

# varia

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WHO'S AFRAID OF FICTIONAL CHARACTERS<sup>1</sup>?

## *Abstract*

What happens us emotionally when we read a work of fiction? According to some philosophers our emotional engagement with fiction gives rise to a paradox and involves either irrationality or participation in a game of make believe. I argue that an Object Theory in a meinongian style, by supporting a realistic perspective on fictional emotions, is able to dissolve the paradox of fiction by providing a positive ontological account of fictional entities (and the properties characterizing them).

## I.

Some philosophers think that it is difficult to explain why we can be scared by fictional characters such as Mr. Hyde. Fictional characters are, needless to say, *fictional*, they are nothing but the product of a writer's imagination, and therefore there seems to be nothing to be afraid of. Nonetheless we (as grown-up readers, not kids any more) scream, tremble and cry. Is ours simply a childish behavior? Are we pretending in responding this way? Are we simply irrational?

I think that none of these questions is the right one. Let's start from the fact that we – differently from little kids (often ontologically and emotionally non reliable) hearing for the first time the tale of the tree little pigs and the big bad

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wolf – perfectly know these novels speak about fictional characters<sup>2</sup> and we feel absolutely serious and rational in responding the way we do (screaming, trembling, and crying). Take the Carew murder case as described by Stevenson in his *Strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*:

NEARLY a year later, in the month of October, 18 –, London was startled by a crime of singular ferocity and rendered all the more notable by the high position of the victim. The details were few and startling. A maid servant living alone in a house not far from the river, had gone up-stairs to bed about eleven. Although a fog rolled over the city in the small hours, the early part of the night was cloudless, and the lane, which the maid's window overlooked, was brilliantly lit by the full moon. It seems she was romantically given, for she sat down upon her box, which stood immediately under the window, and fell into a dream of musing. Never (she used to say, with streaming tears, when she narrated that experience), never had she felt more at peace with all men or thought more kindly of the world. And as she so sat she became aware of an aged and beautiful gentleman with white hair, drawing near along the lane; and advancing to meet him, another and very small gentleman, to whom at first she paid less attention. When they had come within speech (which was just under the maid's eyes) the older man bowed and accosted the other with a very pretty manner of politeness. It did not seem as if the subject of his address were of great importance; indeed, from his pointing, it sometimes appeared as if he were only inquiring his way; but the moon shone on his face as he spoke, and the girl was pleased to watch it, it seemed to breathe such an innocent and old-world kindness of disposition, yet with something high too, as of a well-founded self-content. Presently her eye wandered to the other, and she was surprised to recognise in him a certain Mr. Hyde, who had once visited her master and for whom she had conceived a dislike. He had in his hand a heavy cane, with which he was trifling; but he answered never a word, and seemed to listen with an ill-contained impatience. And then all of a sudden he broke out in a great flame of anger, stamping with his foot, brandishing the cane, and carrying on (as the maid described it) like a madman. The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr. Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted. It was two o'clock when she came to herself and called for the police. The murderer was gone long ago; but there lay his victim in the middle of the lane, incredibly mangled. The stick with which the deed had been done, although it was of some rare and very tough and heavy wood, had broken in the middle under the stress of this insensate cruelty; and one splintered half had rolled in the neighbouring gutter – the other, without doubt, had been carried away by the murderer. A purse and a gold watch were found upon the victim: but no cards or papers, except a sealed and stamped

<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will exclusively focus on fictional characters together with our emotional reaction to them. Nonetheless, as Stacie Friend (2003) underlines, the same problems arise when the individuals represented in fiction are real.

envelope, which he had been probably carrying to the post, and which bore the name and address of Mr. Utterson<sup>3</sup>.

Normally, this is a terrifying moment for readers and some philosophers agree that we have to do with a philosophical paradox, the *paradox of fiction*. The paradox arises because we know perfectly well that a fictional character like Mr. Hyde does not exist and nevertheless we are frightened by him. How can we be scared by something that does not exist (because being afraid of x implies that x frightens me, and something that we know does not exist does not seem to “have to power” to *make me* feel frightened)? Here is the paradox<sup>4</sup>:

- (P1) We are afraid of Mr. Hyde and we know Mr. Hyde is a fictional character;
- (P2) Believing in the existence of x is necessary for having certain emotions towards x;<sup>5</sup>
- (P3) We do not believe in the existence of fictional characters.

