folk psychological terms.

Imagination commonly appears in the explanation of several distinct puzzles surrounding fiction. It's useful to split the puzzles into two classes. First, there are those having to do with the psychological states by which we *comprehend* what is going on in a fiction; second, there are those concerning how and why we become *immersed* in—or emotionally engaged by—fictions. The puzzles of comprehension are rooted in our need to maintain a mental registry of a fiction's events. When we take in a fiction, we typically don't *believe* the fictional events to be occurring, after all. How, then, do we keep in mind what is happening? A natural thought is that we imagine the events and that this imagining constitutes our mental registry of the fiction's events. A second, closely related, puzzle of comprehension concerns our ability to recover "implicit" or "implied" fictional truths. Grasping what is true in a fiction usually involves more than simply understanding what is explicitly stated in a text or shown in a film. We also need to extrapolate from those explicit fictional truths others that are merely implied—recognizing, for example, that the camera's lingering on a tombstone indicates that a certain character has died. It may be thought that imagination is the cognitive resource through which we do so. A third puzzle of comprehension, highlighted by the phenomenon of implicit fictional truths, is the question of what determines truth in a fiction. In virtue of what are some propositions true, and others false with respect to a fictional world? Here imagination has also been thought to provide an answer, with truths-in-fiction defined by some in terms of what an author prescribes her audience *to imagine* (Currie, 1990; Stock, 2017; Walton, 1990). A fourth puzzle of comprehension concerns the metaphysics of fictions themselves:

what makes one *text* a fiction and another a non-fiction, given that neither may correspond to what is true? Again it may be thought that imagination is part of the answer, with fictions being texts whose contents readers are prescribed to imagine, while non-fictions are (perhaps) texts whose contents we are prescribed to believe. To explain the A-imagining at work in fiction consumption in terms of a more basic collection of folk psychological states, we will need to show how these four puzzles of comprehension can been resolved without appealing to *sui generis* imaginative states.[1] That will be the project of this chapter.

The second set of puzzles—the puzzles of immersion—concern our tendency to become emotionally engaged by fictions. We may even, in some sense, "lose ourselves" in a fiction, being "imaginatively transported" (Kampa, 2018) to another (merely fictional) time and place. Naturally, we need to comprehend what is happening in a fiction in order to become immersed in it in these ways. But, on the face of it, comprehension of what is true in a fictional world does not entail immersion within it. We know this from our experience of fictions that we comprehend but don't enjoy. We might, for instance, have a quite comprehensive grasp of what is true in a fiction made for children, without being immersed in it at all. So, becoming immersed in a fiction involves something more than grasping what is true in the fiction. Some have thought this "something more" to be a *sui generis* form of imagination (Kind, 2011; Meskin & Weinberg, 2003; Nichols, 2006b; Spaulding, 2015; Van Leeuwen, 2016). Yet, even if one is convinced that imagination is somehow at work in immersion, it can be difficult to specify the precise nature of the involvement. Does imagination lead to immersion simply by causing relevant *emotions* to occur (Meskin & Weinberg, 2003)? Is it the imagistic aspect of imagination that generates emotion and, thus, immersion (Van Leeuwen, 2016)? Or does imagination generate immersion by somehow constituting a more direct cognitive acquaintance with fictional events than is otherwise available? A related, and very famous, puzzle—known as the "paradox of fiction"—concerns the *appropriateness* of such immersion: is it not irrational to become emotionally engaged in fiction, pitying or fearing characters we know to be unreal (C. Radford, 1975)? Reflection on the normative status of such emotional responses leads to questions about the nature of the responsible psychological states themselves. Are they belief-like imaginings, or ordinary beliefs, that generate these responses? Are they desires, or imaginative counterparts to desires (e.g., "i-desires") that are at work? Are the emotions themselves ordinary emotions, or

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[1] It is important to appreciate that what makes something true in a fiction, and how we come to know about that truth, are distinct questions. For instance, it could be that facts about what is true in a fiction have nothing to do with imagination (as in Lewis (1978)), even if we must use imagination to become aware of those facts. Alternatively—as in both Walton (1990) and Stock (2017)—it could be that the notion of imagination must appear both in accounts of what make something true in a fiction (viz., one is prescribed to imagine it) and in an account of how we come to grasp what is true in a fiction. I will argue that it need not appear in either.

"quasi-emotions" (Walton, 1990)? The many puzzles surrounding immersion are tackled in Chapters 10 and 11. Each can be resolved, I argue, without the need to invoke *sui generis* imaginative states.

In describing the puzzles of immersion, I haven't distinguished between being emotionally engaged in a fiction and being immersed in it. Some may think that this misses a crucial distinction—that it is one thing to respond emotionally to a fiction, caring deeply about its characters, being moved by its events, and so on, and another to be *immersed* in it. The thought here is that immersion involves some deeper or more profound losing of oneself in the fiction, where one's grip on the distinction between what is real and what is pretend slackens…or something. I purposefully run together immersion and emotional engagement because I think that being immersed in a fiction is nothing over and above being deeply emotionally engaged by it. Emotional engagement comes in degrees; in high degrees we call it "immersion." To the extent that others insist on a deeper psychological distinction between being immersed in a fiction and being emotionally engaged by it, I think they are pointing to a bogus phenomenon. As Liao & Doggett (2014) observe, even method actors deeply immersed in their roles don't become confused at the presence of cameras filming them. Daniel Day Lewis, immersed in the character of Abraham Lincoln, isn't perplexed by the sophisticated lighting rigs hanging over his head. So, immersion is not simply believing— or almost believing—that some fiction is recording actual events. After all, we might believe some fiction to record actual events while not being the least bit immersed in it—as when watching a boring drama that we wrongly take for documentary. What matters for immersion is our emotional engagement; explain that, and we're done.

Finally, there is, in addition, a third set of puzzles surrounding fiction and imagination: the puzzles of *imaginative resistance* (Gendler, 2000; Liao, Strohminger, & Sripada, 2014; Miyazono & Liao, 2016; Weatherson, 2005). At the risk of leaving my discussion incomplete, I will not say much about these. Admittedly, the omission is with some prejudice. Many of the debates about imaginative resistance turn on the question of whether one does, or does not, imagine that p when consuming some fiction in which it is that case that p. (This is so, at least, with respect to the "imaginability" and "phenomenological" puzzles, sometimes distinguished from the "fictionality puzzle" or "alethic puzzle" (Gendler & Liao, 2016).) Making determinations of that kind requires that one is able to introspectively discriminate instances of imagining that p from instances of *very closely related* mental states— such as supposing, assuming, conceiving, or "merely entertaining the proposition" that p, which, it is said, do not similarly generate resistance. Because I don't think that the relation of imagining to these other states is at all obvious or well understood, I don't think that anyone is in a good position to make those introspective discriminations—especially not in the borderline cases concocted in attempts to defend one view concerning the cause of imaginative resistance over another (see,

e.g., Gendler (2000) versus Weatherson (2005)). The legitimate puzzle I find interesting in this vicinity is what Liao and Gendler call the *ficitonality puzzle*: why we do we resist judging as true, in the fiction *F*, certain things the author apparently intends for us to judge true in *F*? To this I think Stock's (2005) response is along the right lines: we don't really *get* what the fictions are talking about in cases of such resistance—we don't know how to fill out the fictional world with additional, related truths; though more details or context might help us to do so. I hope to say more about this on another occasion.²

As noted, the balance of this chapter will focus on the puzzles of comprehension. Explaining our ability to grasp what is true in a fiction, I argue, does not call for *sui generis* imaginative states. Nor need we appeal to imagination in explaining what it is that makes something true in a fiction, or in what makes something qualify as a fiction in the first place. Chapter 10 begins discussion of the puzzles of immersion by going on the attack. I argue that *sui generis* imaginings are entirely redundant as explanations of fiction-directed affect and in fact offer no special leverage on the question of immersion. Chapter 11 then provides a positive account of how and why we become immersed in fictions—one that enables us to see how the related imaginings are explicable in more basic folk psychological terms. The bulk of that chapter develops a solution to the paradox of fiction, which, I argue, must be properly resolved if we are to understand the phenomenon of immersion.

