

# On Morals, Fictions, and Genres

by

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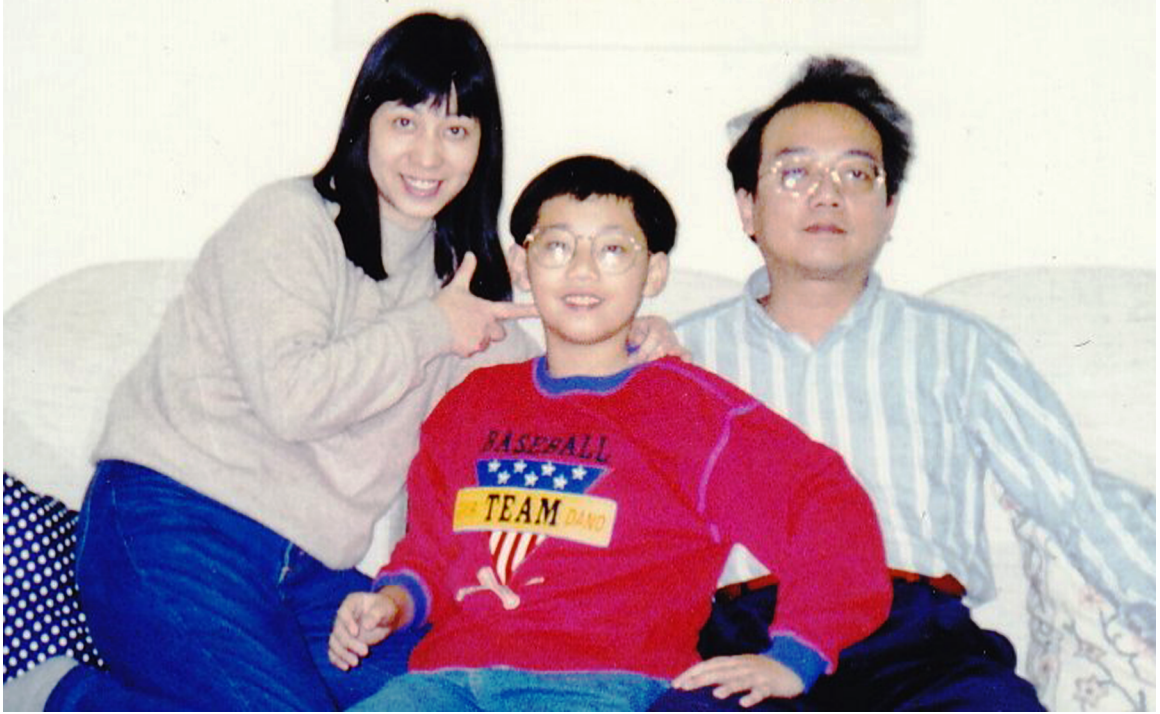
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# ABSTRACT

On Morals, Fictions, and Genres

by

Shen-yi Liao

Chair: Kendall L. Walton

As audiences, we interact with fictions in many ways: we evaluate their artistic worth, we imagine the scenarios that they describe, we emotionally respond to the characters in them, and we draw from them lessons that apply to our lives. As theorists, we want explanations of our interactions with fictions to have two qualities. We want explanations to be specific enough to acknowledge the diversity of fictions, to attend to the differences amongst them, and to account for their peculiarities. We also want explanations to be general enough to extrapolate from individual works, to illuminate interesting patterns, and to endow us with theoretical understanding. Genre explanations have both specificity and generality. As sensible groupings of fictions, genres mark relevant boundaries in the landscape of diverse fictions.

My dissertation argues that genre is central to explaining phenomena that arise from our interactions with fictions. Chapter 1 introduces and addresses two intuitive challenges to genre explanations that question their robustness and informativeness. Chapter 2 brings out genre's role in explaining imaginative resistance. Imaginative resistance occurs when certain propositions, such as morally-disagreeable claims, are presented in fictions and people resist imagining them and accepting them as true

in the fiction. Genre gives us an understanding of why certain propositions evoke imaginative resistance when they are presented in some fictions but do not evoke imaginative resistance when they are presented in other fictions. Chapter 3 uses methods of cognitive science to empirically vindicate the theoretical account developed in the previous chapter. Since genre is low in psychological salience, its role in generating imaginative resistance may be more readily and persuasively demonstrated by empirical means. Chapter 4 brings out genre's role in explaining moral persuasion. Genre gives us an understanding of how different fictions educate or corrupt us in different ways.

## CHAPTER I

# Genre Explanations

Recently, philosophers have invoked genre in explaining a wide variety of aesthetic phenomena. However, (Currie 2004) argues that explanations that centrally cite genre *categorically* fail as aesthetic explanations because they are relatively uninformative and relatively fragile. In this chapter, I offer a modest defense of genre explanations. The upshot is that genre explanations cannot be categorically rejected. Instead, we can only assess whether a particular genre explanation genuinely explains an aesthetic phenomenon by actively investigating that phenomenon ourselves. In the process of constructing my defense of genre explanations, I also show how philosophy of science can inform aesthetics and how to think about aesthetic explanations generally.

