Crocodile Tears

Carola Barbero*

* University of Torino, Italy: carola.barbero@unito.it – http://www.labont.it/barbero/

Abstract. In this paper we examine the emotions we feel while reading a book. Some philosophers think that since objects causing these emotions do not exist, then these emotions should not be considered as true ones. By suggesting an Object Theory in a Meinongian style, we wish to propose a realistic perspective on fictional emotions which is able to dissolve the paradox of fiction.

1. Crying for Anna

"She tried to fling herself below the wheels of the first carriage as it reached her; but the red bag which she tried to drop out of her hand delayed her, and she was too late; she missed the moment. She had to wait for the next carriage. A feeling such as she had known when about to take the first plunge in bathing came upon her, and she crossed herself. That familiar gesture brought back into her soul a whole series of girlish and childish memories, and suddenly the darkness that had covered everything for her was torn apart, and life rose up before her for an instant with all its bright past joys. But she did not take her eyes from the wheels of the second carriage. And exactly at the moment when the space between the wheels came opposite her, she dropped the red bag and drawing her head back into her shoulders, fell on her hands under the carriage, and lightly, as though she would rise again at once, dropped on to her knees. And at the same instant she was terror-stricken at what she was doing. 'Where am I? What am I doing? What for?'. She tried to get up, to drop backwards; but something huge and merciless struck her on the head and rolled her on her back. 'Lord, forgive me all' she said, feeling it impossible to struggle. A peasant muttering something was working at the iron above her. And the light by which she had read the book filled with troubles, falsehoods, sorrow, and evil, flared up more brightly than ever before, lighted up for her all that had been in darkness, flickered, began to grow dim, and was quenched forever".[1]

This is the most tragic moment for the reader. She knew, of course, that things were getting bad because Anna and Vronsky had become increasingly bitter toward each other, that a combination of boredom and suspicion had destroyed Anna's mental heath and that probably Vronsky was unfaithful and tired of her; nevertheless she couldn't imagine such a tragic end. She cries, remembering all the beautiful moments Anna and Vronsky spent together and thinking on how cruel life is, sometimes.

Let us suppose that the reader's name is Emma. Then we could reasonably say that Emma is sad because of Anna's death. Many philosophers think that what we have here clearly is a paradox, the paradox of fiction. The paradox arises because we know perfectly well that a fictional character like Anna does not exist and nonetheless we are saddened by her suicide: but how can we be sad about something that does not exist (because being sad about x implies that x makes me sad, and something that does not exist cannot *make me* feel sad)? Here is the paradox:

(1) Emma is sad about Anna's tragic end, but Emma knows perfectly well that Anna is a fictional character;
(2) To believe in the existence of what makes us sad is a necessary condition for having emotions;
(3) Emma does not believe in the existence of what she knows is a fictional character.

This is the paradox of emotional response to fiction and it clearly is an argument for the conclusion that our emotional response to fiction is irrational.

We are normally willing to accept all these sentences, they all look true, but they cannot all be true at the same time (or in the same way). That is why, when trying to give an answer to the paradox, we have to refuse (1), (2), or (3), or we have to reformulate them in a way that makes the one not contradict the

[1] L. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Ch. XXXI, Part 7.

Latin Meeting in Analytic Philosophy Genova 20-22 September 2007
CEUR-WS Proceedings ISSN 1613-0073. pp. 93-102

other. The problem concerning emotions provoked by fictional entities constitutes a specific part of the wider problem concerning nonexistents and it is also one of the most important themes concerning aesthetic fruition and enjoyment. Let us then briefly explain how an Object Theory can be so generous towards nonexistents and in what way this can help solve the paradox of fiction.

2. Pegasus, Anna et similia

Object Theory considers, and therefore studies, objects in their absolute generality,[2] as pure objects, a priori objects, i.e. objects defined only by the set of properties whose object-correlates they are and hence independently from their possibly also being for someone in some way objects of a particular kind. Actually, Object Theory aspires to take into account all objects, chairs as well as unicorns, numbers as well as round squares, existent objects as well as nonexistent ones, and consequently searches for the principles all these objects in their absolute generality obey.
Such a theory needs a definition of 'object' ample enough to be at the same time suitable for a cat, a number, Anna Karenina and so on.

Object →[3] $\{p_1, p_2, p_3, \ldots\}$

Cat → {mammal, feline, furry, four-legged, clawed, whiskered,…}

Anna Karenina → {passionate and beautiful woman, married sister of Prince Stepan Arkadyevitch Oblonsky, Vronsky's lover, the wife of Alexei Alexandrovich Karenin, …}

According to this definition everything which has at least one property is an object, everything which is not a mere nothing is something.
It does not matter that Pegasus is a mythological object we will never meet in the street, whereas a cat is a real object we can meet, nourish and stroke. These differences do not pertain to the Object Theory itself, but to more specific sciences: zoology will of course study cats, but surely not winged horses, as geometry will analyse the characteristics of the triangle and not those of the round square. This is because zoology – unlike Object Theory – studies only what exists, and geometry successfully analyses authentic geometrical forms and not impossible, contradictory ones.