How can we be frightened by Hyde’s cruelty if we are aware of his being a fictional entity? My direct answer is that this happens because the fictional entity in question exhibits some *emotion-inducing properties* specific to the emotions we feel. Let’s see how Object Theory not only shows how fictional entities may exhibit, or better, have, properties, but also how this could help dissolving the paradox of fiction.

## II.

Object Theory considers objects in their absolute generality<sup>6</sup>, i.e. objects defined only by the set of properties whose object-correlates they are<sup>7</sup> and hence

<sup>3</sup> Stevenson (2003 [1886]): 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> Actually a distinction should be made between the descriptive and the normative versions of the paradox, i.e., how we do respond to fiction vs. how we ought to respond to it. In what follows I will mostly concentrate on the descriptive version of it.

<sup>5</sup> As Stecker (2011) correctly underlines, the paradox was formulated during the greatest time of the cognitive theory of the emotions when there was a strong commitment to (P2). He also emphasizes that nowadays virtually no one accepts something like (P2). Hence, we could say together with him, since to solve the paradox we have to refuse one of the three aforementioned inconsistent assumptions, then it should appear quite easy to reject (P2). This is the way to solve the paradox I will follow in the present paper, but trying in the meantime to advance a different theoretical background from the ones mostly present in the debate, in order to give a new possibility to understand what happens when we emotionally respond to fiction, in particular, the distinctive role that fictional entities, if admitted from an ontological point of view, have in this context.

<sup>6</sup> For an historical sketch on Object Theory see Nef (1998) and Bakaoukas (2003). The most famous Object Theory undoubtedly is Meinong’s (1904).

<sup>7</sup> According to this definition everything which has at least one property is an object (Parsons

independently from their possibly also being for someone in some way objects of a particular kind. Actually, Object Theory takes into account all objects, chairs as well as unicorns, numbers as well as round squares, existent objects as well as nonexistent ones; everything which has at least one property is an object: everything which is not a mere nothing is something. It does not matter if 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 Object Theory itself, but to more specific sciences: zoology will of course study cats, but surely not winged horses, as geometry will analyze the characteristics of the triangle and not those of the round square. This is because zoology – unlike Object Theory<sup>8</sup> – studies only what exists, and geometry successfully analyses possible geometrical forms and not impossible or contradictory ones. Hence, from this 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 existence.

Once we have an object corresponding to a set of properties, we may of course wonder what kind of object it is: is it an existing, a fictional or an imaginary object? Conforming the question specifically to Mr. Hyde<sup>9</sup>, let's see what kind of object it is: it's a fictional literary entity created by Robert Louis Stevenson and accepted (i.e. recognized as such) by a community of readers and critics<sup>10</sup>.

1980) and the criterion for distinguishing what is an object from what is not, is the following: Pegasus is an object because the name "Pegasus" stands for something which corresponds to a certain set of properties ("being a winged horse", "being Medusa's and Poseidon's son", "being a mythological animal"), while on the contrary wrtgfh is not an object, because "wrtgfh" does not stand for anything. On the problems a criterion of this sort may raise, see Salmon (1999), in particular pp. 304-308, Kroon (2003), especially pp. 155-157, and Caplan (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Hence, *pace* Russell (1919), logic and philosophy, as far as Object Theory is concerned, can admit objects that zoology rejects (because logic and philosophy, differently from zoology, aren't concerned only with the real world).