### 1.1 Aesthetic Phenomena, Genre Explanations

In recent years, aesthetics, like many other philosophical areas, has gradually replaced projects of conceptual analysis with projects of theory construction.<sup>1</sup> Rather than attempting to define what beauty or art is, philosophers have shifted their focus to explaining aesthetic phenomena that arise from our interactions with fictions

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<sup>1</sup>Notably, in the presidential speech for the American Society for Aesthetics, (Walton 2007) advocates for the theory-construction methodology, which does not primarily aim to capture the meaning of aesthetic terms in ordinary English.

and artworks.<sup>2</sup> We are thus experiencing a shift from what (Weinberg and Meskin 2006, 177) calls the “traditional paradox-and-analysis model” to a new paradigm, the “phenomenon-and-explanation model”. The methodology of the new paradigm explicitly takes its cue from the sciences: we look for observable data, propose theories that aim to explain the data, adjudicate competing theories, and repeat.

What are some aesthetic phenomena that have interested philosophers? Here is a non-exhaustive list:

- *Imaginative Resistance*. Consider the following asymmetry. When reading a folktale that says the earth is flat, most people have no trouble imagining that proposition and accepting it as fictional, even if they do not believe and it is not actually true. In contrast, when reading that female infanticide is morally permissible, most people experience imaginative resistance: they resist imagining this proposition and accepting that it could be true in the fictional world. The phenomenon of imaginative resistance shows that imagination is not as free as we might antecedently think. This peculiar constraint on the imagination demands an explanation.
- *Moral Education*. Against continuing skepticism, philosophers have defended the claim that fictions can morally educate. Psychologically realistic novels like *The Golden Bowl* and satirical novels like *Catch-22* both teach us valuable moral lessons. To substantiate this claim, we need to explain how imaginative engagements with fictions affect our attitudes toward real-world people and circumstances. Moreover, although *The Golden Bowl* and *Catch-22* both teach us valuable moral lessons, they do so through distinctive means. An adequate explanation must account for the different ways that fictions morally educate.
- *Ethical Criticism of Art*. Some artworks represent, endorse, or cultivate an immoral point of view. These artworks’ immoral features license us to criticize them on moral grounds. Do the same immoral features also license us to criticize these artworks on aesthetic grounds? It seems that, in some cases but not others, audiences’ aesthetic evaluation of a work are appropriately influenced by their

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<sup>2</sup>Which phenomena count as aesthetic? This question is difficult to answer because there are no widely-accepted objective criteria for delineating different kinds of phenomena. As a working definition, we can understand aesthetic phenomena to be those phenomena that hold interest for aestheticians and are described in aesthetic vocabulary. This working definition takes its cue from the special sciences: for example, sociological phenomena could be understood as those phenomena that hold interest for sociologists and are described in sociological vocabulary. To supplement this abstract working definition of “aesthetic phenomena”, the examples mentioned below point to the kind of phenomena that I have in mind. I thank Kendall Walton and Sarah Buss for pressing me to clarify the notion of aesthetic phenomena.

moral evaluation of that work. We need to explain why this is so, and why the appropriate influence holds in some cases but not others.

- “*Unrealistic*” *Fictions*. Since all fictions include some contents that are false, ordinary people must mean something more than that when they call a fiction “unrealistic”. Quite frequently, but not always, labeling a fiction as “unrealistic” amounts to a kind of aesthetic criticism. Being “unrealistic” is seen to be an aesthetic flaw for a medical drama like *ER* but not for a lighthearted romantic comedy like *Love Actually*. The interesting ways that ordinary people use the term “unrealistic” in their aesthetic evaluations should be explained.

Initially, the phenomena on this list appear to be a disparate bunch. What is notable is that, with each of these phenomena, philosophers have recently proposed explanations in which *genre* plays a central role. (Weinberg 2008), (Nanay 2010), and my chapter II invoke genre to explain why the same proposition could evoke imaginative resistance in some works but not in others. My chapter IV invokes genre to explain the different ways that different fictions morally educate. (Giovannelli 2007) and (Gilmore 2011) invoke genre to explain why moral defects constitute aesthetic defects for some works but not for others. (Hazlett and Mag Uidhir 2011) invokes genre to explain why being “unrealistic”—in the sense employed by ordinary people—constitutes an aesthetic defect for some works but not for others. We can improve our understanding of all the aesthetic phenomena on this list through *genre explanations*, or so these philosophers argue.