Object Theory therefore aims at considering any object not only in its generality, but also before determining whether it is a real being like a cat, a mythological one like Pegasus or an ideal one like a number; it focuses purely on their all being objects. Hence, from our point of view, it is possible to be an object without being an existing object, i.e. the definition of what an object is does not include its possible existing.

3. The birth of Anna Karenina

Anna Karenina is a fictional literary character created by Lev Tolstoy in 1877 and accepted (i.e. recognized as such) by a community of readers and critics.

Anna's creation process can be seen as being constituted by three moments: the first one is the *pretending use of language*;[4] the second one the *hypostatising use of language*;[5] and finally the third one (which is the first step reconsidered, or considered again after the hypostatising use has taken place) is the *characterizing use*.[6] In these three steps the fictional entity is created both as an abstract and as a concrete entity. Let us examine these steps in detail, one by one.

---

[2] Many authors – Abelard, Thomas Aquinas, Gregory of Rimini, Roger Bacon, Francisco Suarez, Christian Wolff, Thomas Reid, Bernard Bolzano, Kazimier Twardowski, Alexius Meinong – have considered objects in their absolute generality, and have also dealt with other themes we will focus on later, such as the difference between being and existence, essence and existence, nonexistent objects. For an historical sketch see Nef (1998), Raspa (2002) and Bakaoukas (2003).
[3] We will not dwell upon the nature of this arrow here, whether it stands for identity or something else. We will focus on this later. This is why we define the relation subsisting between the object and the set of its constitutive properties generically as 'correspondence'.
[4] Following Schiffer (1996).
[5] Schiffer (1996).
[6] This particular use of language is not from Schiffer, as in the previous cases, but it is an idea of my own.

With the pretending use of language the author of the novel starts writing. The creation process has hence begun.[7] He writes false statements pretending they are true. At this moment in the work, while combining properties, the entity being dealt with is not yet a fictional entity. It is more like an imaginary entity or rather an invented one. The hypostatising use starts as soon as the novel is finished. A name now has a referent with a different ontological status from the previous imaginary one: names in fact now refer to fictional entities, which are, as far as their external properties are concerned, abstract objects. Once the fictional entity has been recognized, and therefore accepted by a community of readers and critics, thanks to the hypostatising use, it is nevertheless necessary to go back into the novel. The entity we are willing to accept is characterized, within the novel, by a set of properties which have to be true of it. This is achieved thanks to the characterizing use of language, where it is seen that the internal properties[8] are those properties used by the author to make the entity up, and are therefore the ones that characterize the fictional entity. In short: the characterizing use is an ontologically committed transformation of the pretending use, and this transformation is in turn made possible by the hypostatising use.

The most important of these three steps clearly is the second one, the hypostatising use, because without it we would have no fictional entity of any sort. Nonetheless the characterizing use may be probably more interesting, because it gives details about how fictional entities are created by their author. Characters, as far as their internal properties are concerned, are created by being written about by their authors, i.e. they can be brought into existence merely by being described as existents. The characterizing use of language therefore makes it clear that there is a high degree of similarity between fictional objects and social objects:[9] they both are stipulated objects. While creating Anna, Tolstoy stipulated that Anna is a woman, exactly in the same way as the Italian highway code stipulates that a driving licence is made up of 20 credit points (i.e. that the driving licence will be suspended when a driver has a total of 20 points for traffic violations). I speak of stipulation because precisely what happens is that when an author builds up a character through internal properties, in the course of creating a story, then it is true that – as far as its internal properties are concerned – the character has those properties. Similarly, once the highway code has stipulated that the driving licence is made up of 20 credit points, then it is true that it is so characterized.

Here is a definition of creation appropriate for fictional entities:

(C_{lf})[10] To create a fictional entity means to make it be thanks to an act of stipulation.

In fact the internal properties which contribute to building up Anna Karenina as a concrete object are but those properties attributed to it by the author in order to produce, to fabricate, to make Anna Karenina exist. This is why there is such an object as Anna Karenina. Since the name 'Anna Karenina' is introduced first in the novel written by Tolstoy (and not imported into it from some other structure or context), then we need have no qualms about identifying the character introduced in the novel and accepted by readers and critics with this same object characterized by the author. This creating out of thin air is therefore the same as stipulating that the object in question is to have exactly certain properties. By stipulating, for instance, that Anna Karenina is to be a woman, to have Alexei Alexandrovich Karenin as husband, as son Seriozha, and as special lover an army officer called Count Vronski, Tolstoy has generated Anna Karenina as a concrete entity, making it be. What makes the author's generation stipulative[11] in nature? The fact that such generation is always correct, whatever its content. If an author attributes a certain property to a character, then it is invariably true that the character has that property.

