

Royal Institute of Philosophy

On Being Moved by Fiction

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Source: *Philosophy*, Vol. 60, No. 231 (Jan., 1985), pp. 71-87

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of Royal Institute of Philosophy

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3750563>

Accessed: 04-02-2019 16:46 UTC

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On Being Moved by Fiction

DON MANNISON

I

What are we *moved to* when we are *moved by* something? Sometimes to tears; other times to action; and, on other occasions, to quiet contemplation. When a member of the Sierra Club is moved by something, he or she may be moved to tears or to political activism; but 'being moved by' in such circumstances just might consist in feelings of awe. 'Moved by' carries an obvious suggestion of causality on its semantic face. What I am moved by is what brings it about that I feel or act the way I do. To be 'unmoved' is to be unresponsive; or, at times, to lack compassion. To be moved by something or someone often involves having care or concern for that which is found moving. A variety of this sort of concern just could be an essential ingredient in the stance of the environmental preservationist.

To be unmoved by anything not directly involving the plight, or the triumphs, of real people, is one way to be a philistine; but philistinism is not the appropriate characterization of someone who is unresponsive to the fates of those in one's environment. Here we use such notions as 'cold-hearted', 'callous', 'lacking in compassion', or 'inhumane'.

If it were to turn out that there were no such things as uniquely or distinctively aesthetic or moral values, but rather that things are valued, prized, and praised for varying reasons (and, possibly, for different reasons at different times), then it would be unsurprising to find out that a failure, or an inability, to appreciate what is worthwhile about a novel—i.e. what it is in the novel to which we *ought* to respond—betokens a limitation of one's moral horizon. Philistinism and vandalism might be the moral and aesthetic facets of the same human failing. Wittgenstein might have had something like this in mind when he commented that 'Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same',¹ and again, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, he connects aesthetic responses and discriminations with 'a very complicated role . . . in . . . a culture of a period', and with 'ways of living'.² A version

¹ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.421.

² *Wittgenstein: Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Cyril Barrett (ed.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1966), 8.

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of this sort of stance is put quite well by Roger Scruton when he comments, 'A man who declares that his tender feelings have been awoken by the child he sees in the picture is at odds with himself when he shows himself unable to feel tenderness towards a real child'.³

There are so many different sorts of circumstances in which one can be said to be moved. Alexander is said to have been moved to tears when he surveyed his empire and realized that there were no more worlds to conquer. But he did not find anything moving. Consider a much later Alexander: Alexander Portnoy, who, on the occasion of his first visit to Israel, is moved by there being 'Jewish taxi drivers', 'Jewish cops', and even 'Jewish sand'. We might wonder whether Rick, in *Casablanca*, is finally going to be moved by the pleadings and proddings of his former lover. He finally is; i.e. he is certainly moved to act; even though the uncertainties that remain in the unscripted narrative of that film make it easy for us to argue about just what it is that he is moved by.

Examination of enough cases, I think, would support the semantic intuition that 'being moved by' is a rather rough variable (placeholder, or determinable) providing a matrix for a contextual determination of a value (a description, or a determinate). Even then, some of its conceptual dimensions are not even roughly neat. To find something moving does not rest at all well with hating or despising it. Consequently, to be moved by something is not, *eo ipso*, to find it moving.

There are quite a few ways in which one might be moved by something. We may be excited or thrilled by something; galvanized into action or stimulated by something; aroused, affected, and, sometimes, provoked (particularly when 'provocative' is the appropriate form to employ); we might find a scene (on the stage or in nature) electrifying, tantalizing, awe-inspiring, exhilarating, depressing, impressive, absorbing, overwhelming, or humbling.

Colin Radford, in a paper that has sparked off a small industry of various responses, asks us how we can be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina, given that we don't believe that Tolstoy is writing either contemporary or historical biography;⁴ i.e. how can we have any emotional response to something we believe has never existed? If Russell is right, then 'Anna suffered greatly' is false; and even if the Strawsonian reaction is accepted, Anna neither suffered nor did she not-suffer. But, if to be moved by her we must at least believe that

³ Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1974), 131.

⁴ 'How can we be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplement Volume 49, (1975), 67–93.

she suffered, Radford has, in effect, insisted that we are, in this respect, neither Russellians nor Strawsonians.

