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Short Assignment 4

PHIL2054, Emotion in the Arts

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Kendall Walton rejects the first of Jerrold Levinson’s propositions in the paradox of fiction. Levinson’s first proposition is that “we often have emotions for fictional characters and situations known to be purely fictional.” Walton therefore counter-proposes that we do not in fact feel emotions for these fictional characters. We do not in fact feel pity for Anna Karenina, or grief for Mercutio. Instead, we merely imagine that we feel these emotions. According to Walton, we interact with these characters in a game of make-believe. This game of make-believe is similar to the game of make-believe that children play. Children can use objects such as stumps and pretend that they are something else, such as bears. Children can then feel fear for these imaginary bears. In a similar way, we use a novel or play as the object of our game of make believe. The object facilitates our involvement in the imaginary world, where we develop these seeming emotions to the characters. Walton argues that we only imagine these emotions. We imagine that we feel pity for Anna Karenina, just as the children imagine they are afraid of the bears. Neither the bears nor Anna Karenina are real. We are not pitiful for the physical novel we read, and children do not legitimately fear the stumps they play with. Walton therefore resolves the paradox of fiction by rejecting the idea that we feel genuine emotions for fictional characters.

Walton’s solution to the paradox of fiction can be seen as another solution along with the six solutions that Colin Radford proposes and rejects in *How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?* Radford comes up with ways to counter the popular resolutions of the paradox of fiction. Walton’s solution also resolves the problems Radford has with some of the popular resolutions. Part of Walton’s solution involves the imagining of feelings for fictional characters. Walton even describes these feelings as pseudo-emotions. These pseudo-emotions are similar to the secondary type of emotions that Radford describes in his sixth solution. Radford says that there are two types of emotion, the real emotions that we have for nonfictional people and events, and lesser versions of the same emotions that we have for fictional characters and events. These lesser emotions are the same emotions that we would experience if their objects were real, but just not as serious. Radford’s issue with this solution is that even with these lesser emotions, we are still feeling emotion for fictional characters. We never lose sight of the fact that play or novel is fictional. The paradox still exists in this case. Walton’s solution solves this problem by allowing us to imagine feeling emotions for the characters in a play or novel, without believing the work of fiction is real. The lesser feelings of Radford are similar to Walton’s pseudo-emotions. The second solution Radford proposes is that we suspend our disbelief in the play or novel in order to feel real emotions for the fictional characters. Radford rejects this solution because we are never unaware that we are watching a play or reading a novel. The paradox still exists because all three of the components of the paradox of fiction are still being satisfied. Walton’s solution solves Radford’s second solution in the same way that it solves the sixth. With Walton, we can simply imagine the emotions that we experience. It is not necessary for us to be unaware of the existence of the work of fiction. While these are just two examples of how Walton’s solution counters Radford’s arguments, Walton can actually solve more than just these. Radford’s arguments consist mainly of showing why the proposed solution still satisfies all three components of the paradox of fiction. Walton’s solution counters Radford’s arguments by rejecting the first component of the paradox.

The solution Walton offers is plausible and logical. It is satisfactory because Walton never makes any points that we disagree with or cannot identify with. When Walton gives examples, we identify with them and therefore come to the same conclusion as him. While Walton’s solution is satisfactory, it may not be the most satisfactory. It is more graceful to simply reject part (b) of the paradox of fiction. This doesn’t require any of the detailed analysis that Walton has to apply to work out his theory. Ockham’s Razor then demands that this is the better and more likely solution to the paradox of fiction because it is simpler. The solution Walton offers is satisfactory, it simply is not the most satisfactory.