---

[7] I evidently do not consider the pretending use of language exactly in the same way as Schiffer (1996). In fact I maintain that when the pretending use of language starts what we have is first of all a *pure object*, i.e. an object exclusively defined by the set of properties whose object-correlate it is, that can be identified, only afterwards, as a merely imagined object as well as a fictional one. The pretending use of language involved when, for instance, Tolstoy started *Anna Karenina*, could therefore somehow be considered as the first moment in the creation of a fictional entity, even if this can really be recognized as true only subsequently, when the hypostatising use of language starts, making the subsequent characterizing use legitimate (and so the pretending use, too).

[8] Correctly speaking there is only one kind of property, but it may be an internal property (when attributed by the author) or an external one (when attributed by readers and critics). The distinction between two kinds of properties therefore refers to two different ways of predicating a single property.

[9] Searle (1995) has noticed the similarity between cultural entities and institutional entities, in their both being brought into existence simply by being represented as existing. His favourite example is money: "'This note is legal tender for all debts public and private'. But that representation is now, at least in part, a declaration: It creates the institutional status by representing it as existing. It does not represent some prelinguistic natural phenomenon" (p. 74).

[10] 'C_{lf}' stands for 'Creation of Literary Fiction' and is presented as a possible definition only as far as fictional literary entities are concerned.

[11] On the stipulative nature of fictional entities, see also Meinong (1917), GA III, p. 374.

The author therefore makes it true that a character has a certain property by creating the character with this property. The author is free to stipulate what properties a character is to have without ever being wrong:[12] this is the essential creative freedom storytellers typically enjoy. It is important not to forget that the author exercises creative rights and powers while creating his characters. His power comes from his being immune from error. Tolstoy says Anna Karenina's "shining grey eyes, looked dark from the thick lashes."[13] Could he have been wrong about this? Of course not, because everything Tolstoy writes about Anna Karenina must be true. Here is the principle of Freedom of Creation:

> (FC) If, while creating a character X, the author attributes to X the property P, then it is true that X has P.

The author is therefore the maximal authority in choosing what properties a character will have. Anna Karenina could in fact have been different from what it is, if Tolstoy's pretending use of language had been different, attributing to this entity different properties from those it actually has.[14]

4. Anna and Emma

Emma reads of Anna's death and cries. This mirrors, as we have remarked at the beginning, what has been called 'the paradox of fiction': it is seen as somehow paradoxical to cry for something we know perfectly does not exist. While it is absolutely rational to cry for an existent person, it is not rational to cry for a nonexistent one.

The argument at the basis of this paradox is made up by three premises: (1) that in order for us to be moved somehow by what we come to read about people and situations, we must believe that these people and situations really exist; (2) that these beliefs are lacking when we knowingly engage with fictional texts; and (3) that fictional characters and situations do in fact seem capable of moving us at times. Here is the paradox.

Colin Radford,[15] opening the philosophical debate on fictional emotions, in a famous 1975 article maintains that our apparent ability to respond emotionally to fictional characters and events is "irrational, incoherent, and inconsistent."[16] He argues this on the grounds that existence beliefs concerning the objects of our emotions are necessary for us to be moved by them, and that such beliefs are clearly lacking when we read (or see) works of fiction. Since such works do in fact move us at times, Radford concludes straightforwardly that our capacity for emotional response to fiction is irrational.

As evidence for his argument Radford takes the case of something very tragic we first believed was a true account and which subsequently turns out to be false: once aware of this fact, according to him, we no longer feel sad or desperate as before, because we know it is false, it is a lie, it is a novel. He writes that "It would seem that I can only be moved by someone's plight if I believe that something terrible has happened to him. If I do not believe that he has not and is not suffering or whatever, I cannot grieve or be moved to tears."[17] Clearly what Radford here means to say is that we can only be *rationally* moved by someone's plight if we believe that something terrible has happened to him and that if we do not believe that, we cannot *rationally* grieve or be moved to tears. But such beliefs are absent when we knowingly engage with fictions.

One could object to Radford that while we are engaged in the fiction, we somehow forget that what we are reading is a fictional work and therefore that it is not real: Emma can read about Anna Karenina's tragic end temporarily losing her awareness of its fictional status. To an objection of this kind, Radford would answer by offering two different considerations: first, if Emma really forgot that what she was reading was not real, then she would not feel any of the various forms of pleasure that often accompany

---

[12] Of course, if the author wants to write a realistic novel, as is the case in *Anna Karenina*, all the natural, physical and moral laws which are valid in our world must apply in the novel. Nevertheless, as happens for instance in science fiction novels, mirroring reality is not relevant.

[13] Chap. 18, part I.

[14] Anna Karenina could have been different, but nevertheless still have remained the same object if, for instance, Tolstoy had attributed to her the property of having left a daughter in St. Petersburg instead of a son, or if he had endowed her with different properties of this sort. In that case the *shape* would clearly have been preserved. And what if Tolstoy had attributed to her the property of being a cat? In that case, of course, we would still have an entity named 'Anna Karenina', but it would be a different one, only having the same name the previous object had (because the object would clearly not be the same). On problems of this sort, see Thomasson (1999), pp. 56-69.