'Finding something moving' is as semantically complex as the earlier considered 'being moved by' something. If one hears 'Advance Australia Fair' being played at the beginning of an evening's greyhound racing, one might well be impassive, indifferent, and entirely unmoved; but hearing the same song being played at a lonely weather-monitoring station in the Northern Aleutian Islands just might bring a lump to what one thought was a jaded throat. More importantly, however, is the fact that one can congratulate Tolstoy on having written a moving novel; i.e. one can find 'the story of Anna Karenina' quite moving. Even that, however, is not without its complications. What one can find moving is the way in which Tolstoy writes. One might say that without Tolstoy's prose the novel would have been unmoving. The idea here is that even though it may be the artist's skill which turns out to be a sufficient cause of our affective responsiveness, it is not that artistry *to which* our feelings are directed.

The development of this sort of line, however, is what raises Radford's philosophical suspicions. He might say that a novel belongs to the wrong sort of 'ontic' category. It cannot be a book or a story for which we feel pity. This is probably right; but one can be bored by a book, a story, or a person; i.e. a book can be boring, but, perhaps, not pitiable. A story can be awe-inspiring, and we can stand in awe of a fictional heroine.

Radford insists that it is Anna, whose non-existence is a certitude for us, whom we pity. Do we, then, hate Shylock; are we impatient with Hamlet; do we envy Alyosha's virtue or Ivan's intellect? What if I do—i.e. at least say that I do—weep for Anna; but not for the cancer-riddled Jenny in *Love Story*? What if I weep for the latter, but not for the former? What if all human tragedy leaves me cold; and what if all human misfortune left me sobbing?

Why do I have so many questions? It's probably mainly due to the fact that Radford has far too few. We just *do* pity Anna—and that's that! In the end, instead of answering his title-question concerning how this can be, he, as it were, 'insults' us by saying that we're just being 'inconsistent' and 'incoherent'. Radford finds nothing 'wrong' with being inconsistent and incoherent; it is according to him 'natural' in creatures of our sort. Does Radford really think that there is an incoherency involved in every emotional response to art? I think he does. I thought that maybe there was a disguised piece of semantic legerdemain; and I tried to locate Radford's trick. I had no success. I found no subtle shifts in the scope of quantifiers; no rapid juggling of Russellian types. In short, no logical or semantic sleight

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of hand. Nevertheless, I am not at all sure that I fully understand what he is saying when he says that it is Anna Karenina for whom we have pity.

Suppose that we do understand just what it means to say that Anna is the object of my pity. Someone who hasn't read or, perhaps, has never heard of that novel might ask me why I pity Anna. In reply, I tell this person a mini-story; one which captures the essence of this tragic tale. My friend understands that I pity Anna just because the events that I related are true of her; and she asks, 'But I thought that you were a committed Russophobic—that you despised *all* Russians?' 'Indeed, I do', I reply. 'Well', she says, 'Anna is a Russian, and yet, you pity her. You surely, don't—or can't—both despise and pity her'.

I cannot deny that Anna is a Russian without denying, as well, that she is the subject of my mini-story. Anna is a Russian woman to whom these things happened; and, in so being, she is a Russian. (Saying these things does not commit me to disagreeing with almanacs that cite the population figures for nineteenth-century Russia.) What seems intuitive here is this: if I despise all Russians (past, present, and future Russians), it is *actual* Russians who have my enmity. Fictional Russians are not the appropriate sorts of things to despise. My Russophobia might prevent me from even reading stories about fictional Russians; but that is another matter. But then, are fictional heroines the appropriate sorts of things to pity? Are we compelled to say, as well, that only actual persons can be pitied? Radford says no; but instead of explaining how this is possible he leaves us with the cold comfort of an irrational emotional surd.

Suppose that someone says that he hates Iago. How, exactly, might such a person differ from someone who doesn't believe that one can feel anything at all about a fictional character? There is no need at all for these two to differ in any way about the moral dimensions of the deeds of Shakespeare's malicious manipulator. Nevertheless, we might suspect that a behavioural difference between them could be detected. Suppose that Radford had written a piece called, 'How can we be enraged by the deeds of Iago?' I have strong doubts that anyone would have taken that paper very seriously. Why not? Hate and rage are emotions which are as deep as pity. We ask people to tell us which character in a story they disliked the most; just as we ask them to tell us for which character they had the most sympathy. Radford avoids discussing the common belief that a fictional character can be 'identified with'.

Suppose that we discover, when reading *Anna*, that Vronsky pities Anna. Radford tells us that he, as well, pities Anna. It does seem to follow that they both pity the same thing. Do they, or can they, have

pity for the same thing? Vronsky, if we understand fiction at all, pities a person; but Radford, being a reasonable man, does not for a moment believe that there is a person called 'Anna Karenina'. If we were to say that it is 'a character in a novel' who is pitied by Radford, then a character in a novel is certainly not what is pitied by Vronsky. Vronsky not only did not, but cannot, read *Anna Karenina*.