<sup>9</sup> Of course, as Stevenson's title says, Mr. Hyde is just one side (actually the evil one) of the story, because Dr. Jeekyll needs to be considered too. Actually, Dr. Jeekyll was there much time before Mr. Hyde appeared. One could be interested in knowing how many fictional characters are there: one and a same character taking different forms at different points in the story or two different characters taking their own distinctive characteristics? According to Object theory there is just one object constituted by the set of properties used by Stevenson to make it up: there is just one person, Dr. Jeekyll, showing two personalities, the one apparently good and the other totally evil named "Mr. Hyde". Moreover, this is exactly what Stevenson wants us understand from his novella; that there is a friendly and sociable person whose name is "Dr. Jeekyll" transforming in his dark side, i.e. in Mr. Hyde, by drinking a potion (that's the key of the story). Thanks to Peter Lamarque for having made me think on questions of identity concerning this specific character.

<sup>10</sup> As Thomasson (1999) suggests (even if the *meinongian* position here defended is not shared by Thomasson's view).

Stevenson has generated Mr. Hyde making it be. The author is free to stipulate what properties a character is to have without ever being wrong (this is the essential creative freedom storytellers typically enjoy) and therefore he is the maximal authority<sup>11</sup> for what concerns his *creature* and the properties characterizing it.

### III.

We have now elements enough to go back to the paradox. The paradox arises when we read Carew's murder and we are frightened, regardless of his non-existing.

Colin Radford<sup>12</sup>, re-opening in the mid-seventies of the last century the philosophical debate on fictional emotions, maintains that our apparent ability to respond emotionally to fictional characters and events is «irrational, incoherent, and inconsistent»<sup>13</sup>. 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 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»<sup>14</sup>. Clearly what Radford here means to say is that we can only be *rationaly* 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 *rationaly* 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 with fiction, we somehow forget that what we are reading is a fictional work and therefore that it is not real: we could read about Mr. Hyde's cruelty temporarily losing our awareness of its fictional status. To an objection of this kind, Radford would answer by offering two different considerations. First, if we really forgot that what we were reading was not real, then we would not feel any of the various forms of pleasure that often accompany

<sup>11</sup> Barbero (2005). For a position casting doubt on the principle according to which the author has the freedom of poetic license see Weatherson (2004) and the solution he proposes to the alethic puzzle.

<sup>12</sup> Radford (1975).

<sup>13</sup> Ivi: 75.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi: 68.

negative emotions in fictional but not in real-life cases. Second, the fact that we do not even try to do something, to react somehow: when we read about Carew's murder, we have the awareness of its fictional status even while we are scared<sup>15, 16</sup>. Nevertheless Radford does not offer a solution to the paradox, rather he stresses something strange concerning human nature; i.e. he does not explain how is it that we can be moved or frightened by what we perfectly know does not exist, all he says is that the fact of being afraid of what we know does not exist is irrational and illogical. Nothing more.

But let's consider the paradox again. The paradox arises because each of these statements seems to be plausible, but since when taken together they are inconsistent, at least one of them must be false. The first claims that we have genuine emotional responses to fictional characters and situations; the second that we experience genuine emotions only for objects we believe exist; and the third that we do not believe in the existence of fictional objects and situations. From the inconsistency of these statements Radford concludes that emotional responses to fictional characters and events are irrational and incoherent<sup>17</sup>.

To solve the paradox we therefore need to deny or reformulate some (at least one) of the aforementioned statements. Pretence theorists, Kendall Walton<sup>18</sup> in the lead, robustly deny the first one (P1)<sup>19</sup>, i.e. that we are *genuinely* afraid of Mr. Hyde. 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»<sup>20</sup>. According to Walton, it is only *make-believedly true* that we are scared by Mr. Hyde, in fact he claims that what we are *really* doing is participating in a game of make-believe: we would make *as if* there were a villain committing murder and we would then feel a *quasi-emotion*, quasi-fear, which clearly would not be considered as true. Such situations of make-believe would generate fictional truths, as for instance the one saying that *We are frightened because of Mr. Hyde's cruelty*. While scared, we are playing a game and hence even if experiencing something essentially related to fear, actually we do not experience full-fledged fear. Walton's solution is quite hard to be accepted, because it just seems like a fact that people experience real, genuine emotions towards fictional characters,

<sup>15</sup> Ivi: 71.

<sup>16</sup> Radford (1977).