[15] Radford (1975).

[16] Radford (1975), p. 75.

[17] Radford (1975), p. 68.

other negative emotions (fear, pity, sadness, etc.) in fictional but not real-life cases; and second, the fact that she does not even try to do something, to react somehow: when she reads about Anna throwing herself under the train, she has the awareness of her fictional status even while she is moved by what happens to her.[18,19]

Nevertheless, what Radford offers is not the solution to a mystery, rather it is an easy recognition of something strange about human nature: he does not explain how is it that we can be moved by what we perfectly know does not exist, but he just says that the fact of being moved by what we know does not exist is irrational and illogical.

How can we then explain the great and positive influence literary (and more generally artistic) works have on people? Why then do people read so much? Why do teachers try to transmit to children the passion for reading books, when this activity is nothing but dangerous for their intellectual development? In order to give an answer, we need to go deeper into the question.

Here what is involved is a paradox, a paradox concerning the emotional response to fiction. There is a paradox where two or more statements that are by themselves true, contradict each other. Radford's paradox is based on three premises all of which he claims to be true. The first claims that to have an emotional response to a story, one must believe that that story actually exists or has existed; the second that such beliefs are often lacking when we read stories; and the third that we clearly have emotional responses to works of fiction. Because these premises contradict each other Radford comes to the conclusion that emotional responses to fictional characters and events are irrational and incoherent.

To solve the paradox we therefore have to deny or to reformulate some (or at least one) of these premises. Pretence theorists, Kendall Walton[20] in the lead, robustly deny premise (3),[21] i.e. that we genuinely fear horror film entities or genuinely feel sad for the tragic end of Anna Karenina. Walton maintains that "It seems a principle of common sense, one which ought not to be abandoned if there is any reasonable alternative, that fear must be accompanied by, or must involve, a belief that one is in danger."[22] According to Walton, it is only *make-believedly true* that we fear horror film entities, feel sad for Anna Karenina, etc. In fact he claims that when, for instance, Emma cries for Anna's death, what she is *really* doing is participating in a play of make-believe: she would make *as if* there were a woman committing suicide and she would then feel a *quasi-emotion*, quasi-sadness, which clearly would not be considered as true. Such situations of make-believe would generate fictional truths, as for instance the one saying that *Emma is sad because of Anna's death* (in this case, of course, what is true is that *it is fictional that Emma is sad because of Anna's death*). Emma, while crying, is playing a game and hence hers are nothing but crocodile tears, fake tears[23].

He therefore admits that these characters move us in various ways, but regardless of what our bodies tell us, or what we might say, think, or believe we are feeling, what we actually experience in such cases are only quasi-emotions. Quasi-emotions differ from true ones primarily in that they are generated not by existence beliefs (such as the belief that the woman who is committing suicide really exists), but by second-order beliefs about what is fictionally the case according to the work in question.[24] This means that it is only make-believedly the case that we respond emotionally to fictional characters, and this happens because our beliefs concerning the fictional properties of those characters generate in us quasi-emotional states.

Many objections can be raised against Pretence Theory. The strongest is the one which focuses on the disanalogies with the paradigmatic cases of games of make-believe. While proposing his theory Walton makes explicit reference to the familiar games of make-believe played by children, in which globs of mud are taken to be pies, for example, or games in which a father, pretending to be a monster, pursues his child and attacks him.[25] One such disanalogy concerns our lack of choice: unlike children playing a game, while reading a novel we cannot control our emotional responses. For instance we cannot simply refuse to play and prevent ourselves from being affected - as kids can,[26] nor are we able to just turn our

---

[18] Radford (1975), p. 71.
[19] Radford (1977).
[20] Walton (1978).
[21] See also Kroon (1994).
[22] Walton (1978), p. 6-7.
[23] We can also find exasperations of positions of that sort, according to which, for instance, women's tears are always fake ones. Let us remember the famous expression used by Shakespeare in *Othello* (Act 4, Scene 1): "O devil, devil! If that the earth could teem with woman's tears, Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile. Out of my sight!".
[24] "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" (Walton 1978, p. 14).
[25] Walton (1978), p. 13.
[26] "[…] if it [the fear produced by horror films] were a pretend emotion, one would think that it could be engaged at will. I could elect to remain unmoved by The Exorcist; I could refuse to make believe I was horrified. But I don't

emotional responses on (think about those fictional texts which simply fail to generate their intended emotional response). Another disanalogy concentrates on the phenomenology of the two cases: it is simply not true to ordinary experience that consumers of fictions are in emotional states similar to those typical of make believe games when watching movies, reading books, and the like.[27,28]

Another possibility to solve the paradox is, following a classical line of thought, to deny premise (1), i.e. that existence beliefs are a necessary condition of emotional response. In fact we could reasonably maintain that although our emotional responses to actual characters require beliefs in their existence, there is no good reason to hold up this particular kind of emotional response as the model for understanding emotional response in general. What makes emotional response to fiction different from emotional response to real world characters is that, rather than having to believe in the actual existence of the entity in question, all we need do is to 'present' it to ourselves.[29] Existence beliefs are then rejected as a requirement for emotional response to fictions and the only kinds of beliefs required when engaging with fictions are beliefs in those properties characters have and that make them funny, stupid, frightening, pathetic, and so on. We will follow next this second possibility of solving the paradox,[30] mostly because it is compatible, as we will see later on, with Object Theory and its assumptions.