This observation provides a basis for the suggestion that Radford's alleged pity for Anna is not, as it were, real or genuine pity, but something else; a sort of 'make-believe' pity which is semantically derivative from 'pity'.⁵ Radford briefly considers this possible solution, and quickly dismisses it—perhaps just a bit too summarily.

Radford says that he finds 'counter-intuitive' the idea that there are two senses of 'pity', depending on whether the object of pity is believed to be actual or fictional. He illustrates his conceptual discomfort by rhetorically asking if 'killed' has a different sense in 'Nixon has been killed' from what it has in 'Mercutio has been killed'.

This won't do. The semantic differences between 'kill' and 'pity' are too great to accept Radford's type of counter-example. Consider:

- (1) Kissinger has killed Nixon.
- (2) I have killed Nixon.
- (3) Tybalt has killed Mercutio.
- (4) I have killed Mercutio.

Which is the deviant sentence is clear when the audience knows that the speaker knows that Mercutio is a character in *Romeo and Juliet*. We might say that 'kill' is of the form 'Rxy', demanding that 'x' and 'y' take values in the same ontic domain. But Radford is claiming that 'pity' is also a two-place predicate; but one which does not require the values of its variables to be in the same domain. Consequently, since the semantic structure of 'kill' excludes propositions such as (4), and since, according to Radford, both

- (5) Vronsky pitied Anna.

and

- (6) I pitied Anna.

are in semantic order, putative counter-examples of this sort do not defeat the suggestion that the sense of 'pity' just might vary according to whether or not the pitier and the pitied are in the same ontic domain.

⁵ See Kendall Walton's 'Fearing Fictions', *Journal of Philosophy* LXXV (1978), 5–27.

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But I, likewise, find counter-intuitive the suggestion that there are multiple senses of 'pity' varying with the ontic status of the referent of the grammatical object. However, unlike Radford, I am not at all confident that I can briefly, or adequately, show just what is wrong with it. Although it makes no sense to say that I could have had lunch with Falstaff, it does seem to make sense to deny that I could have drunk him under the table. What about someone—an Olympic medallist—who claims to be able to run faster than Polonius? Almost everyone we know is better educated than Oliver Twist; and none of us believe that we are as hardhearted as Shylock.

We might be able to sort out a bit of this. Suppose that we can, at least dimly, distinguish three types of verbs; namely:

- (a) C(ausative)-verbs; such that if 'x Vs y', then x has brought about a change in y's condition; e.g. 'kill', 'injure', 'paint', 'repair'.
- (b) R(elation)-verbs: such that if 'x Vs y', then it does not follow that a change has been brought about as a result of x's V-ing; e.g. 'growing taller than', 'being better educated than', 'dying earlier than'.
- (c) A(bout)-verbs; such that when 'x Vs y', y is the object of x's V-ing; e.g. 'pity', 'envy', 'think'.

These distinctions are crude; crude because I am not at all sure exactly what they divide up. Nevertheless, they do reflect actual differences in our understanding of ways in which we connect with the world.

It might be that the basic difference between a C-verb and an R-verb is that the former, but not the latter, requires some sort of physical alteration. If so, then certain verbs which have been taken to mark 'Cambridge changes' need to be re-examined. I can 'widow Xanthippe' (or 'make a widow of Xanthippe') without laying a glove on her; but I must do this by killing Socrates. 'Killing' is a C-verb and, consequently, there may be a subclass of so-called 'Cambridge changes' which are not R-verbs, but rather, disguised C-verbs. The disguise is revealed when we find that a 'by V-ing' when 'V' is a C-verb is required for the truth of 'x Vs y'; even in cases where 'V' is an R-verb.

My intuition about all of this is this: C-verbs do require the values of 'x' and 'y' to be in the same ontic domain. This is why reasonable people, including Radford, do not believe that they have any causal power with respect to the outcomes of completed fictions.

Moreover, there is no possible world in which I can influence Anna; since if there was, it would not be Anna Karenina who was

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influenced by me. 'Anna Karenina' names a character in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, and I am not, and could not be, a character in that novel. If I were, then it wouldn't be that particular novel. In terms of today's fashionable jargon, since it is not possible for there to be a possible world in which I influence Anna, it is necessarily true that I cannot influence Anna.

If this is so, then I think that there is something wrong with treating fiction in terms of 'possible worlds'.⁶ Two things seem to me wrong about this perspective; one logical and one, as it were, psychological. The first is this: if a work of fiction creates or describes one possible world, then, if proper names are rigid designators, in the sense intended by Kripke and others, then I do not see what prevents me and Anna from occupying the same possible world. In such a possible world I am able to prevent Anna's fate. But, I have argued above, this is not possible.

