

# Fictionality and Feelings

I want to tell a **story**.

**On the trip from New York to Chicago  
With a friend**

**After 30 mins of waiting in the  
security line.**

**I was sent back all the way to check in**

So I missed the flight my friend just  
got on.

**I was left alone in the airport, 4:00AM**



But, it's not exactly true...

**Does making this story fictional change any feelings?**

**Does making this story fictional change any feelings?**

Maybe, maybe not?

But why?

# Colin Radford's Initial Statement of the Paradox(1975)

His claim:

Our apparent ability to respond emotionally to fictional characters and events is “irrational, incoherent, and inconsistent”

# Colin Radford's Initial Statement of the Paradox(1975)

His premises:

1)*existence beliefs* concerning the objects of our emotions are necessary for us to be moved by them. (the belief of something is real)

# Colin Radford's Initial Statement of the Paradox(1975)

His premises:

1)*existence beliefs* concerning the objects of our emotions are necessary for us to be moved by them. (the belief of something is real)

2)And, such beliefs are *lacking* when we knowingly partake of works of fiction. (we know fictions are not real)

# Colin Radford's Initial Statement of the Paradox(1975)

His premises:

1)*existence beliefs* concerning the objects of our emotions are necessary for us to be moved by them. (the belief of something is real)

2)And, such beliefs are *lacking* when we knowingly partake of works of fiction. (we know fictions are not real)

3)In fact, we are sometimes moved by those fictions.

# Colin Radford's Initial Statement of the Paradox(1975)

His claim:

Our apparent ability to respond emotionally to fictional characters and events is “irrational, incoherent, and inconsistent”

What are some possible solutions to this puzzle?

# Outline:

## 1. Pretend theory

We are only pretending to believe in fictions.

## 2. Thought theory

Existence of existential beliefs are not necessary for fictions.

## 3. Illusion theory

Existential beliefs can be generated while consuming work of fiction.

# Caveats

- Every explanation is in a nutshell.
- May generate some hidden nihilistic worldview.
- These are ongoing debates in the field. Be open on ideas!

# Pretend theory

In denial of premise (3), Kendall Walton claims that

we are **pretending** that fictions are real, so that we can feel emotions.  
Quasi-emotions are generated with fictions.

# Pretend theory

One example:

“Charles believes (he knows) that make-believedly the green slime [on the screen] is bearing down on him and he is in danger of being destroyed by it. His quasi-fear results from this belief”

Thus, it is make-believedly the case that some fictional work generates the quasi-fear mental state.



# Pretend theory

## Objections:

1. We do not seem to **have a choice** on what are we make-believing.
  - a. Example: FANF movie / The Shining
2. **Visual stimulus** are also capable of generating some feelings like anxiety and disgusting, which makes the “make-believe” part unnecessary.

# Thought theory

We do need existential beliefs of actual event and people to generate emotional responses towards them. But we do not necessarily need the same standard on fictional work.

As long as we can have **evaluative beliefs** on fictions; beliefs about whether a character is funny, horrible, or dangerous. We can still have emotional response based on these.

# Thought theory

But again, if we know that the green slime is fake and not going to cause any damage on us



# Thought theory

But again, if we know that the **green slime** is fake and not going to cause any damage on us

Then the fear of the **green slime** becomes irrational again.



# Illusion theory

To deny the (2) premise:

The existential beliefs can be generated throughout the consumption of fictions.

# Illusion theory

To deny the (2) premise:

The existential beliefs can be generated throughout the consumption of fictions.

We could possible believe the slime is real when we interact with it.

# Illusion theory

Yet, again.

Even though we half believe such green slime exists, we would still need to show some *inclination* to prevent ourselves from being harmed.



# Illusion theory

If we object this theory, then what do we actually mean when we are talking about “absorbed” / “engaged” / “lost” in the story?



# Reference

<https://iep.utm.edu/fict-par/>



- 1) Existential beliefs are necessary to be moved.
- 2) Fictions lack of such existential beliefs
- 3) we sometimes are indeed moved by fictions

# Questions

- Do you believe our emotional response towards fictional work are rational?
  - If we are indeed rational, how can we argue against the three premises?
- How do you know if something is fictional?
  - Can videogames be fictional work?
- Can historical writing be fictional? How can we tell if they are (or not)?
- How much moral standard should we exert on fictional works?
  - Can virtual murder be accepted?
- Can we actually apply truth judgement on fictional works?
  - In another word, can there be truth in fictions?
- How should we treat modal facts (things that is plausible