There is also a third way out of the paradox: to deny premise (2), suggesting a concept of weak (or partial) belief. In this case the emotions involved in response to fictional characters would not be the same kind of emotions that we experience in response to real life persons. To experience emotions for characters, many people need to have a sort of "willing suspension of disbelief". This phrase was coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge,[31] who maintains that creating a suspension of disbelief means creating a different kind of emotions from those experienced in real life. Nevertheless this third solution implies strong behavioural disanalogies between our emotional responses to real versus fictional characters.[32]

The solution we will follow is hence the second one, which claims that the emotional response to fiction is different (but quantitatively, i.e. in degree, and not qualitatively) from the emotional response to real world characters, and that all we need to do is to 'present' the fictional entities and the events they are involved in to ourselves, and to believe in some of the properties characterising what is presented. This means, first of all, that Emma's emotion for (a fictional character such as) Anna Karenina does have an object which is somehow presented to her and which causes her emotions. Emma believes in some properties Anna has – i.e. the property of being desperate and abandoned, the property of being rejected by her friends, and the property of falling under a train – and this is enough for Emma to feel sad for her.

An important point to consider here is the *judgmental element*: is it correct to say that if E cries for A, this means that E judges that A is miserable and sad? According to Object Theory sketched above, of course it is. In fact, as emerges from (FC), if the author attributes to the fictional entity X the property P, then it is true that X has P: that is why we are willing to admit that E recognizes this property as characterizing A and consequently judges that A has that property.

Our main interest here is ontological and not psychological: therefore we do not aim at explaining what happens in people's minds while reading and what the difference is (from a psychological point of

---

think that that was really an option for those, like myself, who were overwhelmedly struck by it" (Carroll 1990, p. 74).

[27] "[…] many theatre-goers and readers believe that they are actually upset, excited, amused, afraid, and even sexually aroused by the exploits of fictional characters. It seems altogether inappropriate in such cases to maintain that our theatre-goers merely make-believe that they are in these emotional states" (Novitz 1987, p. 241).

[28] Carroll strongly claims that "Walton's theory appears to throw out the phenomenology of the state [here 'art-horror'] for the sake of logic" (Carroll 1990, p. 74); in fact, in contrast with kids playing make-believe, when responding to works of fiction we do not seem to be absolutely aware of playing any games.

[29] Lamarque (1981) speaks about 'mental representation', Carroll (1990) about 'entertainment in thought' and Smith (1995) of 'imaginative proposal'.

[30] Radford powerfully rejects this second way out: "Lamarque claims that I am frightened by 'the thought' of the green slime. That is the 'real object' of my fear. But if it is the moving picture of the slime which frightens me (for myself), then my fear is irrational, etc., for I know that what frightens me cannot harm me. So the fact that we are frightened by fictional thoughts does not solve the problem but forms part of it" (Radford 1977, pp. 261-62).

[31] Coleridge coined the phrase 'Suspension of disbelief' in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817): "[...] it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Ch. XIV).

[32] Even when the existence beliefs are of the weak or partial variety, Walton argues that: "Charles has no doubts about whether he is in the presence of an actual slime. If he half believed, and were half afraid, we would expect him to have some inclination to act on his fear in the normal ways. Even a hesitant belief, a mere suspicion, that the slime is real would induce any normal person seriously to consider calling the police and warning his family. Charles gives no thought whatever to such courses of action" (Walton 1978, p. 7).

view), for instance for Emma, between reading about Anna Karenina's death or her cousin's death; what we mostly mean is to make clear that fictional entities are objects, that they are characterized by specific properties, and so that there is something, in this case some of the internal properties characterizing Anna Karenina, that Emma is directed to when she cries.

According to the paradox of fiction set forth by Radford, there is a problem with fictional emotions because in those situations there seems to be no object, no existing object. In his original article, he asks the following questions in order to stress the mysterious nature of our emotional responses to fiction: "We are saddened, but how can we be? What are we sad about? How can we feel genuinely and involuntarily sad, and weep, as we do knowing as we do that no one has suffered or died?"[33]

According to Object Theory, in contrast with Radford's point of view, being an object and being an existing object are not one and the same thing. Something – like Anna Karenina, Pegasus or even the round square – can be an object without being an existing one. From this perspective the paradox does not arise:

(1) Emma is sad about Anna's tragic end, but Emma knows perfectly well that Anna is a fictional character;
(2) To believe that there is an object which makes us sad is a necessary and sufficient condition for having emotions (i.e. the emotion has to be directed towards something);
(3) Emma does believe there is a fictional character whose name is Anna Karenina and whose end is tragic.