Instead of evaluating the specific explanations proposed, I want to ask a more fundamental question: can genre explanations be good explanations of aesthetic phenomena?<sup>3</sup> There are, I think, two reasons why so little attention has been paid to this fundamental question. First, philosophers who offer genre explanations tend to be primarily concerned with explaining particular aesthetic phenomena rather than understanding the theoretical underpinnings of these explanations. Second, the aesthetics literature does not provide obvious standards for assessing purported

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<sup>3</sup>To be precise, the question is whether the *purported* aesthetic explanations that centrally invoke genre are in fact *genuine* aesthetic explanations. Throughout this chapter, I use the term “explanation” to cover both purported and genuine explanations when the context clearly disambiguates them.

explanations. Because the phenomenon-and-explanation model has only recently figured prominently in aesthetics, philosophers simply have not explicitly considered what *aesthetic explanations*—explanations of aesthetic phenomena—should look like. However, if the methodology of aesthetics is to take its cue from the sciences, as the new paradigm dictates, then we must investigate the nature of aesthetic explanations.

This chapter initiates just such an investigation. Substantively, this chapter defends genre explanations. §1.2 presents two intuitive challenges to genre explanations. The *counterfactual challenge* questions the robustness of genre explanations. Given that the generalizations underlying genre explanations seem to admit of exceptions, they seem to be unable to support as wide a range of counterfactuals as laws can. The *fundamentality challenge* questions the informativeness of genre explanations. Given that genre classifications are metaphysically grounded in lower-level features of works, genre explanations seem to be unable to be more informative than, or even as informative as, the explanations that cite those lower-level features. §1.3 responds to the counterfactual challenge: the generalizations that underlie genre explanations are best thought of as *ceteris paribus* laws, which can indeed support a wide range of counterfactuals. §1.4 responds to the fundamentality challenge: explanations at different levels give us different kinds of information. With the resources developed in these responses, §1.5 replies to Gregory Currie’s argument against the explanatory worth of genre.

§1.6 draws general lessons for characterizing aesthetic explanations. Methodologically, this chapter explores a surprising and fruitful connection between aesthetics and philosophy of science. If the new paradigm of aesthetics is to take its methodological cue from the sciences, then understanding the nature of aesthetic explanations requires engaging with recent developments in philosophy of science. In recent decades, philosophers of science are increasingly turning away from conceptions of laws and explanations that are devised from metaphysicians’ armchairs to conceptions of laws and explanations that are developed with attention to actual scientific practices. In



particular, they are increasingly attentive to the special sciences in their theorizing. The substantive project of this chapter, defending genre explanations, reflects these recent developments. As we will see, the two intuitive challenges to genre explanations are essentially motivated by naive conceptions of explanations and related notions. Attending to actual scientific practices and the special sciences will allow us to show that the intuitions behind these challenges are misguided.

## 1.2 Intuitive Challenges to Genre Explanations

Proponents of genre explanations face two intuitive challenges. I begin by clarifying the relevant theoretical notions, genre and genre explanation. I then consider the two challenges with special attention to their intuitive bases. These intuitions turn out to be fundamentally not about genre, but about explanation. Examining these challenges to genre explanations thus promises to guide us toward a more sophisticated understanding of aesthetic explanations in general.

### 1.2.1 Genres and Genre Explanations

There are few systematic treatments of genre in contemporary analytic aesthetics. Aestheticians have primarily concerned themselves with particular genres, such as horror and tragedy, rather than the very notion of genre itself. Notable exceptions include (Walton 1970), (Currie 2004), and (Laetz and Lopes 2008). Of these, Walton and Laetz and Lopes are primarily concerned with the *metaphysical* dimension of genre: the definition of genre groupings and the classification conditions for a work in a genre. Only Currie touches on the *epistemic* dimension of genre: the role of genre in furnishing explanations of aesthetic phenomena. Ultimately, Currie argues that genre cannot play a meaningful explanatory role because the resulting explanations are neither informative nor robust. The intuitive challenges presented here are inspired by

Currie’s argument against genre explanations. (We will return to Currie’s argument in §1.5.)

We will not presuppose any particular metaphysical account of genre. For our purposes, we can simply think of a **genre** as a special grouping of fictions that is recognized by a community as such.<sup>4</sup> The account of perceptually-distinguishable categories developed in (Walton 1970) suggests one, but by no means the only, way of supplementing this minimalist notion of genre: whether a fiction is appropriately classified in a genre depends on factors such as its relevant resemblance to other works in that genre, the artist’s intentions, critical judgments, and that genre’s propensity for aesthetic pleasure. A genre can be relatively broad, such as comedy, or relatively narrow, such as Shakespearean tragedy. Typically, a genre will overlap with and stand in hierarchical relationships to many other genres. A typical fiction is thus appropriately classified in multiple genres, some of which may be particularly salient for a given context. The minimalist notion of genre is also broad enough to include what others might call medium, presentation, mode, or style.