Of greater interest to me here is the idea that what I pity when I pity Anna is a person; but one who allegedly lives in a world other than the actual one in which I am resident. I don't think that this will do. If the possible world theorist is to be believed, then all of us are in an infinite number of possible worlds. Consequently, there is a possible world in which my wife is now being tortured by the Marquis de Sade; and, as well, one in which she and I are now enjoying our twilight years. What sort of neurotic would I be if I were inconsolable because of my realization of the existence of the first-mentioned possible world?

Does it make any difference that Anna has no 'actual' relationship to me; i.e. that she does not inhabit my actual world? I don't think so. If I pity her *qua* inhabitant of the world that Tolstoy wrote about, why can't I remind myself that, after all, there are an indefinitely large number of *other* worlds in which she and Vronsky ride off together into the setting sun? In other words, my pity is neither justified, nor really explained, by the alleged fact that it is directed at a person inhabiting a non-actual but actually possible world.

There really are no 'fictional worlds'; and this is because there are no worlds other than our own; which is a world that contains unactualized possibilities. What a fiction discloses to us are some of the possibilities within our world.

Unlike C-verbs, R-verbs do not require the referents of 'x' and 'y' to be from the same domain. This is why I can be less autocratic than Creon, although I can't look him straight in the eye. Perhaps

⁶ See David Lewis's 'Truth in Fiction', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 15 (January 1978), 37–46.

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R-verbs are more concerned with properties of the values of 'x' and 'y' than with the things themselves.

At any rate, what if Radford had written a paper titled, 'How can we be Better Educated than Little Nell?' Again, I don't think it would have generated much interest. Why not? Don't we need to understand how R-verbs can cross ontological barriers? Yes we do; but that is not of any aesthetic interest. According to Yorick Smythies, according to Wittgenstein, 'The puzzles which arise in aesthetics, which are puzzles arising from the effects the arts have on us, are not puzzles about how these things are caused'.⁷ So, at least as Wittgenstein viewed these sorts of matters, Radford has presented us with a puzzle central to aesthetics.

Consider those cases in which V is an R-verb, and Vxy, and 'y' takes something fictional as a value, and 'x' something actual, e.g. 'I am luckier than Anna Karenina', or 'Kissinger is not nearly as dashing as Vronsky'. In these sorts of cases it is obvious that Vxy's being the case is not an effect of or a response to anything Tolstoy wrote, even though Tolstoy's writing what he did is a truth condition for these sorts of statements. In Radford's terms, I am not in any way 'moved by' Anna in so far as I am luckier than she. In this case, my luck would still have been just the same had Tolstoy never put pen to paper.

But, 'pity', 'envy', 'hate', and 'admiration' all have 'objects'; which suggests that in so far as I pity Anna I am moved by her fate, and that I am so moved as a result of reading Tolstoy's novel. To gloss Wittgenstein: one might say that it is Tolstoy's *artistry*—his skill as a novelist—that causes us to feel whatever we feel; but it's not that, Tolstoy's skill, which we pity. So, the puzzle, if there is one, is not about causes but about effects or responses.

What has been shown above is that Radford cannot reject the suggestion that the sense of A-verbs varies with the ontic status of what they are about by selecting putative counter-examples from the domain of either C-verbs (as he does) or R-verbs (which someone else might try to do). What still remains, then, is to explain the claim that A-verbs can transcend the boundaries of ontological categories without a variation in sense; and to do this without enlisting the dubious assistance of actually existing possible worlds.

One of my qualms about this solution is lexical. When words are embedded in 'cancellation' contexts, e.g. 'A stone *lion* guards the entrance to her castle', or, 'I gave my love an artificial *rose*', a necessary condition for understanding what is being said is that the crucial words have their normal or literal meaning. As I can offer no

⁷ In *Wittgenstein: Lectures and Conversations*, 28.

semantic account of literalness, all I mean here is that in those speech situations 'lion' and 'rose' mean whatever it is that they mean in 'The hunter shot a lion today' and 'I picked a rose from my garden'.⁸

In order to understand and to employ words in cancellation contexts (and in most metaphorical contexts, as well) I have to adjust my logical framework to conform to these types of speech situations, i.e. I need not surrender my knowledge that all roses require watering and all lions have to eat, in order to fit with my understanding that nutrients are not required by stone lions or artificial roses. When I say that my concern is 'lexical', I mean, in part, that I don't require two dictionary entries for 'lion' and 'rose'; and this despite the fact that I know that stone lions are not a breed of lions and artificial roses are not a variety of rose. We understand the phrases 'stone lion' and 'artificial rose' only if we acknowledge that 'lion' and 'rose' in these phrases have their ordinary sense. If not, then there are, perhaps, obstacles standing in the way of distinguishing the sense of 'stone lion' from 'stone unicorn', and 'artificial rose' from 'artificial geranium'.