Object Theory therefore makes us identify an object (a fictional object, Anna Karenina) causing a specific emotion (sadness) and that is how the paradox disappears. Of course it is important to remember that there are many objects of many different kinds and clearly the corresponding emotions will be of many different kinds too. Clearly there is a big difference between:

(a) Emma cries for Anna Karenina' death

and

(b) Emma cries for her cousin's death,

nevertheless it is important to underline that the difference does not concern the *kind* of emotion involved here (false or not genuine the first one and true or genuine the second), but the *degree,* i.e. there is a quantitative difference between the two and not a qualitative one. Those objects with which we are more concerned (like Emma's cousin) will clearly cause stronger emotions than those caused by objects far from us. This distinction of degree makes clear also what happens in everyday situations:

(c) Emma is scared of Mr Hyde
(d) Emma is scared of Jack the Ripper
(e) Emma is scared of that man over there who is killing a dog
(f) Emma is scared of the man over there who is killing her cousin
(g) Emma is scared of the man who is pursuing her with a knife.

Now, let us suppose that Emma is a prostitute and lives in London in 1888. (c) tells us that Emma fears Mr Hyde, the main character of Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* published in 1886. She fears Mr Hyde because he is ugly and violent, and because he is responsible, among many crimes, for the brutal murder of Sir Danvers Carew. There is an object which is a fictional entity and Emma fears it (while reading, even a bit afterwards, but not for long). A quite different situation is the one depicted by (d), where we find Jack the Ripper, the popular name given to a serial killer who killed a number of prostitutes in the East End of London in 1888. The killings took place within a square mile and involved the districts of Whitechapel, Spitalfields, Aldgate, and the City of London proper. Emma fears Jack the Ripper because she is a prostitute working every night in the district of Aldgate: she is a potential victim. In this case her being scared would probably make her not go to work for some days, or even change her job: she fears Jack the Ripper and accordingly she behaves and reacts, avoiding danger as much as possible. (e) speaks about a danger at hand: a man killing a dog. Those who kill animals without any apparent reason are evil people, who simply gain pleasure from torturing and then killing other

[33] Radford (1975), p. 77.

beings. Emma fears that man because she knows he is unpleasant and she prefers not to have anything to do with him. (f) is almost the same as (e), though there is a significant difference: now it is Emma's cousin, and not a dog, that is being killed. This would of course strongly affect Emma's emotions, and as a reaction she would probably cry out and scream, or she would call the police and so on. The last example, (g), where Emma fears for her own life, clearly reflects the highest degree of emotional response to an object X which is the cause of that emotion.

Since there are objects of many different kinds it is therefore legitimate to suppose that the corresponding emotions will vary in degree. This means that, if we have an object (any object), then we have a true emotion whose degree will vary from person to person and from situation to situation.

A significant result which is important to emphasize here is that thanks to the definition of object given by Object Theory, the hypothesis of the irrationality of fictional emotions can be definitively abandoned and we can therefore give more convincing reasons regarding not only novels and stories, but artworks in general. While abandoning irrationality, we also put aside Walton's Make-Believe Theory, according to which nothing real, nothing serious, would be involved when we read or see fictional works, and the corresponding emotions would not therefore be true. The Theory we want to propose here is a realistic theory of fictional emotions, based on Object Theory, according to which the necessary and sufficient condition for an emotion to be true is to be directed towards an object. And an emotion directed towards a fictional object, clearly is directed towards an object.

Emma cries for Anna Karenina, so not for nothing, not for her mother whose destiny was similar to Anna's, not for an abstract entity: she cries for a woman who in a jealous rage commits suicide by throwing herself in the path of a train, she cries because she remembers how beautiful and passionate Anna and Vronsky were during the mazurka at the ball in Moscow, and in the end she cries because she understands how true were the opening lines of the novel, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way". The properties of the fictional entity mostly relevant here are the internal ones, and this happens because we are normally more emotionally involved with those properties we share – or we could somehow share – with them (being a woman, having an old and boring husband, meeting a fascinating man, being desperate because we have been threatened with never seeing our son again if we leave or misbehave…), than with those which distinguish us from them (being an abstract entity, being the character separating Tolstoy's first and second period, being as famous as Emma Bovary, being the symbol of a desperate passion, …).

5. Believing in Anna and believing in Queen Victoria

Emma cries for Anna's death. Suppose that Emma cries for her death for four months. In that case we would probably consider Emma foolish.
Emma cries for Queen Victoria's death. Suppose that Emma cries for her death for four months. In that case we would probably consider Emma a very strange person.
Emma cries for her cousin's death. Suppose that Emma cries for him for four months. In that case we would probably consider Emma perfectly normal.