I turn back now to the puzzles of comprehension, which will occupy us to the end of this chapter.

9.2 Understanding a Fiction—the First Puzzle

We don't believe everything we hear. We don't imagine it, either. Two cases in point:

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² All right, I'll say more now. When we read a fiction, our "imaginings" in response consist, in large part, in inferences about what else is implicitly true in the fiction. (Such is my claim, defended later this chapter.) Suppose (as I believe) that Lewis's (1978) account of truth in fiction is essentially correct: *p* is true in fiction *F* if, at the nearest possible worlds where *F* is told as known fact, *p* is true. To apply this heuristic smoothly and efficiently, and so to enrich our understanding of a fictional world, we need to have an intuitive sense of how similar the nearest possible world where *F* is told as known fact is to our own. This lets us know how much of our own world can be imported to the fiction in the form of inferences about what else is implicitly true in the fiction. Imaginative resistance (of the "fictionality puzzle" sort) occurs when we come upon a proposition that suddenly suggests we were way off in our initial appraisal of how close that nearest possible world is. For instance, when, in the middle of an otherwise realistic fiction, we are told by a narrator that universal female infanticide is a good thing, we have to shift our thoughts to a possible world where such a thing could be said as known fact, before we can draw out any further inferences about what is true in the fiction. This isn't in itself a problem. Lots of fictions test the bounds of possibility. But when this shift occurs in the context of an otherwise ordinary fiction—one that has so far implied that the fictional world is very similar to our own—we become unsure of which sort of possible world to use as our model for filling in implicit truths: one nearby, or very far away? Further context may help to resolve this ambiguity and so to get our imaginings (in the form of judgments about what else is true in the fiction) flowing again.

> I am watching political pundits on TV. One of them says that *p*. But *p* is false! I understand what he is saying, but reject it out of hand. I don't pause to imagine the possibility of its being true.

> A philosopher has written a book on imagination. You understand the claims he is making, for the most part. But plenty of it you neither believe nor imagine.

Understanding what is being said while withholding belief is a part of everyday life. It is not something that requires imagination. Not intuitively, at least, and not on anyone's view that I am aware of. It could nevertheless be that, against appearances, simply understanding someone's speech, when we don't believe him, requires imagination. But we would need a special reason for thinking so. Of course, when we understand someone without believing him, it is not as though we form no related beliefs *at all*. Usually, we will form some beliefs about what the person has said—about what is true, *according to him*. But we might not form very many. At the end of a long, dubious lecture, we may only emerge with a few beliefs capturing the gist of what was said.

Taking in a fiction—a novel, a film, a play—is another context where we understand what is said while, for the most part, not believing it. And yet almost everyone in philosophy holds that understanding fiction centrally involves imagination (Currie, 1990, 1995; Kind, 2011; Meskin & Weinberg, 2003; Nichols, 2004a; Spaulding, 2015; Stock, 2017; Walton, 1990).[3] We might wonder why they do not, instead, hold that we understand a fictional text as we do the speech of someone we don't believe. After all, it won't be denied that we form beliefs about what is true in the fictions we enjoy, just as we form beliefs when listening to a known liar. We rely on such beliefs when we tell people about a fiction after the fact. Why, then, do *sui generis* imaginings *also* need to be involved in fiction comprehension—assuming, again, that they are not involved when listening to a known liar, or when comprehending a bad argument? It is unclear why the fact that the content we are comprehending is that of a fiction would introduce a special need for imagination.

One thought is that the difference traces to the comparable richness of fictional narratives. When we consume a fiction, we grasp *very many* propositions without believing them—perhaps more than when reading a philosophy paper, or when listening to a political debate. In the latter cases, we may believe *much* of what is said; whereas, when enjoying a fiction, we may believe none of it. It may seem, instead, that we make use of a "streaming mode" of our imagination, letting the fiction's entire content pass through our minds in the form of momentary

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[3] Derek Matravers (2014) is a notable exception. Matravers' core argument is that the mental states and processes at work in consuming a fiction are essentially the same as those involved in consuming non-fictional narratives; it is therefore a mistake to associate a particular kind of mental state (imagining) exclusively with fiction. Whether he thinks that imagination is nevertheless involved in consuming *both* fictions and non-fictions is less clear, as discussed below.

imaginings. I take this idea of a streaming mode of imagination from Weinberg & Meskin (2006b) and Meskin & Weinberg (2003), who hold that fiction-appreciation involves use of the "Possible Worlds Box" (PWB) familiar from Nichols & Stich (2000). When we read a novel or watch a movie, they propose, "the representational contents of the fiction are placed into the PWB" (Meskin & Weinberg, 2003, p. 31). There are two "modes" in which the PWB can operate in this context, according to Weinberg & Meskin. First, there is "streaming mode," where we "simply open ourselves to a stream of content (as in ordinary experience)"; second, there is "punctate mode" where we put propositions into the PWB "one by one" (Weinberg & Meskin, 2006b, p. 196). "Both modes," they explain "are typical of imagining" (Weinberg & Meskin, 2006b, p. 196).[4] Kathleen Stock similarly proposes that the sort of imagining that occurs when we consume a fiction "can be largely passive" and may involve "little deliberate activity on the part of the reader other than reading and processing lines of text" (2017, p. 27). It seems that she also allows for something akin to a "streaming mode" of imagination.

It is worth considering this idea of a largely passive form of imagination. While imagining is typically seen as a kind of mental activity—as something we *do*—the need for a more passive form may seem acute when there is a rich amount of (unbelieved) content that needs registering—precisely as when consuming a fiction.

And yet, reality is very rich as well. Take a walk around town. An elementary school is letting out. Children are scattering onto buses, to the playground, to their parents. You form a few beliefs about these events—things you could later report—just as you will form a number of beliefs about any fiction you encounter. But most of it washes over you: their facial expressions, the snippets of conversation, the clothes they wore. You are perceptually aware of it all, just as you are perceptually aware of whatever play or film you may be watching. This awareness doesn't consist in your forming thousands of beliefs that last only a nanosecond; yet neither do you "stream" all of this reality though your imagination.[5] The same points apply to our engagement with fictions. Suppose that we are passively taking in a silent play. We watch the events unfold and form some beliefs about what is happening in the play. Setting issues of emotional immersion to the side, there is no reason to think that imagining is involved here, provided that it wasn't

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[4] Recall, however, that on Nichols and Stich's view—which Weinberg & Meskin mean to adopt—ordinary pretense and hypothetical reasoning involve copying the entire contents of one's "Belief Box" into the PWB, aside from those contents that conflict with the "inserted" premise. So, strictly speaking, there are never just one or two propositions in the PWB—there must always be an extremely rich "stream" of content there. This somewhat blurs the distinction Weinberg & Meskin see between "streaming" and "punctate" modes.

[5] I am thus confused by the parenthetical remark—"(as in ordinary experience)"—that follows Weinberg & Meskin's description of the streaming mode, in the passage quoted above. Do they mean to suggest that simply perceiving the world, as we go about our ordinary lives, also involves streaming the world through our PWB? This would be a surprising view. Damage to one's PWB would, in that case, lead to severe deficits in ordinary perceptual awareness. I do not think that can be their view.

required when walking around town. Now add speech to the play; the characters are engaged in dialogue. Understanding the play now requires us to draw upon our capacity for language comprehension. But this changes nothing. We have already seen that comprehending language without believing what is said does not require imagination. So, no matter how rich the content of a fiction may be—and whether or not taking it in involves comprehending language—our passive perceptual awareness of it presents no clear need for *sui generis* imaginings. We can, if we like, call the passive reception of such content "A-imagining," on the grounds that it is a kind of epistemically safe metal-registering of rich, elaborated content concerning the fictional, unreal, and so on (though it is not a form of *thought*, if thought is assumed to be volitional). But it is easy to see that such instances of A-imagining are reducible to more basic folk psychological states of believing, perceiving, and understanding what is said. We have, then, an imagination-free solution to the first puzzle of comprehension.