In the end, then, I think that Radford is right, i.e. if we do feel pity for Anna, then the pity we feel for her is just the same—i.e. just the same emotion—as the pity we have for actual persons. But, then, I am somewhat at a loss as to how to explain the compatibility between my pity for Anna and my Russophobia. Moreover, there is still the bother about how Vronsky and I can, allegedly, feel the same way about *Anna*, since he believes that Anna exists, while I have no such belief.

If I can pity Anna, then, surely, I could love her as well. In that case, would Anna have two lovers, Vronsky and me? Would that make me something like Cyrano, who loved the fair Roxane from afar? Declaring love is not a necessary condition for my having it. I can declare my love for Anna, although I cannot declare it to her.

Exactly why is it that Anna can terrify Vronsky but cannot terrify me? It is probably for a reason similar to why I cannot be threatened by Anna, although Vronsky can. But even though Anna can neither threaten nor terrify me, she can horrify me. This assumes that it is *she* who horrifies me; something Radford would have no reason to deny.

Why is the Holocaust found by us not to be terrifying, but rather, horrifying? I don't believe that the answer lies in scale or magnitude. Those who undertake to terrorize an entire planet do not, for that

⁸ See L. J. Cohen, 'The Semantics of Metaphor', in *Metaphor and Thought*, A. Ortony (ed.) (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

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reason, become 'horrorists' or 'horrifiers'. Why do we 'flee from the terrifying', but 'shrink away' from the horrifying? Radford does mention 'being terrified' in a later paper, but not in a way that makes it clear one way or the other whether he believes that we can be terrified by a fictional character.⁹ What he says is that 'some of us have been quite terrified by reading *The Turn of the Screw*'. This, of course, can be understood in a number of ways. His reading *The Turn of the Screw*, alone, at night, in, as Radford says, an otherwise empty house, can be the cause of our becoming terrified by the realization of one's vulnerability; of impotence if the chips should be down. This observation is no more helpful than if he had observed that by reading Thurber at breakfast each morning I was put in a cheerful mood all day.

There is no question that Radford takes art seriously; but just how seriously when he believes that being moved by a work of art is to fall into inconsistency and incoherence?

Incoherence and inconsistency are privations we usually seek to avoid. We admonish others when we think that they are being incoherent. We might advise them to stop raving, or to sober up. Inconstancy of character is the moral failing which has its counterpart in logical inconsistency. Logic is supposed to remedy the latter; but, perhaps, there is no cure for the former. I trust that nobody will deny that incoherence and inconsistency are things to be avoided; and that, consequently, the frequency of their occurrence diminished wherever and whenever possible. If Radford is right, and what I have just said is right, there is a bit of advice we can give to anyone wishing to be as free as possible from incoherence and inconsistency: stop drinking, study logic, and stay away from works of art such as *Anna Karenina*.

If our being moved by a work of art is an incoherency just because our genuine emotion fails to have its normally appropriate kind of object and, as well, fails to be connected with the normally appropriate array of existential beliefs, then we might be wise to seek a different sort of answer to Radford's question.

II

Michael Weston, in his symposium response to Radford, has pointed in a number of fruitful directions.¹⁰ What I have to say will be

⁹ 'Tears and Fiction', *Philosophy* (1977).

¹⁰ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 49, 81–93.

similar in some respects to what Weston has said; but I hope it will help to bring the issues into much sharper focus.

What sorts of words would someone use in order to persuade another to take up reading, theatre, or film-going? Suppose that I had a cousin, Phil; and that Phil's sole recreation consisted in playing noughts-and-crosses with his five-year-old daughter. Such an activity is surely neither incoherent nor inconsistent; and, indeed, Phil finds it most enjoyable. If I recommend to him that he divide his time between reading *Anna Karenina* and playing noughts-and-crosses, just what is there in favour of such advice? Putting aside Radford's view that I am encouraging my cousin to be more incoherent and inconsistent than he may be already, I am in no position to argue that he will enjoy it more than he already enjoys playing noughts-and-crosses. Indeed, there is something quite strange about my saying, 'Come on Phil, you'll really get a big kick out of reading *Anna Karenina*, especially the last bit; it'll really knock you out'. Whenever I hear philosophers talking about *pleasure* as being in some way central or salient to aesthetics, I immediately think of Francis Bacon's paintings or 'The Cabinet of Dr Caligari', or *King Lear*.