<sup>17</sup> I think that the paradox, as set forth by Radford, implies a strong misunderstanding of our involvement with fiction. For a detailed analysis of Radford's position and a list of arguments against it, Barbero (2013).

<sup>18</sup> Walton (1978).

<sup>19</sup> See also Kroon (1994).

<sup>20</sup> Walton (1978: 6-7).

whereas according to him, what seems fear is only “quasi-fear” (incidentally, following Walton’s way of solving the paradox we would totally lose the domain of aesthetic emotions, because they would all be non-genuine). Walton’s account is based on the idea that quasi-emotions differ from true ones primarily in that they are generated not by existence beliefs (such as the belief that the man who is committing a murder really exists), but by second-order beliefs about what is fictionally the case according to the work in question<sup>21</sup>. This means that it is only make-believedly the case that we respond emotionally to fictional characters, 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 focusing on the *differences* between these cases (e.g. Charles *fearing* the Green Slime) and 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<sup>22</sup>. One such difference concerns our lack of choice: unlike children playing a game, while reading a novel we cannot decide which will be our emotional reaction: for instance we cannot simply refuse to *play* and prevent ourselves from being affected, as kids when playing make-believe games can<sup>23</sup>, nor we are able just to turn our emotional responses on (think about those fictional texts which simply fail to generate their intended emotional effect). Another difference 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<sup>24, 25</sup>. The experience of reading and enjoying literature isn’t a

<sup>21</sup> «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: 14).

<sup>22</sup> Walton (1978: 13).

<sup>23</sup> «[...] 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 think that that was really an option for those, like myself, who were overwhelmingly struck by it» (Carroll 1990: 74).

<sup>24</sup> «[...] 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: 241).

<sup>25</sup> 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: 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.

sort of adult game we take part in<sup>26</sup>: actually it is a totally different experience, more deep and complex than *classical adult games are*.

Another possibility to solve the paradox is, following a classical line of thought, to deny the second statement (P2), i.e. that existence beliefs are a necessary condition for genuine emotional responses. It is in fact reasonable to 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 reaction as the absolute model for understanding emotional response in general<sup>27</sup>. What makes the emotions we feel towards fiction different from the ones we feel for real world individuals is that, rather than having to believe in the actual existence of the entity producing in us such an effect, all we need do is to “present” it to ourselves<sup>28</sup> believing that it is something and not a mere nothing. Hence the only kind of beliefs we need have when engaging with fictions would be beliefs in those properties characters have and that make them funny, stupid, frightening, pathetic, and so on. In the next section I will pursue this second way of solving the paradox<sup>29</sup> which is compatible with Object Theory and its assumptions.

We could also go through a different way out to the paradox<sup>30</sup>, i.e. denying statement (P3) and suggesting a concept of *weak* (or half, partial) belief maintaining that, for the sake of the literary experience, we somehow “suspend the disbelief”<sup>31</sup> setting aside what we know and coming to believe that the scenes we are reading about are real. Evidently this is a quite problematic solution,

<sup>26</sup> For the idea that emotional engagement with art is not best thought at as a game, see also Levinson (1996: 287-307).

<sup>27</sup> As Stecker (2011) extensively explains.

<sup>28</sup> Lamarque (1981) speaks about “mental representation”, Carroll (1990) about “entertainment in thought” and Smith (1995) of “imaginative proposal”.

<sup>29</sup> 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: 261-262).

<sup>30</sup> Levinson (1997: 22-27) outlines seven different solutions to the paradox: the non-intentionalist solution, the suspension-of-disbelief solution, the surrogate-object solution, the antijudgmentalist solution, the surrogate-belief solution, the irrationalist solution and the make-believe, or imaginary, solution. But for my purposes the two sketched here are enough in order to explain how Object Theory could easily dissolve the paradox of fiction.

<sup>31</sup> 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).



since a basic assumption in the debate is that people without any ontological confusion are involved, i.e. people never losing sight of the fact that what they are reading is fictional and therefore never considering – not even for a while – fictional entities as real ones. When reading fiction we are perfectly aware of *what* we are reading, as our behavior clearly shows: we know it's all fiction and no “half beliefs” are at stake<sup>32</sup>. That's why rejecting (P3) does not seem a plausible move.