Of course, consuming a fiction requires more active engagement with what is understood than simply listening to a liar or grasping the claims of a political opponent. Typically, we need to *fill out* our understanding of a fictional world by (actively) uncovering what is only implicitly true in the fiction from what is given by its explicit content.[6] This "filling in" of the fictional world in thought is perhaps a more obvious candidate for the "something more" in fiction comprehension that requires imagination. It forms the basis of the second puzzle of fiction-comprehension.

9.3 Imaginative Filling-in—the Second Puzzle

What we consider to be true in a fiction typically outstrips what the fiction explicitly states. In Lewis's (1978) example, it is true, in the Sherlock Holmes stories, that Holmes lives closer to Paddington Station than to Waterloo Station. Yet this is never explicitly stated in any of the stories; rather, it can be inferred from the fact that he is said to reside on Baker Street, which, in reality, is closer to Paddington than Waterloo. Or consider the famous "six word novel" attributed (perhaps apocryphally) to Hemmingway: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." What we recover from the sentence, through a kind of inference, is more than what it explicitly states. This recovery requires an act of cognitive extrapolation beyond mere comprehension. If we form beliefs about things not explicitly stated, there is a legitimate question of how we arrived at those beliefs. Again it seems we may

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[6] True, even "passively" understanding someone's speech requires a kind of active interpretation as well. Contextual cues are exploited in order to determine reference and resolve ambiguities. The point is simply that there is an additional interpretive aspect to fiction consumption over and above what is required for ordinary linguistic understanding.

have done so through a process that qualifies as A-imagining; we will have engaged in rich, elaborated thought about the unreal, fantastical, merely possible in an epistemically safe manner.

Arguably, the same sort of recovery-via-extrapolation occurs when we read non-fiction as well (Friend, 2008; Matravers, 2014). We need only suppose that Hemmingway's six word novel was an actual classified ad. In that case, too, we would arrive at an unfortunate inference—we would "fill out" our understanding of the actual world in ways we hadn't previously. Similarly, our appreciation of biographies and histories involves drawing inferences about the lives and times of their subjects, filling in details only implied by the text. In such cases, instead of adding to our beliefs about what is true in a fiction, we are adding to our beliefs about what occurred in the past. Both processes are equally "active" and inferential. If one invites imagining then so, it seems, does the other.

Here I am echoing points developed at length by Derek Matravers in his *Fiction and Narrative* (2014) (see also Friend (2008)). Matravers' conclusion—with which I concur—is that the psychology of fiction-consumption is not materially different from the psychology of *non-fiction* consumption. There is, as Matravers puts it "no mental state peculiar to our engagement with fiction."[7] We will need an account of how we recover implicit content from *both* fiction and non-fiction. Moreover, just as non-fictions lead us to engage in something like imagining in extracting their implicit content, fictions, at times, prescribe belief.[8,9] The still-pressing question, for our purposes, is whether imagining *in either context* will require *sui generis* imaginative states. Matravers appears to answer in the negative, arguing that "the most perspicuous account of our engaging with narratives [both fictions and non-fictions] available finds no role for the imagination" (2014, p. 3). His view deserves close scrutiny here. If he can make good on the claim that recovering implicit content from narratives (both fictional and non-fictional), and engaging with narratives generally, does not require *sui generis* imaginative

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[7] Friend (2008) develops related arguments to the effect that a work of fiction cannot be defined *as such* by appeal to a distinctive psychological state involved in its reception.

[8] For instance, *The Great Gatsby* ends: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." Fitzgerald uses metaphor to prescribe belief in a deep fact about human existence. More mundane examples abound in historical fiction.

[9] It is true, as Stock (2017, pp. 168–9) objects, that we are more likely to form beliefs corresponding to the content of a non-fiction than we are corresponding to the content of a fiction. However, this is not, by itself, a difference that calls for the involvement of a *sui generis* imaginative state in one case, but not the other. So it is not a difference that suggests there is a mental state "peculiar to our engagement with fiction." Compare two people of radically different political views watching the right-leaning *Fox and Friends* newscast. One will assimilate content of the newscast to his beliefs (for the most part), while the other will not. There is a psychological difference between the dispositions of the individuals to form beliefs on the basis of what they understand from the different news sources. But it is not a difference that calls for an explanation in terms of imagination, or some other mental state peculiar to one, but not the other, partisan. Moreover, it is not as though consumers of fictions, or of rejected political narratives, do not form beliefs about what they are witnessing. They simply form beliefs about what is true *in a fiction*, or what is true *according to the hosts of Fox and Friends*.

states (or "the imagination," in his term), he will have accomplished a good deal of my work for me.

9.3.1 Sidebar on Matravers

First, a note on terminology: as noted above, I allow that consuming fictions involves A-imagining. My claim is that we can explain this A-imagining in more basic folk psychological terms. Matravers—at least at times—denies that consuming fictions involves imagining. We saw one place where he does so above. Elsewhere, he remarks: "the imagination is not needed as part of our account of engaging with representations," where "representations" include both fictions and non-fictions (2014, p. 5). By "the imagination" he seems to have in mind a *sui generis* mental state or faculty that cannot be reduced to other, more basic folk psychological kinds. We thus appear in agreement that consuming fictions does not involve use of *sui generis* imaginative states.

However, Matravers in fact wavers on whether imagination is at work in our comprehension of fictions. In other places he appears content to establish that engaging with both fictions and non-fictions requires imagination and that, therefore, the psychology of fiction and non-fiction consumption is materially the same. "What is needed is an account of *understanding* narrative," he writes. "*The extent to which such an account need make use of the imagination is an entirely open question*" (2014, p. 54, emphasis in original). The question of which of these quotations best represents Matravers' overall view deserves a close look; we make no progress in explaining imagination if our appreciation of both fictions *and* non-fictions requires *sui generis* imaginative states.

The key distinction Matravers advocates in place of the fiction/non-fiction distinction is that between confrontation situations and representation situations—this is what he calls "the real distinction" of interest (2014, pp. 45–58). Representation situations "are situations in which action is not possible because what is being represented to us is out of reach" (p. 47). These occur when we interact both with fictions—such as novels and films—and non-fictions, such as documentaries and histories. Confrontation situations, by contrast, are "situations in which action is possible" (p. 47). They occur where one is forced to navigate and interact with one's present (non-representational) environment, as when boarding the subway, cleaning up a glass of spilt milk, or facing a wolf in the woods. Here Matravers comments on the relation of confrontation situations and representation situations to imagination:

> Confrontations do not require the imagination; I do not need to imagine being confronted by a wolf if there is one before me. [However] Something is needed to explain my engagement with representations…If philosophy does need some notion of a DCA or 'make-believe', it applies to this category rather than only to fictions.   (p. 53)

Matravers proposes that confrontation situations bear no essential relation to imagination, whereas representation situations plausibly do. In fact, he makes explicit appeal to the notion of a DCA (or "Distinct Cognitive Attitude") of imagination, of the kind posited by Nichols & Stich (2000) and Weinberg & Meskin (2006a, 2006b) in their discussions of pretense and fiction (and discussed in the earlier chapters of this book on pretense and conditional reasoning). The "Possible Worlds Box" of Nichols & Stich (2000) and the "Imagination Box" of Weinberg & Meskin seem to capture what Matravers sees as the distinctive psychological resource at work in representation situations, as opposed to confrontation situations.