Moreover, Phil is not at all impressed by snobbery. Consequently, telling him that all the educated and 'best' people do things other than play noughts-and-crosses will not get me very far. Whatever there is to recommend Mill's 'competent judge' story concerning the superiority of Pushkin to pushpin, it provides nobody with a good reason to stop doing what they enjoy doing, and begin to do things that might be laborious, or, at times, even tedious.

Suppose, however, that just in order to please me Phil does read *Anna Karenina*. When he finishes it I ask him what he thought. 'Dull, boring, trivial, and a total waste of my time!' he replies. 'It's the last time I do anything on your recommendation', he adds. But it isn't. I am relentless and persistent. Phil reads *Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*; and goes to see 'Death of a Salesman', 'Grande Illusion', 'Paths of Glory', 'A Streetcar Named Desire', and 'Apocalypse Now'. When I ask him what he thought of this lot, he says that they were all as dull and as boring as *Anna Karenina*.

'Didn't you feel anything at all? Weren't you saddened, angered; or in any way moved by what you read or saw?' 'Don't be so silly', Phil retorts; 'all of that was just fiction. You know as well as I that they weren't real people in real situations.'

We all know that Phil is at least half right, if by saying that they are not real people, he means that 'Anna', 'Vronsky', 'Horatio', 'Blanche', 'Stanley', and so on, are not names to be looked for in the baptismal records by ancients or moderns.

But perhaps Phil is only half right. What he might be wrong about

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is his belief that Iago, Stella, Polonius, Gloucester, and Regan are not involved in real situations. Weston is beginning to say something like this when he comments:

We are moved, if you like, by the thought that men can be placed in situations in which the pursuit of what they perceive to be good brings destruction on both themselves and the ones they love, and that nevertheless this can be faced with a dignity that does not betray the nature of those relationships for which they perish: that a man may, in fact, lose 'everything and nothing' (p. 90; he is discussing Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*).

I would not want to say, as Weston does, that we are moved by a *thought*; although our being moved could well have been caused by a thought occasioned by our reading of that play. The reason I do not want to say that is that what we pity, admire, or find horrifying when we respond to art are not our thoughts. Part of what I am trying to get to here is this: although it is not Anna Karenina whom we pity, perhaps it is Anna's 'fate' which moves us. However bizarre and unbelievable this suggestion strikes one at first, it is no more strange than the idea that what we are moved by is an 'intentional object' or an 'imaginative construction'. Indeed, the latter would seem to be a kind of state of oneself; in which case it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that pitying the fate of Anna Karenina was a form of self-pity.

How can this recommendation be accepted; since, it would seem, only a person can have fates (at least, fates of the sort we are interested in here)? It doesn't follow from that that all fates are the fate of some person. All lives come to some end; but it doesn't follow that all ends are the end of some life. There could be traps and pitfalls into which nobody has ever fallen. These are, nevertheless, dangers which we would be well advised to avoid. We put up a sign which reads 'Keep Out: Ferocious Dog' just in order to ensure that the set of people savaged by Rover remains empty.

There is nothing wrong about talking and thinking about situations that nobody has been in. There are such situations; and, moreover, some are more interesting and more revealing than others. From some we can learn; and in others we can wallow. Philosophers have yet to provide an account of the difference between sentiment and sentimentality; between pathos and bathos; between *Anna Karenina* and *Love Story*.

I want, finally, to discuss a comment of Weston's; and, in so

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doing, I will be exploiting, paraphrasing, and adapting ideas developed by Stanley Cavell.¹¹ Weston writes:

What I am responding to . . . is, we can say, a possibility of human life perceived through a certain conception of that life. I am not responding to *events* I believe to have happened or are likely to happen, for the 'possibility' here is not an expression of a prediction. Such responses are part of a conception of what is important in life and will vary with differences in what is so conceived. The feelings generated in us by serious literature will seem less strange if we connect them with responses such as these (p. 86).

What intrigues me in particular about this passage is this: Weston says, in effect, that the objects to which my emotional response to art is directed are 'possibilities' which are not connected with 'prediction'. Just exactly what sort of possibilities are these? Are there really different sorts, anyway? Yes, there are. There is a sort of 'logical possibility'. A philosopher's favourite, because how things really are places no constraints and sets no limits to what these may be. These are the possibilities out of which 'possible worlds' are constructed. Most often, but not always, the syntactical clue that it is a member of this species with which we are being presented is the presence of the philosophically ubiquitous 'that' clause. 'It is possible that I will be reading a paper to the Saturnian Academy of Philosophy tomorrow afternoon', but not 'It is possible *for* me to read a paper . . .'¹²