#### IV.

The solution I find most interesting is the one questioning if existence beliefs are a necessary condition for genuine emotional responses whose most convincing example is the one offered by what has been labeled<sup>33</sup> “Thought Theory” (TT henceforth). TT<sup>34</sup> maintains that while reading fiction we do experience *real emotions* which are caused by *thoughts* brought to our mind by the novel. Therefore the paradox may be solved by modifying (P2) with the claim that vivid imagining can be a good substitute for belief: actually, it seems enough to bring to our mind fictional characters and events to be genuinely frightened of them. But pay attention: we are frightened *of* (interpreted intentionally) Mr. Hyde and not *by* (understood causally) him, i.e. the objects of our emotion are thoughts (instead of non-existent individuals). The main point of this theory is thus that bringing a thought to mind does not mean to *believe* a proposition to be true, but simply to *entertain* the thought. Distinguishing between the *real* object of our fear (missing in the case of Mr. Hyde since he does not exist: that's why we can not be frightened *by* him) and the *intentional* object (what we are afraid *of*, i.e. Hyde-fear), TT is successful in capturing the object of our emotion while we read Stevenson's novel (without being compelled to admit emotions caused by nonexistents). Nevertheless one could object<sup>35</sup> that, strictly speaking, according to this account there's actually no object of the emotion: if we are genuinely afraid when reading Stevenson's novel, what are we afraid of? Supporters of TT could of course reply that there is an imagined object of the fear and that speaking about the object of the fear is to speak about an

<sup>32</sup>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: 7).

<sup>33</sup>By Carroll (1990).

<sup>34</sup>Lamarque (1981).

<sup>35</sup>As, for instance, Radford (1977) does, cfr. here n. 25.

intentional characterization of that fear. Connected to this answer type is to accept that, strictly speaking, although it is true that while reading the novel we fear Mr. Hyde, *there is nothing* such that we fear it (i.e. *de re* there is nothing we are afraid of). Hence, according to TT we do not need to suppose that the natural candidate for the object of fear, i.e. Mr. Hyde in the novel, has any kind of reality, nor we do have to suppose that we are frightened of a thought. In our fear *images* of Mr. Hyde and *thoughts* about him are real, in fact we are frightened *by* them.

TT satisfactorily solves the paradox of fiction by giving a persuasive answer explaining what happens to the reader who feels fear while reading Stevenson's novel. But is this enough in order to provide an explanation considering all the elements at stake in the paradox of fiction? I think not. In fact, while clearly TT gives a solution *parte subjecti* – explaining what happens to the reader – it seems to me that it still needs a satisfactory ontological completion *parte objecti*. We may be, and actually are, frightened by thought and images but – and here is the ontological question, *what are they thoughts and images of?* The inevitability of the ontological question can not be avoided any more<sup>36</sup>.

V.

We are frightened while reading Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde*. Why does this happen? Because we are frightened by thought and images, says TT. But why those thoughts and images make us feel frightened? Because there is something we believe to be dangerous, i.e. something exhibiting, among the others, fear-inducing properties<sup>37</sup>. This something, Mr. Hyde,

<sup>36</sup> In order to properly understand this question we need underline that “by” is always causally understood (i.e. what produces or causes the emotions) whereas “of” is intentionally interpreted (specifying towards what are directed our emotions). Radford's 1977 critique of TT clearly is based on the collapsing of the intentional element on the causal one (i.e. the “of” on the “by”), kept separate in Lamarque's position. Nevertheless one could object: is that really an ontological question? Or, by using different words, is it really advantageous to confer to what TT would simply accept as an intentional object an ontological status? As I will extensively explain next, my argument in favor of an ontological commitment towards our (fictional) objects of fear (or other emotions as well) derives from three thesis: 1) TT maintains that emotions we feel while reading fiction are caused by thoughts; 2) According to Brentano (1874) thoughts necessarily have intentional objects; 3) Following Meinong (1904) there are good reasons for assuming that intentional objects are actual and mind-independent (even if not always existing) objects. This latter thesis is based on the meinongian distinction between *being* and *existing*. Against such a position the classical *parsimony objection* – as the one raised for instance by Crane 2013 – would be: why thesis 1) and 2) (i.e. the phenomenological ones) are not enough? Why should we need also thesis 3)? I will try to answer objections of that kind in what follows.