In later chapters, Matravers fine-tunes this idea in drawing on the work of Philip Johnson-Laird (1983; Johnson-Laird & Byrne 2002) to propose, more concretely, that *mental models* are the cognitive states that play the mediating role in representation situations. He views mental models as neutral in their relation to both imagination (i.e., "make-belief") and belief:

> When reading a text, a reader is building a mental model of its content…the propositions take their place in this mental model whether they are beliefs or imaginings…The narrative could be either non-fiction or fiction. Some of these propositions we also believe, some we do not also believe. That is it; there is no need, on this account, for us to wander into the swamp consequent on postulating a mental state particularly linked to fiction.
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> (Matravers, 2014, pp. 43, 78–9, 95)

We can think of mental models, on Matravers' view, as a kind of mental purgatory wherein the propositions relevant to engaging with a narrative—fictional or non-fictional—are represented and, potentially, elaborated before being incorporated into one's beliefs, or (in the case of fictions) simply cast aside.

Mental models are, in Matravers's term, the means by which we "engage" with a narrative, where engaging "includes…understanding it," but also involves making it "vivid to ourselves" (2014, pp. 76–7). Their having these roles meshes with the role that mental models play in Johnson-Laird & Byrne's (2002) influential account of conditional reasoning, discussed at the end of Chapter 5. For one way to make a narrative vivid for ourselves—to *engage* with it—is to fill in details about the situation it represents that are not part of its explicit content. And this can be done by representing other things that would be the case, were the explicit statements of the narrative true.

However, now that we have clarified the role that mental models might play within fiction appreciation—as enabling a kind of representation of what else would be true in the fictional world, given the fiction's explicit content—it is hard to see why they would not also be relied upon in confrontation situations. Suppose that a wolf appears before me on my path through the woods—a confrontation par excellence, and Matravers' own example. I quickly consider what to do. If I start to run away, the wolf will detect fear and start to chase. If I keep

moving forward, it will feel threatened and may attack. If I slowly back away, it is more likely to stand its ground and let me return from whence I came. I decide to back away. My decision was arrived at through a quick bit of hypothetical reasoning, considering different possible courses of action and their likely outcomes. This involves thinking about merely possible wolves I cannot act upon, in other possible situations.

And so it is with many of the situations that confront us each day. Our success in navigating them requires us to consider and evaluate unrealized possibilities. If Johnson-Laird & Byrne (2002) are correct in their account of conditional reasoning, we make use of mental models in the processes. But, in that case, there is no deep *psychological* difference between being in a representation situation and being in a confrontation situation. Both kinds of situation will often involve the use of mental models (or, alternatively, a DCA of imagination). If there remains a "real distinction" between being in confrontation and representation situations, it is not clear what the distinction comes to.

On the other hand, there *may be* an important psychological difference between conditional reasoning and non-conditional reasoning—one that generates the many puzzles in philosophy and psychology discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Likewise, it may be thought that daydreaming, remembering, and planning also draw upon the same resource as conditional reasoning—with that resource being none other than imagination itself. My argument in Chapters 5 and 6 was that we can explain the A-imaginings involved in conditional reasoning in more basic folk psychological terms. Inferences involving sequences of beliefs constitute the relevant episodes of hypothetical and conditional reasoning. Further, if my discussion at the end of Chapter 5 was correct, we can allow mental models into our ontology—and into our account of conditional reasoning—without committing to *sui generis* imaginative states. Mental models, I argued, can plausibly be seen as constituents of occurrent judgments, including judgments in favor of conditionals, disjunctions, and ordinary indicative propositions. Such occurrent beliefs, *qua* sets of mental models, include beliefs in the kinds of counterfactual conditionals essential to recovering implicit content from a fiction.

I will say more, momentarily, on the nature of the conditional reasoning that occurs during our engagement with fictions. The upshot, for Matravers, is that his sustained attack on the project of distinguishing fiction from non-fiction by appeal to imagination leaves us with the more difficult question of whether imagination— or something very much like it—is required for a wider array of stimulus-independent cognitive acts. Further, his distinction between confrontation and representation situations gains us no ground on understanding this resource, as it appears active in both. Instead of wandering "into the swamp consequent on postulating a mental state particularly linked to fiction" (2014, p. 95), we have entered the deeper, more treacherous waters of positing a special kind of mental state at work in representing and developing possibilities more generally. This leaves us, as

well, with no clear psychological difference between representation situations and confrontation situations. Matravers has not kept us on dry land.

9.3.2 Recovering Fictional Content through Counterfactual Reasoning

When recovering implicit fictional content, we make inferences on the basis of what is explicitly true in the fiction. Often, this involves a kind of counterfactual reasoning about what else would be true in a world where the explicit content of a fiction is true. This insight forms the backbone of Lewis's (1978) influential theory of truth in fiction. But, as we will see, this is not *all* that recovering fictional content involves. Stock (2017) argues persuasively that other kinds of inferences concerning authorial intentions are relevant as well.[10] But let's focus first on the aspect of fictional content-recovery that does plausibly involve counterfactual reasoning. In developing his theory, Lewis offers two distinct, if related, analyses of what determines truth in a fiction. Both aim to account for implicit fictional truths; and both assign a central role to counterfactual reasoning. Focusing only on the first—"Analysis 1"—will suffice for our purposes here. According to Lewis, the explicit content of a fiction corresponds to those propositions that are true at every possible world where the fiction "is told as known fact rather than fiction" (Lewis, 1978, p. 41). This characterization of truth in a fiction does not, however, capture implicit truths, such as that Sherlock Holmes wears underwear and does not paint his toenails pink. For there will be *some* possible world where the Sherlock Holmes stories are told as known fact where Holmes *does* favor pink toenails and fewer sartorial restrictions. To include implicit fictional truths, Lewis invokes a similarity relation between the actual world and worlds where the fiction is told as known fact, as follows:

> A sentence of the form 'in the fiction *f*, φ' is non-vacuously true...[if and only if]...some world where *f* is told as known fact and φ is true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where *f* is told as known fact and φ is not true.   (1978, p. 42)

Lewis's idea is that, when we opine on whether *p* is (perhaps implicitly) true in some fiction, we are asking ourselves the following: is some possible world where the fiction is told as known fact, and where *p* is true, more similar to the actual world than every possible world where the fiction is told as known fact and *p* is not true? Or, more simply, if the fiction were told as known fact, would it be that *p*? If the answer is yes, then *p* is true in the fiction; if the answer is no, then *p* is

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[10] A similar line of argument for the relevance of authorial intentions has also been pursued by Lamarque (1990), Byrne (1993), Sainsbury (2014) and others.

false in the fiction.[11] Recovering fictional content—and thereby filling out one's understanding of the fictional world—is simply a matter of engaging in counterfactual reasoning of a certain sort. For instance, we might ask: is some possible world where the Sherlock Holmes stories are told as known fact and Sherlock Holmes paints his toenails pink more similar to the actual world than any where the stories are told as known fact and he does not paint his toenails that color? Here the answer appears to be no. In the actual world, men in late nineteenth century England were unlikely to paint their toenails pink. Thus, a possible world where the Holmes stories are told as known fact and where Holmes's toenails are pink is *not* more similar to our own than some where the stories are told as known fact and his toenails are unpainted. For this reason, it is false that, in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes' toenails are pink.

The larger question we are after is whether recovering fictional content—and, in so doing, actively filling out our understanding of a fictional world—requires *sui generis* imaginative states. Supposing that one accepts a broadly Lewisian account of truth-in-fiction, answering this question turns on issues already discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, concerning the nature of counterfactual reasoning. If, as I argued there, reasoning our way to new beliefs in counterfactual conditionals does not require *sui generis* imaginative states, then neither does uncovering what is true in a fiction—at least, not insofar as the Lewisian view captures those truths. (I will consider the situation from the perspective of those who reject the Lewisian view momentarily.)