These logical possibilities are not connected with predictions and, consequently, neither are they particularly of interest to a calculator of probabilities. Since these are not 'expressions of a prediction' about how things are or are likely, or unlikely, to be, are these, then, the sorts of possibilities to which Weston is referring? I think not. If they were, then wherein would lie the obvious mental derangement manifested by me if I were to become inconsolable by the thought of the possibility that my wife has fallen into the clutches of the Marquis de Sade? Moreover, not everything that is possible is a possibility for a particular human life. The failure to acknowledge this is, as Alan White has recognized, 'a root cause of scepticism'.¹³

¹¹ *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford University Press, 1979), Pt 4; *The World Viewed* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), Ch. 19; 'Knowing and Acknowledging' and 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of Lear', both in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹² A detailed treatment of these sorts of considerations is to be found in Ch. 1 of Alan White's *Modal Thinking* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975).

¹³ *Ibid.* 15.

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But *actual* possibilities are, in the relevant sense, expressions of predictions. They are of interest to statisticians and operators of probability calculi. These, then, according to Weston, are not the kind of possibilities to which we are responding when we are moved by fiction. I think he is right about this; because if they were, then my cousin Phil would be at least epistemologically justified in his failure to be moved by any fiction. He might always be in a position to argue successfully that the ‘odds’ were simply enormously against the actual occurrence of situations—at least, perhaps, ever again—of the sort portrayed in *King Lear* and *Anna Karenina*. I lack anything resembling a ‘knock-down argument’ here; but can only point to the strangeness of allowing epistemology to enthrone and enshrine this variety of Philistinism.

Is there another sort of possibility; one that fits with Weston’s remarks; since, after all, these two rather familiar sorts cannot be reasonably pressed into Weston’s service? Wittgenstein commented that in philosophy ‘We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the “*possibilities*” of phenomena’.¹⁴ Wittgenstein cannot be thinking of either of the two sorts of possibilities that have been considered here. We can learn nothing of philosophical interest about persons; i.e. about the condition of being human, from examining either ‘It is possible that I will deliver a paper tomorrow to the Philosophy Academy of Central Saturn’ or ‘It is possible for me to order chicken quenelles for dinner tomorrow evening’. Aristotle introduced us to a notion of ‘potentiality’; in effect, to the sort of possibility that constituted the *actual* nature of the kind of thing under consideration. To distinguish these from the others, I will call them ‘potentialities’.

Love Story is not about peculiarly *human* potentialities. It is about the empirical—biological—fact that we are a sort of being that can die young. There is nothing at all distinctly human about this. It is a fact, as well, about beavers, scorpions, jackals, and oysters. There is nothing of interest about what it is possible to face in so far as one is a person to be learned from reading *Love Story*, provided that this is all that there is to it. There is nothing for us to ‘come to realize’, ‘to be struck by’, to ‘appreciate’, or to have ‘dawn on us’. This is one reason why the heroine’s death in *Love Story* is not a ‘tragic fate’. The incurability of cancer is not a grounding for tragedy.

But even a story that relies upon mawkish sentimentality, such as *Love Story*, can involve some uniquely human elements. It can present us with a picture of unrealized ambitions, dashed hopes, and

¹⁴ *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), sec. 90.

projects forced to be abandoned. It can involve distinctly human forms of unhappiness, misery, and anguish; and these are things that can move us. But even the 'fate' of non-human things can move us, e.g. the suffering of a pet, or the degradation of a wilderness or a sand-dune. Not every sort of misery or unhappiness should be seen as tragedy; and most particularly, not the misery that results from what has *befallen* a person. Echoing Aristotle again, tragedy deals with the anguish that results from what a person has chosen to do. This is why we can learn something about our (i.e. uniquely human) potentialities from tragedy.¹⁵

It is not uncommon for people to be horrified by the realization of just what it was that Freud was telling us about ourselves. But, that we know we have the sort of genitalia that we do have is only a necessary condition for acknowledging the potentialities, the distinctly human potentialities that Freud confronts us with. This is at least a partial explanation of why the Positivists were right in saying that psychoanalysis is not empirical. (Why they were wrong in damning it for *that* reason is beyond the scope of this paper.) After all, our sexual apparatus is not all that different from that of other mammals.