What does that mean? It means that while it is legitimate to cry, or more generally to be sad, for Anna Karenina's death, but for a short moment, it is not seen as normal to cry for her as we would for a relative or a friend; it means also that it is normal to cry for Queen Victoria's death, since everybody in those years when Emma lived knew the Queen and was very interested in her vicissitudes, nevertheless it is a little strange to cry for her for such a long time; it means, in the end, that it is absolutely understandable to cry for one's cousin death, and it is 'logical' to cry for four months and even more.

These examples show different reasons for crying for something. Anna Karenina, Queen Victoria and Emma's cousin are all objects – and therefore they are all accepted in our ontology – even if they are not on the same metaphysical level (i.e. they are not objects of just one kind). Anna Karenina is a fictional object created by Lev Tolstoy and accepted by readers and critics. Queen Victoria and Emma's cousin are two existing (at that time) persons connected with Emma in different ways, i.e. they are different kinds of objects not only in themselves but for Emma too.

Therefore, believing in Anna Karenina or believing in her own cousin are for Emma both authentic acts of believing: she believes in both objects, even if she believes in objects of two different kinds. We can maintain this thanks to Object Theory and thanks to the definition of object given above. Nonetheless, as we have already noticed, we do not aim at explaining what the difference is (from a psychological point of view), in people's heads, between crying for a fictional object and crying for a real one, or at

giving arguments for those cases where there is an evident confusion between fictional and real objects.[34] We are perfectly aware that emotions are still a big problem, if not even a mystery, that psychology has not solved yet: they are a product of our brain, but they are something we fail to wholly understand and control the operations of. As a result of this lack of psychological understanding of why we have certain emotions in certain situations, there is no way of proving definitively that we can only feel emotions about events we think are real (we know from our own experience that we often have stronger emotional responses to characters in books and movies than to people we see on the evening news).

We have absolutely no intention here of supporting any specific psychological theory to the detriment of another. What we are doing is just proposing an ontological answer to the paradox of fiction based on Object Theory. The ontological interest which guides us here makes us face the paradox of fiction by using ontological tools. In order to have an emotion we need an object causing it (in fact, for someone who starts crying without any reason – and 'reason' here is a synonym for 'object' – we would not say "he is sad", but "he is depressed"). According to Object Theory an object is the correlate of a set of properties. Fictional entities derive both from the attribution of internal and of external properties. Being the correlate of sets of properties, fictional entities are objects. That is why we legitimately consider as true emotions (even if differing in the degree of intensity) the emotions we feel towards fictional literary entities, because there is a specific object – a fictional object – causing them.

This is our solution to the paradox. This makes clear why it is neither irrational nor absurd for Emma to cry for Anna Karenina's death. There is an object Emma is crying for and, from an ontological point of view, that is enough for us. We clearly need to explain the difference between crying for Anna Karenina and crying for an existent person, and we explain this by introducing a difference in degree of intensity between the two. It is precisely this difference of degree that makes us understand the legitimacy (even if not the truthfulness) of both these statements:

(*) Emma is crying for Anna Karenina
(**) Emma is crying for nothing.[35]

This second sentence means "Emma is crying for nothing existent", "There exists nothing Emma is crying for". This does not mean that problems concerning the emotions we feel towards fictional entities are nothing but problems deriving from the way we describe some events.[36] We can describe things in many different ways and this will clearly depend on our interest in a specific moment. If we want to make children stop screaming about the monster in the film, then probably all we need to say is "Come on, it doesn't exist", and we would be somehow right. Nonetheless this does not change our ontology: we have many objects of different kinds (existent, impossible, fictional, possible, past, …) and for an emotion to be a true one, it is enough to be directed towards an object. If we have an emotion and we have the object of the emotion, there is no problem at all from an ontological point of view, even if the object is a fictional one.

While maintaining Object Theory we therefore solve the paradox of fiction by dissolving it: there is no paradox because there is an object. Philosophers have nevertheless offered many different, and often conflicting solutions to this paradox, as we have seen above: some argue that our apparent emotional responses to fiction are only 'make-believe' or pretend, others (and it is the position maintained here) claim that existence beliefs are not necessary for having emotional responses (at least to fiction) in the first place, and still others hold that there is nothing especially problematic about our emotional responses to works of fiction, since what these works manage to do (when successful) is create in us the 'illusion' that the characters and situations depicted therein actually exist.

From our viewpoint what we have here does not qualify as a 'paradox' at all: our emotional responses to fiction are absolutely rational and normal, and the rationality of these emotions does not prevent them from being different, in degree, from those emotions we feel towards real, existent entities. That is why the tears Emma cries for Anna aren't crocodile tears: her weeping is not false or insincere, and what she displays are genuine emotions. This does not mean, of course, that to produce tears is always symptom of sadness, as the crocodile's example clearly shows (and differently from what legends

[34] A clear example of this is, for instance, the film based on Stephen King's novel *Misery*.
[35] Uttered when Emma is actually crying for Anna Karenina.
[36] As Neill (1991) remarks, we could describe Emma's sadness for Anna saying that she is not sad for a fictional person, rather she is sad for a real, existent person whom Anna reminds her of. The fictional entity would therefore be a pretext, an excuse to think about and to feel emotions for real persons and events.

on crocodiles tell us): crocodiles, in fact, can and do generate tears, even if they do not cry for remorse, sadness or something of that sort.[37]

References

Bakaoukas, M. (2003), *Nothing exists. A history of the philosophy of non-being*, Philadelphia, Xlibris Corporation.