It is perhaps worth reemphasizing that, in proposing that we undertake this kind of conditional reasoning during fiction consumption, I am not suggesting that we utter the relevant "if-then" sentences in our heads, or that we are consciously aware of each step in each inference. Indeed, by itself, the claim that we engage in counterfactual reasoning while engaging with fictions has no phenomenological implications at all. Further, as we saw in Chapter 6, the nature of the mental states and processes underlying and giving rise to those judgments remains an open empirical question. I sketched a heavy-duty "how-possibly" story where the states are indeed all language-like mental representations tokened in one's "Belief Box." But we needn't commit to that view to hold that the relevant counterfactual reasoning can be explained (in light-duty terms) as involving inferences among beliefs about what would be true in the world most similar to our own where the fiction is told as known fact.

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[11] Plausibly, the truth of some propositions—such as that Holmes wears brown shoes—is indeterminate in a fiction, in the sense that they are neither true nor false in that fiction. Lewis holds that a proposition p is neither true nor false in a fiction if, among the set of worlds most similar to the actual world where the story is told as known fact, p is true in some but false in others (Lewis, 1978, p. 43).

9.3.3 Imagery and the Development of Indeterminate Fictional Truths

Intuitively, our recovery and development of fictional content often involves the use of mental imagery. Some even find imagery central to our engagement with fiction (Van Leeuwen, 2016; Stokes, 2019). In Chapter 4, I argued that mental images can form proper parts of judgments, desires, and decisions. Thus, should we find that mental imagery plays an important role in the recovery of fictional content—and in our engagement with fiction more generally—this is consistent with the A-imaginings in which they are featured being judgments, desires, and decisions. Consider, for instance, the closing of Raymond Carver's story "Cathedral," when the narrator guides the hand of a blind visitor as they draw a cathedral. Registering the scene could involve making judgments such as:

JIG (In this story, the men's hands are: **a pair of hands holding a pencil together**.)

If the image in this JIG is vague or sketchy in its detail, the JIG can be seen as a true imagistic judgment about what is happening in the fiction. This judgment doesn't "say" anything about the character's hands that isn't true of them in the nearest possible worlds where the fiction is told as known fact. (Or, on an intentionalist conception of truth in fiction, it only "says" things about the character's hands that the author prescribes that we imagine.) However, it is also possible—particularly when imagery is involved—for an A-imagining to fill in the details of a story in ways that go beyond what is strictly true or false in the fiction, adding details such as a particular shade of brown to Sherlock Holmes's shoes that are left indeterminate by the fiction itself. Where the truth of a proposition (image-involving or not) is indeterminate in a fiction (see fn. 11), the JIGs that take such propositions as their contents will be of indeterminate truth as well.

However, in many cases where we imaginatively fill in details that are left indeterminate by a fiction, it is more accurate to view the imaginings as *decisions* than as judgments.[12] Suppose, for instance, that while reading "Cathedral" we are imagining the blind man to look rather like Jeff Bridges.[13] While some aspects of the man's appearance are made explicit by the text (such as that he has a beard), there is nothing in the text that suggests that he either must, or must not look much like Jeff Bridges. The man's facial appearance is indeterminate within a certain range of options, within which fall people who look like Jeff Bridges. In A-imagining the man as looking like Jeff Bridges, we have made a decision to develop the fiction in a certain way of our own; we have shifted out of the mode of

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[12] This serves, *inter alia,* as a reply to Van Leeuwen (2020), who argues that the representation of propositions that one takes to be neither true nor false in a fiction requires *sui generis* attitudinal imaginings.

[13] I was spurred to consider this sort of case by a draft paper that Neil Van Leeuwen once shared with me—an ancestor to the now published Van Leeuwen (2020).

merely recovering what is true in the fiction to doing a bit of storytelling ourselves. The decision can be symbolized as:

DEC (I will experience the blind man in the fiction as being: **a Jeff Bridges-looking man** …)

Again, this just gives the *content* of the decision; there is no suggestion that this specific sentence runs through the head of a reader who generates what we would intuitively call an "image of Jeff Bridges" while reading the story. The point is simply that cases where we knowingly elaborate a fiction, for ourselves, in ways that go beyond what is true or false in the fiction can be seen as decisions to elaborate or experience the fiction in this or that way. Very often, these decisions have mental images as proper parts; this is why it feels right to describe the decision as a decision to *experience* the fiction in a certain way. The normal act of enjoying a fiction is a continual interplay of judgments about what is true in the fiction and decisions about how further to develop or experience the fiction for oneself. Thus, fiction *appreciation* is not a passive "streaming" of content from the page into the mind of the reader, but an ongoing collaboration between reader and author. This interactive element in the experience of fiction is obscured by standard accounts that assign to a single type of state—our *sui generis* "imaginings"—*both* the passive role of registering what is true in the fiction and the active role of developing the fiction for oneself. We get a clearer picture of what is going on, psychologically, when we don't try to assign all the interesting work to one kind of state.

9.4 Extracting Fictional Truths through Non-counterfactual Reasoning

So far, we have an account of how explicit and implied fictional content can be recovered from a fiction without the use of *sui generis* imaginative states—at least insofar as doing so simply requires counterfactual reasoning. However, as earlier noted, not all who think that imagination is essential to the appreciation of fictions agree with the Lewisian account of truth in fiction. (Not even Lewis himself thought that his Analysis 1 or 2 could explain *all* cases of truth in fiction.)[14] Recently, Kathleen Stock (2017) has mounted a counterargument on two fronts. First, she argues that truth in fiction is not, in general, to be understood in Lewisian terms, but instead by appeal to what the author intends one to imagine; and, second, she holds that the relevant imaginings at work in fiction appreciation are not, as a default, belief-like (nor, for that matter, are they beliefs). For an imaginative

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[14] He describes the other relevant factors as instances of "carry-over from other truth in fiction" (Lewis, 1978, p. 45). These include genre-related inferences such as that a dragon-like creature breathes fire, even if it is not explicitly stated in the fiction that the creature breathes fire.

state to be "belief-like," in the relevant sense, is for it to inferentially interact with other imaginings in ways that beliefs with matching contents inferentially interact with each other—in the manner of the proposals of Nichols & Stich (2000), Currie & Ravenscroft (2002), Williamson (2016), and Weinberg & Meskin (2006a). Stock is willing to allow that counterfactual reasoning may be carried out through the use of imaginative states that are, at least in the moment, functioning in belief-like ways. Her core argument, however, is that "making inferences from fictional content as to what to imagine is not inevitably or even *often* like counter-factual thinking" (2017, p. 179). Thus, while she grants that "working out, relative to some background set of beliefs about the world, what would be the case given some initial imaginative premise, *may* be a defeasible route" to recovering fictional content, she emphasizes that:

> The process might [also] operate via a different route: for instance, working out what a given symbol was intended by the author to mean with respect to fictional content; or her use of a stock character, or some playful metafictional reference, or some innovative but meaningful use of language.   (2017, p. 178)

Imagining in these cases, she observes, "is not exclusively aimed at what would be the case in the world, were some explicit sentences true" (p. 178). As support, Stock offers examples where background beliefs about fiction and language appear equally important to the content recovered from a fiction as the inferences we would be inclined to draw from the truth of a fiction's explicit content. For instance, genre conventions—as Lewis also noted (1978, p. 45)—are at times more relevant than the consideration of nearby possible worlds where the story is told as known fact. If a character has prominent incisors in a vampire book, Stock observes:

> she is often a vampire; yet a world in which a person is a vampire is much further away from the actual than one in which she merely has prominent incisors and is not a vampire.   (Stock, 2017, pp. 52–3)

Other fictional truths Stock highlights are grounded in the use of symbolism, which "depends on seeing the fiction as a deliberate construct" (p. 54):