<sup>37</sup> I here follow Parsons (1980) in defining fictional entities as constituted by sets of properties. Fear-inducing properties are among the properties corresponding to fictional entities.

does not exist, we know it, but even so he is characterized by some properties. According to the realistic position I here maintain, essentially based on Object Theory<sup>38</sup> (OT henceforth), all we need in order to have a genuine emotional response is to believe in the properties characterizing specific fictional entities and events (that's why *parte objecti* is now at stake, because the paradox of fiction is tackled by pointing to the objects involved). Since we believe Mr. Hyde being characterized by some properties – those properties used by the author to make this character up, i.e. the property of being like some damned Juggernaut, the property of being hardly human, and the property of being pure evil, ecc. – , we have good reasons to be scared by him<sup>39</sup>.

My main concern here is on the object (feared) together with its properties and not on the subject (feeling fear): that's why I am not interested in explaining what happens in people's minds while they read novels or what is the difference between reading about Mr. Hyde's cruelty rather than Charles Manson's cruelty. What I mostly mean here is to point out that fictional entities are objects, that they are characterized by specific properties, and hence that *there is* (but, of course, does not exist) something – in this case some properties characterizing Mr. Hyde – I am directed to when I'm afraid of Mr. Hyde.

The necessary condition for an emotion to be genuine is to be directed towards an object. Here there is a quite important difference between TT and OT: whereas according to TT we do experience real emotions like fear and pity in responding to fiction and these emotions are seen as caused by thoughts brought to our mind by the fiction, according to OT to fear genuinely Mr. Hyde we just need believe that Mr. Hyde is characterized by fear-inducing properties. Actually this difference between TT and OT does not lead to a contraposition, because it is nothing but two different ways of describing the same: believing too may be considered as a thought, and it is precisely that thought brought to out mind by the fiction that causes the corresponding emotions.

On the one hand, 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, i.e. no existing object. In his original article, he asks: «We are saddened, but how can we be? What are we sad about? How can we feel

<sup>38</sup> Meinong (1904).

<sup>39</sup> When responding emotionally to something, our emotions always have a formal object which is a property implicitly ascribed by the emotion to its target, in virtue of which the emotion can be seen as intelligible. For example, my fear of a dog construes a number of the dog's features (its salivating maw, its ferocious bark, its brutality) as being frightening, and it is exactly my perception of the dog as frightening that makes my emotion fear, rather than some other emotion. The formal object associated with a given emotion is essential to the definition of that particular emotion. This is in part what allows us to speak of emotions being appropriate or inappropriate (and henceforth concerns the normative side of the question). If the dog obstructing my path is a stuffed dog, my fear is mistaken: the target of my fear fails to fit fear's formal object.

genuinely and involuntarily sad, and weep, as we do knowing as we do that no one has suffered or died?»<sup>40</sup>. On the other hand, and in contrast with Radford's point of view, OT maintains that being an *object* and being an *existing object* are not one and the same thing: something – like Mr. Hyde, Pegasus or even the round square – can be an object without being an existing one. From this perspective the paradox does not arise:

(S1) We are afraid of Mr. Hyde and we know that Mr. Hyde is a fictional character (and therefore that he *does not exist*);

(S2) To believe that *there is* (and not that *there exists*) an object exhibiting some of the *emotion-inducing properties* specific to fear is a necessary and sufficient condition for being frightened by it (i.e. the emotion has to be directed towards something characterized by some properties)<sup>41</sup>;

(S3) We do believe that *there are* fictional characters exhibiting emotion-inducing properties (e.g. *there is* a fictional character whose name is Mr. Hyde and who is frightening).