In 'Knowing and Acknowledging', Cavell introduces a non-epistemic concept of 'acknowledging'. Potentialities are acknowledged; they are not known, believed, guessed at, or doubted. Those are the sorts of ideas that belong to our assessment of statistical possibilities; i.e. to the sorts of possibilities which are the productive forces that epistemology organizes in accordance with the relations of reasons that have ideological supremacy. They belong to the domain of the 'true'; while potentialities are said by Cavell to be in the realm of the 'truthful'. Cavell, at one place, puts it this way:

Empirical statements that claim truth depend upon evidence; statements that claim truthfulness depend upon our acceptance of them. My acceptance is the way I respond to them, and not everyone is capable of the response, or willing for it. I put this by saying that a true statement is something we know or do not know; a truthful statement is one we must acknowledge or refuse to acknowledge.¹⁶

For Cavell, that the *Homo sapiens* that share one's environment are human (or persons) is something that cannot be known, but can only be acknowledged. In Part IV of *The Claim of Reason* he argues

¹⁵ That this is the sort of difference I was perceiving between *Love Story* and *Anna Karenina* became clearer to me in discussions with my colleague Michael Carey.

¹⁶ *The World Viewed*, op. cit. 157.

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that this is the 'truth' of traditional scepticism about the existence of other minds.

There are numerous and interesting connections to be examined between Cavell's prising-off of the truthful from the true and Roger Scruton's discussion of the differences between 'truth conditions' and 'acceptance conditions'. With respect to the latter, Scruton wrote:

... the intention is to get another not to believe something but rather to 'see the point' of what one says, in the way that, in responding appropriately, he will 'see the point' of an aesthetic judgment.¹⁷

When I wrote above of a fate that was not the fate of any particular person; and of situations which nobody has ever been in, and which nobody is ever likely to be in; and said that they are fates and situations from which we can learn about ourselves, I was introducing an idea of human *potentialities* which can only be either acknowledged or rejected.

As Cavell has, in effect, noted, Phil need not acknowledge these potentialities; he can refuse to do so, or be rendered unable to do so. I read *A Clockwork Orange* as saying either that B. F. Skinner refused to acknowledge some of these; or, alternatively, that he was prevented, by his theoretical commitment to the universality of the domain of the true, from being 'struck by' them.

Philistinism, when it is genuine, is not unlike scepticism about other minds, when it is genuine. The sceptic who harbours doubts about whether there are others; others who are *real*—who are real *persons*—will have to find his own reality baffling, diminished, or horrifying, or all three at once.

Imagine yourself, as you are now, suddenly being alone on an island with only a tribe of zombies for company. Suppose they pose no threat to your physical well-being. A tribe of friendly zombies, we could say. You know that although they clap their hands to their ears when you cry out in anguish, they haven't understood a word you scream; and when you caress one of them, the caressed body slightly quivers, but you know the zombie can have no idea who or *what* you are.

A more mundane reminder: suppose a child has fallen out with his mates. Why is 'being sent to Coventry' a far more cruel thing for them to do to him than, say, challenging him to a fight? As Cavell might suggest (following his discussion in *The Claim of Reason*), by sending him to Coventry the others are denying his *being an other for them*. Scepticism about other minds requires the ultimate alienation.

¹⁷ *Art and Imagination*, op. cit. 59.

On Being Moved by Fiction

What has this to do with Phil? Phil is unmoved because these stories are not about real people in real situations. They are—and he is right about that—works of fiction. The situations are seen by him as empirically unlikely possibilities; and not as human potentialities. But, in so far as he can doubt or deny that art confronts us with real situations his horizons of understanding, of compassion, of empathy, are severely limited. The only situations that count for him are of the ‘here and now’ variety. This is a way of being isolated. It requires one to endure solitude; even if that solitude is lived-through in the presence of others.

It is clear that the potentialities to which I have alluded are not another species of ‘*possibilia*’; but are, rather, uniquely human *necessities*. To be moved by the fate of a tragic hero or heroine is to acknowledge one’s recognition of how it must be for at least a certain sort of human being in such a situation. How it must be, that is, if such a person is not to be ‘unrecognizably different’ from oneself.

To be moved by art is to be ‘involved’ with it.¹⁸ What this means is that one has made the potentialities portrayed a part of one’s understanding of oneself. This need not involve the sort of ‘moving experience’ that betokens emotionality. I can find something moving in so far as it has a strong significant impact on me. In some cases this will be a ‘contemplative impact’; e.g. as a response to many of Bergman’s films or to Kurosawa’s *Derzu Uzala*.

So, what in Tolstoy moves me? Radford was half right. We are moved by the fate of Anna Karenina; but, I have argued, not by her. Consequently, coherence and consistency are retained because potentialities (unlike logical possibilities) not only lie within the actual; that is, within our world; but are necessities, the ignoring of which distances one from oneself.¹⁹

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¹⁸ *The World Viewed*, op. cit. 154.

¹⁹ I am indebted to Colin Radford for the stimulating discussions which produced my interest in the topics of this paper. I am grateful to Lloyd Reinhardt, of Sydney University, and to Chris Mortensen, of Adelaide University, for valuable and generous criticisms of earlier drafts.