> Say that I read *Jane Eyre* and so imagine that (effectively) *Jane is locked in a red room*. In interpreting what else is made fictional in the light of this fact, I can permissibly draw upon a belief that *the use of a red room is intended by Brontë to symbolize a womb, and so imply, in conjunction with other content, that Jane is much affected by the loss of her mother*. I may then on the basis of these two thoughts derive the imagining that *Jane is much affected by the loss of her mother*.
>
> (p. 178, emphases in original)

Such examples serve Stock's larger project of defending "extreme intentionalism," the view that "the fictional content of a particular text is equivalent to exactly what the author of the text *intended the reader to imagine*" (2017, p. 1). Lewis's account of fictional truth is a direct competitor, as it aims to explain truth-in-fiction without any appeal to authorial intentions (or to imagination, for that matter). The different source of fictional truth, for Stock, puts different constraints on the imaginings used in our engagement with a fiction. Our imagining "is not exclusively aimed at what would be the case in the world, were some explicit sentences true," but rather

> Draws equally or even more heavily upon background beliefs about fiction and language: for instance, about the author and her characteristic technique; about conventions governing fictional reference, or genre, or symbolism, or words, and so on; and about how those might be adopted or playfully adapted.   (p. 179)

I agree with Stock that, in many cases, recovering fictional content involves subtler reasoning than the kind of counterfactual extrapolation appealed to in a strict Lewisian account. The required interpretive tasks are more heterogeneous than that—as also noted by Walton (1990, pp. 184–7). This is so whether or not truth in fiction wholly depends on what the author intends us to imagine. Our question is whether admitting this heterogeneity create barriers to explaining the A-imagining that occurs during fiction appreciation in more basic terms.

Stock thinks that the answer is yes, arguing at length that fiction-related imagining can neither be understood as "belief-like" by default, nor *reduced to* belief. In fact, she takes explicit aim at a reductive view of imagination I've earlier defended in the context of explaining pretense (Langland-Hassan, 2012). Yet I see nothing in Stock's account that suggests fiction-directed imagining cannot be reduced to more basic kinds of folk psychological states, so long as we are prepared to grant that such imaginings can consist in one's using one's beliefs in a variety of different *kinds* of inferences. Indeed, the greater role we assign to the importance of background beliefs "about fiction and language" (including beliefs about genre, symbolism, and so on), the *easier* it is to see how fiction consumption can be explained without appeal to *sui generis* imaginings.

Consider Stock's example of vampire fiction: Hans, an experienced reader of vampire fiction, knows that characters with pronounced incisors typically turn out to be vampires. Grasping the fiction's explicit content, Hans judges that, in the fiction, Handsome James has pronounced incisors. Bringing to bear his background knowledge about the genre, he then judges that, in the fiction, Handsome James is a vampire. Nothing in the recovery of this fictional truth suggests a need for something other than belief and abductive inference. Hans needs to be a skilled reader. He needs to know when to let genre-norms trump other (Lewisian)

principles for how to uncover fictional truths. But this sort of knowledge is not facilitated by imagination. For one could obviously have *sui generis* imaginative states (were there to be such) while lacking it.

What occurs in the reader's mind as she recognizes that Brontë is using the redness of Jane's room as a symbol? There are various possibilities, of course; but it is easy enough to characterize the recognition as an abductive inference along the lines of: *The redness of the room is highlighted in the text. It is probably not an accident that Brontë has highlighted the color of the room in this way. The color of the room likely serves to highlight something about Jane and her predicament. Jane lost her mother early in life. Perhaps, in resembling a womb, the color serves to emphasize that Jane is much affected by the loss of her mother.* This is not the easiest or most obvious inference one might arrive at. But it is the sort of thing that a skilled critic might uncover through a bit of reasoning. We can call this abductive reasoning "imagining," if we like. But it is another case of imagining that is given a more enlightening characterization when viewed as a straightforward abductive inference involving one's beliefs about the text and the use of symbolism by authors. It is again hard to see how this reasoning would be facilitated by the use of *sui generis* imaginative states; certainly, the use of such states (e.g., by the average undergraduate) would not be sufficient for uncovering this interesting bit of symbolism.

Stock effectively anticipates this sort of response:

> It is true, I suppose, that working out an author's intentions as to what is to be imagined in these latter ways may *loosely* be counted as a kind of 'inference' 'drawing upon' beliefs e.g. beliefs about authors, fiction, genre, history, language, etc.   (2017, p. 178)

It is unclear why the inferences she mentions would count only "loosely" as inferences, but let's continue:

> But, crucially, the contents of these beliefs are not entering into inferences *directly* with imaginative content *as such*, as, allegedly, the contents of beliefs do according to the model I am criticizing.   (p. 178)

Here Stock notes that, on the kind of model she is criticizing—where imaginings are "belief-like" and occur in their own cognitive "box"—there is no "direct" mixing of imagined and believed contents. For instance, on Weinberg & Meskin's view (Meskin & Weinberg, 2003; Weinberg & Meskin, 2006b), where the contents of a fiction are "streamed" through one's Imagination Box, any abductive inferences about symbolism must occur within a distinct Belief Box. For those judgments (e.g., "Brontë likely used red to symbolize a womb") concern the author's actions

and do not, as it were, record facts about what is happening in the fictional world itself. Stock returns to the example of Jane's red room in developing this point:

> The imagining that *Jane is locked in a red room* concerns Jane *qua* orphan girl, former inhabitant of Lowood, future wife of Rochester…The belief that *the use of a red room is intended by Brontë*…(etc.) concerns the events of the book *qua* fictional constructs and elements of a novel composed by Brontë *as such.* There is little obvious sense in which these two kinds of thought, one imaginative and one a belief, come into *direct* inferential contact: for they take different scenarios as objects.   (p. 179)

This passage suggests two distinct worries. The first is that there is a lack of "direct inferential contact" between imaginings and beliefs, even if both are involved in recovering fictional content. (The events of the fiction are imagined, we can suppose, and the facts about symbolism are believed.) The second is that the imaginings and the beliefs have "different scenarios as objects." There is the fiction *qua* artwork as one object. It is believed to contain symbolism. And there are *the events of the fiction* on the other. These involve Jane's room being red, but do not contain facts about Brontë's use of symbolism.

Taking the first worry first, the mere fact that a view (such as Weinberg & Meskin's) requires interaction between cognitive boxes does nothing to show that the resulting states fail to come into "direct inferential contact." Ordinary hypothetical inferences—judging that if p then q—require coordination between boxes on such views, as we saw in Chapters 5 and 6. Cross-box inferences can be as cognitively "direct" as an ordinary conditional inference. The second worry—concerning "different scenarios as objects"—is also easily explained away. Once we have deduced that the red color of the room is meant to highlight the significance to Jane of the loss of her mother, we are warranted in imagining—on that basis—that Jane is much affected by the loss of her mother. (NB This latter imagining may in turn simply be a judgment that, in the fiction, Jane is much affected by the loss of her mother.) A belief with the fiction as its object warrants an imagining with the events of the fiction as its object. There is nothing untoward or unusual in this. My judgments about what is true *in the particular soccer match I am watching* (e.g., that Luka Modrić has scored a brilliant goal) are typically influenced by my beliefs about what is true *of the game of soccer itself* (e.g., In soccer, goals are scored when the ball enters a goal). My thoughts simultaneously take two different objects: the events of a particular game, and the rules of all soccer games. There is nothing problematic in one thought, with one sort of object, motivating and justifying the other. Turning back to fiction, it is a distinct aesthetic pleasure to be at once intrigued by the events described and amazed at the author's ability in so describing them. There is no conflict in the idea that we shift between thinking about the fiction as such—appreciating its beauty and

ingenuity—and what is true in the fiction itself, with each sequence of thought influencing the other. If this involves a kind of "split consciousness," it is nothing to regret.