Braun, D. (1993), "Empty Names", Noûs, 27, pp. 449-469.

Brock, S. (2002), "Fictionalism about Fictional Characters", Noûs, 36, pp. 1-21.

Caplan, B. (2004), "Creatures of Fiction, Myth and Imagination", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 41, pp. 331-337.

Carroll, N. (1990), *The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, New York, Routledge.

Chisholm, R.M. (1973), "Homeless objects", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 27, pp. 207-223.

Coleridge, S.T. (1817), *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, London, Rest Fenner.

Everett, A. (2000), "Referentialism and Empty Names", in Everett & Hofweber [eds.] (2000), pp. 37-60.

– & Hofweber, Thomas [eds.] (2000), *Empty Names, Fiction and the Puzzles of Non-Existence*, Stanford, CSLI Publications.

Kripke, S. (1973), *The John Locke Lectures 1973*, unpublished typescript.

Kroon, F. (1992), "Was Meinong Only Pretending?", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* 52, pp. 499-527.

– (1994), "Make-Believe and Fictional Reference", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 42, pp. 207-214.

– (2003), "Quantified Negative Existentials", *Dialectica*, 57, pp. 149-164.

Lamarque, P. (1981), "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 21, pp. 291-304.

Meinong, A. (1902), *Ueber Annahmen*, Leipzig, J.A. Barth (= «Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane», Ergänzungsband 2).

– (1904), *Über Gegenstandstheorie*, in *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*, hrsg. von A. Meinong, Leipzig, J.A. Barth, pp. 1-50; in *GA* II, pp. 481-530.

– (1910), *Über Annahmen*, Zweite, umgearbeitete Auflage, Leipzig, J.A. Barth; in *GA* IV, pp. 1-389, pp. 517-535.

– (1917), "Über emotionale Präsentation", *Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien. Phil.-hist. Klasse, Sitzungsberichte*, CLXXXIII, 2. Abh.; in *GA* III, pp. 283-476.

– (1968-1978), *Alexius Meinong Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. von R. Haller und R. Kindinger gemeinsam mit R.M. Chisholm, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Graz.

Nef, F. (1998), *L'objet quelconque. Recherches sur l'ontologie de l'objet*, Paris, Vrin.

Neill, A. (1991), "Fear, Fiction and Make-Believe", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49, pp. 47-56.

Novitz, D. (1987), *Knowledge, Fiction and Imagination*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.

Parsons, T. (1980), *Nonexistent Objects*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press.

Radford, C. (1975), "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 49, pp. 67-80.

– (1977), "Tears and Fiction", *Philosophy*, 52, pp. 208-213.

Rapaport, W. J. (1978), "Meinongian Theories and a Russellian Paradox", *Noûs*, 12, pp. 153-180.

– (1985-86), "Non-Existent Objects and Epistemological Ontology", *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 25-26, pp. 61-95.

Raspa, V. [ed.] (2002), *Alexius Meinong. Teoria dell'oggetto*, Trieste, Edizioni Parnaso.

Routley, R. (1980), *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond*, Canberra, Australian National University.

Russell, B. (1903), *The Principles of Mathematics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

– (1905/1973), "On Denoting", *Mind*, n. s. XIV, 479-493; now in Russell (1973), pp. 103-119.

– (1973), *Essays in Analysis*, ed. by D. Lackey, London, Allen and Unwin.

Salmon, N. (1999), "Nonexistence", *Noûs*, 32, pp. 277-319.

Schiffer, S. (1996), "Language-Created Language-Independent Entities", *Philosophical Topics,* 24, pp. 149-167.

Searle, J. R. (1979), "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse", in P.A. French *et al.* [eds.] *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, pp. 233-243.

Smith, M. (1995), "Film Spectatorship and the Institution of Fiction", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 53, pp. 113-27.

Taylor, K. A. (2000), "Emptiness without Compromise", in Everett & Hofweber [eds.] (2000), pp. 17-36.

Thomasson, A. L. (1999), *Fiction and Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Walton, K. (1978), "Fearing Fictions", *Journal of Philosophy*, 75, pp. 5-27.

– (2003), "Restricted Quantification, Negative Existentials, and Fiction", *Dialectica*, 57, pp. 239-242.

Zalta, E. N. (1983), *Abstract Objects. An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics*, Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, Reidel.

[37] Actually crocodile tears, exactly like ours, are products of the lachrymal glands, but they only help to clean the eye, lubricate the passage of the nictitating membrane across the eye's surface, and probably also help to reduce bacterial growth while the crocodile's eyes begin to dry out of water.