Distinguishing between *being* and *existing*, Object Theory makes it possible to identify an object (a fictional object, Mr. Hyde) causing a specific emotion (fear), even if that object does not exist. That is precisely the way the paradox disappears. Therefore the hypothesis of irrationality together with the hypothesis of make-believe can definitively be abandoned thanks to a realistic theory of fictional emotions according to which the necessary and sufficient condition for an emotion to be genuine and rational is to be directed towards an object exhibiting some of the emotion-inducing properties. And an emotion directed

<sup>40</sup> Radford (1975): 77.

<sup>41</sup> One could object that (S2) is too demanding: on the one hand, against the necessary condition, one could object that animals surely feel emotions such as fear, even if we can not take for granted that they have beliefs, even more so beliefs on fear-inducing properties; on the other, one could maintain, against the sufficient condition, that someone could believe that something has fear-inducing properties not feeling yet fear because he is totally insensitive or because he is particularly brave. I would like to thank Enrico Terrone for having made me reflect on both points. To such objections a possible reply is that the necessary condition still works because (S2) is intended to solve a paradox pertaining exclusively to humans: animals do not read fiction, do not have beliefs concerning fictional entities and do not feel anything while following Hyde's evil deeds or Anna Karenina's misfortunes. Also the sufficient condition still works: insensitive people can be put aside (insensitive people have problems with emotions and here we are looking for a convincing solution concerning normal people, then excluding both insensitive and excessively impressionable ones); for what concerns courageous people, in that case we wouldn't say that they don't feel fear, but simply that they are very good in holding back what they feel (otherwise they wouldn't be brave at all!).

towards a fictional object clearly is directed towards an object exhibiting some of the emotion-inducing properties.

A natural objection to (S3) could be: but why do we have to admit in our ontology fictional entities even if they do not exist? Following Brentano<sup>42</sup> we could in fact try to solve the paradox of fiction simply saying that every emotional state involves an intentional object and that some, but not all, of these intentional objects exist (incidentally, this was exactly TT's deflationary way of treating *ficta*). Subsequently, following Crane<sup>43</sup>, we could maintain that properties and relations characteristic of existent objects are not one and the same with the properties typical of nonexistent ones: while the former are substantial or natural (i.e. existence entailing) properties, the latter are non-substantial and pleonastic ones<sup>44</sup> (clearly not existence entailing). Under this conception being, for instance, a fictional evil person committing murders is instantiated by Mr. Hyde. Crane explains the difference between pleonastic and substantial properties in terms of representation-dependence maintaining that something couldn't be a fictional evil person unless it was represented as such in a story. Since nonexistent objects can only instantiate pleonastic properties and since pleonastic properties are representation-dependent, Crane concludes<sup>45</sup> that intentional objects are enough and therefore that we shouldn't embrace meinongian views and defend any principle of characterization<sup>46</sup> whatsoever. The objection undoubtedly is a strong one, nevertheless it can be answered as follows<sup>47</sup>. The distinction between pleonastic and non-pleonastic properties based on representation-dependence actually works only as far as fictional entities are *genetically* considered, i.e. considered during the process of creation. Why is Mr. Hyde a fictional frightening and evil person? Because he is represented as such in the *Strange Case of Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde* by Stevenson. And this is true when we speak about the creation of Mr. Hyde. But once the novel has been published Mr. Hyde does not depend representationally any more on Stevenson's story, he becomes an autonomous and ontologically independent entity (in fact we could loose any connection to the original novel without losing Mr. Hyde). What it is important to underline here is that the analysis of the creation process, after having – *via* the pleonastic properties – acknowledged a specific object, i.e. Mr. Hyde, as an intentional nonexistent object, has to go back to the novel itself and individuate in the author's use of language the means by which Mr.

<sup>42</sup> Brentano (1874).

<sup>43</sup> Crane (2013).

<sup>44</sup> Schiffer (1996).

<sup>45</sup> Crane (2013), § 1.4, § 3.3, § 4.1-3.

<sup>46</sup> According to Meinong (1904) nonexistent objects do actually have all the properties they are represented as having.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. Barbero (2005), Sec. 2, particularly pp. 91-94.