9.5 Constraints on Fiction-related Imaginings?

Stock formulates a second attack on the idea that imagining is belief-like—or, indeed, a *species* of belief—by appeal to the different *constraints* operative on imaginings as opposed to beliefs. The trajectory of a propositional imagining, she tells us:

> can be significantly influenced by constraints other than those operative upon beliefs with the same contents: constraints connected to the particular goal of the imaginative episode, and the reasons of the thinker for undertaking it. *A fortiori*, the view that imagining is in fact a *species* of belief…is also impugned.
>
> (2017, p. 187)

According to Stock, the constraints in question:

> Depend on the particular instance and what the imaginative goal is, but might include: (in the case of writing fiction) beliefs or suspicions about what is funny, what is suspenseful, what is emotionally powerful, what is titillating (etc.); or (in the case of fantasizing) what causes the thinker pleasure.   (p. 185)

Stock is right to emphasize the importance of constraints in any account of how imaginings develop. To hold that imaginings develop without *any* constraints leaves us with no positive account of why an author might bother to prescribe an imagining. Normally, when we speak of a sequence of thoughts being *constrained*, we have in mind they are constrained by a norm of truth or accuracy. What, exactly, would it be for a sequence of thoughts (imaginings) to be constrained by "beliefs or suspicions about what is funny, what is suspenseful, what is emotionally powerful," and so on? In the case where thoughts are constrained by a norm of truth, our arrival at thought that p is constrained by prior thoughts that q, r, and s, to the extent that the truth of p is guaranteed (or at least made likely) by the truth of q, r, and s—if, in other words, there is a *truth-preserving* principle of reasoning that warrants p on the basis of q, r, and s.

The "constraints" Stock has in mind would appear to be *humor-preserving*, or *suspense-preserving*, or *emotional-impact-preserving*. Doubtless, a *fiction* could end up being humorous, or suspenseful, or emotionally impactful—indeed it could be all three simultaneously. In such cases, we can, perhaps, say that the propositions comprising the fiction are humor-, suspense-, and emotional-impact-preserving.

But what could it mean to say that a sequence of discrete thoughts or propositions—or *imaginings*—develop in a humor-, or suspense-, or emotion-preserving way? In most cases, we will not be able to say whether an entire *page* of fiction is humor-, suspense-, or emotional-impact-preserving until we see how the fiction turns out on a larger scale. One and the same set of sentences can easily be humor-, suspense-, or emotional-impact-preserving in the context of one story, and not another. Unlike standard inference rules—such as *modus ponens*, or the statistical syllogism—which *can* be said to constrain thoughts or proposition-sequences one by one, *as they unfold*, there is no sense in which the norms governing humor or suspense-creation do so (supposing we could articulate such norms).

Of course, it remains true that an author may be *motivated* to write something funny, or suspenseful, or with emotional impact, and that these motivations will influence the fiction she creates. We can make sense of that easily enough: a goal to write a funny, or suspenseful, or emotionally impactful story will influence the sort of premises chosen as the basis for an imagining. One can then make a series of judgments about what else would likely happen, given such a premise. Those thought transitions will be constrained by normal *truth*-preserving inference rules. If one judges the development to hold promise for suspense, humor, or an emotional response, it continues forward. If it doesn't seem promising, one can change it by inserting new premises. In just the same way, the goal of a toothbrush manufacturer to minimize costs might constrain his imagining of new toothbrush designs. Beginning to develop a design using one polymer, he may shift to another if the chosen material presents engineering difficulties. But this involves no new (cost-preserving) constraint on his imaginings, different from the ordinary truth-preserving inferential constraints on belief. We have, instead, a very ordinary interaction between "top-down" input from one's intentions or goals—which determine the topic of one's reasoning—and the lateral, truth-preserving inferential constraints that move one forward from a given set of premises or decisions (Langland-Hassan, 2016). Quite generally, we are able to guide the subject-matter and course of our own reasoning without this guidance implying an ability to break free of the inferential constraints operative on beliefs. To have our inferences, as consumers of a fiction, appropriately "constrained," we simply need to have a good idea of the author's goals and interests in creating the fiction. And we have yet to see any reason why *sui generis* imaginative states would aid us in that endeavor.[15]

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[15]   Curiously, despite arguing that what is true in a fiction is whatever we are prescribed by the author to imagine (and despite her arguments that neither beliefs nor belief-like imaginings would suffice to recover fictional content), Stock does not think that any sort of imagining is *necessary* for determining what is true in a fiction. She compares grasping what is to be imagined in a fiction to grasping what is said during another's testimony (2017, p. 36). Typically, we will move immediately from understanding what a person says to believing what they say. But we need not do so; and we *do not* do so in cases where we mistrust the source, such as in the cases described at the outset of this chapter. Similarly, Stock proposes, "for fictional cognition, all the reader needs to do is understand

Now, I think that, for the skilled novelist, the psychology of fiction writing is considerably more complex than I have just described. I delve deeper into the psychology of fiction-*creation* in Chapter 12, on creativity. For now, this skeletal account suffices to show that Stock's appeal to authorial goals and interests can be made to cohere with a reductive view of imagination's role in fiction appreciation. Stock hasn't shown that our recovery of fictional content involves something other than reasoning with beliefs. She has just revealed some diversity and layers of complexity to that reasoning.

9.6 Reconciliation with Intentionalism—the Third and Fourth Puzzles of Comprehension

Up to this point, I have argued that we do not need *sui generis* imaginative states in order to recover explicit or implied fictional truths. As noted at the outset, it is a separate question whether a successful analysis of what it is to be true in a fiction must appeal to an irreducible notion of imagination; this was the third puzzle of comprehension. Likewise, there remains the fourth puzzle of whether imagination must be invoked in any plausible account of the difference between fictions and non-fictions.

We can view the third puzzle as asking whether any substantive analysis of the "in the fiction" operator must appeal in some way to a *sui generis* notion of imagination. We have already seen that, for Lewis, it does not. His means for filling the schema "'In the fiction F, p' is true iff _____" don't appeal to imagination. Of course, not everyone is convinced by Lewis's account. Kendall Walton, for instance, holds that "a fictional truth consists in there being a prescription or mandate to imagine something" (1990, p. 39). He has famously defended a schema along the lines of: "'In the fiction F, p' is true iff F is a prop in a game where there is a prescription to imagine that p" (though he backs away from this in more recent work (Walton, 2015)). Similarly, Stock defends a schema that is roughly: "'In the fiction F, p' is true iff the author of F intends the reader to imagine that p." Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that Walton's and Stock's accounts of how to analyze the "in the fiction" operator are correct, insofar as we must appeal to an author's intentions (or a game's prescriptions) that we imagine

what she is intended to F-imagine, not F-imagine it" (p. 36). Thus, while "in most cases understanding what one is reflexively intended to F-imagine [and thus what is true in a fiction, according to Stock] and F-imagining that thing will co-occur," in other cases, "the reader merely understands what she is to imagine, but does not imagine it" (p. 36). So, clearly, even for Stock, there are ways of recovering fictional content that require no imagining. What does Stock think these ways might be? And why, given their availability, do we think that imagining is *ever* deployed in the process of recovering fictional content?

thus and such. What then? Must we resign ourselves to *sui generis* imaginings after all?

We needn't. Instead, we can agree (for the sake of argument) with either Walton or Stock's analysis and go on to ask: but *what is it* to imagine that *p* in response to a fiction? What is it that the author intends for us to do? Limiting ourselves to the context under discussion—that of recovering content from a fiction—a plausible reductive analysis suggests itself: imagining that *p* in recovering fictional content from a fiction *F* amounts to judging that, in the fiction *F*, *p*.[16] This analysis of what it is to imagine that *p* in response to a particular fiction enables an alternative intentionalist account of truth in fiction:

Doxastic Intentionalism: "In the fiction *F*, *p*" is true, iff *F* (or its author) prescribes or intends the reader to *judge that*, in the fiction *F*, *p*.

This criterion for truth in fiction will return all the same propositions as true in a certain fiction as the intentionalist account involving prescriptions to imagine— at least insofar as the latter is correct! After all, there are not going to be any propositions the author prescribes us to imagine that she doesn't also prescribe us to judge true in the fiction, if the intentionalist is correct.[17] And so we have an answer to the third puzzle of comprehension that is compatible both with the claim that imagination plays a key role in defining what it is to be true in a fiction and with the idea that the relevant imaginings are reducible to more basic folk psychological states (in this case, judgments about what the author prescribes us to judge true in the fiction). An important note, however: my claim is not that we can only imagine that *p*, in response to a fiction *F*, if we think it is true, in fiction *F*, that *p*. We might imagine the fiction to be going in ways we don't believe it to be going. The claim, instead, is that what it is for the author to intend the reader to imagine that *p*, in response to *F*—and so what it is for it to be true, in *F*, that *p*—is for the author to intend the reader to judge that, in the fiction *F*, *p*.

One might worry that this criterion is circular, however. After all, when we say that *p* is true in the fiction *F* just in case the author intends for us to judge

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[16] In Chapter 10 I argue that what is normally referred to as "imagining that *p*" in response to a fiction *F* must be reconceived with an "in the fiction" operator—such that we don't simply imagine that *p* in response to *F* but, rather, imagine that, in the fiction *F*, *p*. I call this the "Operator Claim" and offer it as a kind of *reductio* of the orthodox view of imagination's role in fiction appreciation. I don't assume that view here, however. For now I simply claim that the phenomenon we colloquially call "imagining that *p*, in response to fiction *F*" is the same as judging that, in the fiction *F*, *p*.

[17] In some cases, authors purposefully lead readers to form a false belief about what is true in the fiction—only to render a surprise later. Those are also cases where readers are prescribed to imagine things that, it turns out, are not true in the fiction. Explanations of the imaginative phenomenon—as found, e.g., in Stock (2017, Ch. 2)—can be smoothly translated into the language of judgments.

that p is true in the fiction F, the "in the fiction" operator itself appears in the characterization of what it is for something to be true in the fiction. Yet, taken as an account of the truth conditions of the "in the fiction" operator (or of "what makes something true in a fiction"), it is not circular. Truth in a fiction is defined in terms of what an author prescribes (or intends) for us to judge true in the fiction. We can see that the account is not vacuous because it remains in competition with Lewis's view; for Lewis makes no appeal to an author's intentions or prescriptions at all when characterizing truth in fiction. Granted, the definition does not tell us what it is to be a *fiction* (I come to this below). But that is not what it aims to answer. It is, instead, an (intentionalist) answer to the question of what makes some propositions true in a fiction, and others not (the answer being: a proposition is true in a fiction only when an author intends the reader to judge that it is true in the fiction).

Though the account is not vacuous, it is open to two criticisms. First, one might ask how we go about determining what it is the author (or text) prescribes for us to judge true in the fiction. However, we can ask the same question with respect to the imagination-involving account: how do we figure out what it is that the author (or text) intends for us to imagine? Presumably not by imagining! Imagining, on an intentionalist view, is something we only do once we've determined what the author wants us to imagine. In any case, the two questions will likely get the same (messy) answer involving readerly know-how. It is know-how that we begin to acquire as soon as we learn to read and that sharpens as we become more sophisticated consumers of narrative, grasping how and when to attune to symbolism, when to apply or let slide genre-related assumptions, and so on. (Walton appears to agree about this messiness when contemplating the "disorderly behavior of the machinery of [fictional-truth] generation," noting that "fictional truths are generated in very different ways" (1990, pp. 184–6); Lewis's formal characterization of truth in fiction traces such know-how to three sources (1978, p. 45).)

A second objection one might raise is: what is it to be a fiction? This—the fourth puzzle of comprehension—is indeed a different question than: what is it to be true in a fiction? But if we cannot give an account of what it is to be a work of fiction without invoking imagination, it might seem that my imagination-free approach to explaining what it is to be true in a fiction is in trouble. One might press objection this by asking: *what is it* to judge that the author intends for us to judge that p is true in the fiction F—other than to judge that the author intends for us to imagine that p, in response to the fiction? The key to giving a satisfying answer to this question is to characterize what it is to be a work of fiction without appeal to imagination. I am not alone in thinking this can be done. Friend (2012) and Matravers (2014, pp. 98–101) each develop such accounts, motivated in part

by the many difficulties inherent in trying to define fiction by appeal to imagination. The following rough-and-ready account is broadly in keeping with theirs and seems to me adequate for present purposes:

A Work of Fiction: a work of fiction is a set of sentences *S*, put forward by an author with the expectation that readers will believe that much, if not all, of what is said and implied by *S* is not true.

With this definition of "a work of fiction" in hand, we can give the following answer to the earlier question: to judge that the author intends for us to judge that *p* is true in the fiction *F* is to judge that the author of *F* intends for us to judge that *p* is stated or implied by a set of sentences *S* that the author has put forward with the expectation that readers will believe that much, if not all, of what is said and implied by *S* is not true. While the above characterization of fiction will admit of borderline cases—many of which are detailed in Matravers (2014) and Friend (2012)—the borders do not get any clearer when one introduces "imagination" into the mix. Nor, I think, are we left with the sense that there remains a deep puzzle, or loaded term, in the vicinity in need of further explanation.

9.7 Summary

Up to this point, I have sketched a view of how we recover fictional content that is consistent with the related imaginings being *judgments* and *decisions* of different kinds. We begin simply by taking in a fiction's explicit content, by whatever means we grasp linguistic content or perceive the world more generally. The examples of hearing political punditry and reading dubious philosophy showed that the mere phenomenon of understanding content without belief does not require, or even suggest, the use of *sui generis* imaginative states. To the extent that this content does not merely wash over us—to the extent that it is preserved in memory—this occurs in the form of beliefs about what has happened in the fiction. Of course, we don't form beliefs about *everything* we have been aware of in the fiction, just as we don't form beliefs about everything we are aware of when walking around town. The beliefs we do form enable us to reason conditionally about what else is likely true in the fiction, given its explicit content, and to thereby actively enrich our understanding of the fictional world. We recover more, or less, implicit content depending on how much work we put in to drawing out such inferences. Our appreciation of the fiction may be further enhanced by other kinds of inferences as well, concerning, for instance, particular genre conventions, or an author's apparent use of symbolism. Further, it is not only judgments about what is true in a fiction that constitute our mental registry of the fictional world. We also often

make *decisions* about how to further develop or experience the fictional world for ourselves, in ways that add details that the fiction itself leaves indeterminate. This accounts for the active, collaborative aspect of fiction appreciation.

I concluded with an argument that the question of whether consuming fiction requires *sui generis* imagining is orthogonal to the question of whether fictional truths result from prescriptions to imagine. For we can grant, for the sake of argument, that fictional truths result from prescriptions to imagine while understanding the prescription to imagine that *p* (in response to fiction *F*) as the prescription to judge that, in the fiction *F*, *p*. Further, I argued, there is no vicious circularity in that proposal. The lack of circularity is evident in our ability to articulate what it is to be a fiction without appeal to imagination.

So much, then, for answering the four puzzles of fiction-comprehension in a way compatible with explaining the A-imagining at work in fiction consumption in more basic folk psychological terms. Now, so far I've said nothing about why it would be *fun* or *enjoyable*—or even upsetting—to engage with fictions. A sad omission, but necessary! Thus, still before us, in the two chapters to come, are the questions of why we become immersed in fictions, whether our doing so is rationally warranted, and what sort of mental states are responsible for that immersion.