Hyde was created or characterized as some damned Juggernaut, hardly human, being pure evil, and so on. The author's use of language thus sets in motion the constitution and the fabrication of the fictional entity within the novel. We are therefore ontologically committed to an object first by what Schiffer<sup>48</sup> calls the *hypostatizing use* of language (the one introducing pleonastic properties) and secondly by the *characterizing use*<sup>49</sup> (the one taking place when the hypostatizing use of language has come to an end and the character is considered as actually characterized by the properties the author has attributed to it). Hence Mr. Hyde – not genetically but structurally speaking – actually has substantial properties, although not existence-entailing (since Mr. Hyde is not an existing object) but being-entailing.

We mustn't *believe* in the existence of Mr. Hyde in order to be afraid of him and, to explain why we do not even try to intervene in what happens (for instance preventing him from murdering Sir Denver Carew), it is enough to *disbelieve* in his *existence* while believing, in the meantime, in its *being*. In fact what we just believe in is the being of an object, a fictional object, characterized by specific properties. Hence even when we know that the object of our fear is non-existent we can be scared by it<sup>50</sup>. That genuine emotions can be generated in us by non-existing persons (as fictional characters are) should not surprise: don't we register genuine feelings for dead persons, past and future situations, dreams and daydreams<sup>51</sup>? Actually we do not need believing in the existence of something in order to be involved with it: I can cry for a never-born son and I can fear a possible burglar killer. Are they existing entities? Surely not. But they are *something*, at least those objects my emotions are focused on. Hence believing that there is a non-existent object with fear-inducing properties is enough for experiencing vivid and powerful emotions.

<sup>48</sup> Schiffer (1996).

<sup>49</sup> This is not by Schiffer, cfr. Barbero (2005) pp. 91 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Lamarque, during his commentary to a previous version of this paper, asked «But are we really afraid of Mr. Hyde?» arguing that Hyde might be a frightening character in some respects but he – differently from Walton's slime coming towards us – actually presents no danger to us. According to his view at best we fear what Mr. Hyde might do to others (but not to us), that's why, strictly speaking, we wouldn't be *really* afraid of him (maybe we could be defined as disturbed by the idea that there is such a dangerous figure roaming the streets, but nothing more). I am not sure that things really go this way. For instance, as Damasio & others 1991 explicitly suggest, it is not a condition of our feeling genuine and rational emotions towards someone (or something) that we believe his being real (i.e. non-fictional) and that he can have some real causal power *on us* – besides that of causing emotional responses. Empathy and practical reasoning are in fact based on the idea that emotions are object-oriented even when the object is a nonexistent one and that they are activated even when objects causing them can not harm us in any way.

<sup>51</sup> For the idea that we appropriately feel emotions for many kind of things, only some of them existing before us, see Szabó Gendler and Kovakovich (2006); Moran (1994); Zemach (1997: 189-214).

It is now clear how the paradox of fiction disappears: when we are afraid of Mr. Hyde we are neither feeling quasi-fear nor we are irrational; on the contrary we are experiencing genuine and rational fear. Nonetheless, even if we are authentically scared, we do not try to call the police or stop him<sup>52</sup>, and this because we perfectly know that he is a fictional character and therefore that we can not have a causal power on him (probably Stevenson could have had, but that is another matter) even if we know that he can have causal efficacy towards us. Needless to say, our relationship with fictional entities is totally *asymmetrical*: they cause emotional responses in us being in the meantime absolutely impenetrable to any action, feeling or thought coming from us (that's the way fiction works!).

It is true that the emoter disbelieves in any *real* reference of his feelings, yet he believes his emotions being referred to *fictional* entities. The emotion thus produced is real and is directed towards *ficta*. Our disbelief in the existence of the object – and our consequent belief in its being fictional – does not preclude us from being moved by it. We are afraid of Mr. Hyde and do not try to communicate with him or stop him from murdering that poor man because we are aware of his being fictional and we realize that it is impossible to stop him, yet we are frightened. This, far from being an evidence of our irrationality is a proof of our being totally rational.

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<sup>52</sup> Brock (2007).

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