A **genre explanation** is an explanation that invokes genre classification as a central explanatory factor. In other words, not every explanation that mentions genre counts as a genre explanation. An explanation of the audience’s response to a fiction that appeals to the author’s intention of producing a tragedy does not count as a genre explanation. Although this explanation mentions a genre, tragedy, the central explanatory factor is the author’s intention. In contrast, an explanation of the audience’s response to a fiction that appeals to that fiction’s appropriate classification as a tragedy would indeed count as a genre explanation. Note that a genre explanation could be partial rather than exhaustive. Indeed, at least some proponents of genre

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<sup>4</sup>In this chapter, “fiction” serves as a term of art that refers to any work that prompts imaginings. This technical sense of the term originates from (Walton 1990). As (Friend 2008) clarifies, the class of works under consideration in fact includes non-fictive works, such as memoirs, in addition to fictive works, such as novels. Indeed, Friend notes that “fiction” and “non-fiction”, in their ordinary senses, can be construed as names for genres with distinctive conventions.

explanations mentioned in §1.1 explicitly say that genre is only a part of the complete account of the phenomena that they address.

### 1.2.2 The Counterfactual Challenge

The **counterfactual challenge** indirectly questions the explanatory worth of genre: it points to the lack of counterfactual robustness as an indicator that genre explanations are not genuine explanations. Among the distinctive roles that laws and law-like generalizations perform in science are *supporting robust counterfactuals* and *grounding genuine explanations* (Lange 2002, 412). Counterfactual robustness thus goes hand in hand with genuine explanatoriness. Purported explanations that are not counterfactually robust are unlikely to be genuinely explanatory because they are unlikely to be grounded in laws or law-like generalizations.

This challenge to genre explanations is driven by the **no-exception intuition**: genuine explanations must involve exceptionless laws, or at least exceptionless law-like generalizations. The basic idea behind the counterfactual challenge is this: since the generalizations that genre explanations cite—call them “genre laws”—are apparently shot through with exceptions, they can neither support robust counterfactuals nor ground genuine explanations.<sup>5</sup> Think of cases where two works of the same genre produce significantly different effects on audiences, or cases where small changes to a work make the genre laws that previously applied to no longer do so. Such cases suggest that genre laws are not counterfactually robust. In turn, this lack of counterfactual robustness suggests that genre explanations, the purported explanations that cite genre laws, are not genuinely explanatory. To answer the counterfactual challenge, we must show that genre laws can support robust counterfactuals despite the numerous

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<sup>5</sup>Nothing substantial hangs on the term “genre laws”. Some philosophers, such as (Earman and Roberts 1999), want to reserve the term “laws” strictly for fundamental physical laws. Others, such as (Lange 2002), apply the term to other law-like generalizations in the special sciences. It would be more accurate to call the generalizations under consideration here “generalizations-about-genre-that-are-law-like-if-genre-explanations-are-genuinely-explanatory”, but “genre laws” is more handy.

apparent exceptions to them.

### 1.2.3 The Fundamentality Challenge

The **fundamentality challenge** directly questions the explanatory worth of genre: it aims to show that genre explanations lack an essential feature of genuine explanations because it is relatively uninformative. It is driven by the **smaller-grain intuition**: explanations at lower levels give more information than explanations at higher levels. All metaphysical accounts of genre acknowledge that a work's appropriate classification in a genre depends on the lower-level features of that work, even if these accounts do not always agree on what the relevant lower-level features are. Since genre is not metaphysically fundamental, it is natural to think that it is not explanatorily fundamental either. Specifically, the worry here is that genre explanations cannot give any more information than *individualistic explanations*, explanations that do cite the metaphysically fundamental features. In fact, we might expect individualistic explanations to tell us more about the specifics of a work, especially how it differs from works that are similar in other respects, such as genre membership. To answer the fundamentality challenge, we must say what information can genre explanations provide that individualistic explanations cannot.

## 1.3 Genre Laws and Counterfactual Robustness

The no-exception intuition behind the counterfactual challenge is misguided. It fails to acknowledge the important role that *ceteris paribus* laws, or cp-laws, play in actual scientific practices, especially in the special sciences. Although cp-laws are apparently shot through with exceptions, they nevertheless support a wide range of counterfactuals. So special science cp-laws can support genuine explanations in the special sciences, despite the numerous apparent exceptions to them. Genre laws are best understood as cp-laws. As is the case with other cp-laws, they are counterfactually

robust despite the numerous apparent exceptions to them. I will first clarify the nature of cp-laws and then consider how cp-laws allow us to respond to the counterfactual challenge.

### 1.3.1 *Ceteris Paribus* Laws

Let us begin by examining what *ceteris paribus* clauses do. Consider the generalization *fish eggs develop into fish*. This generalization is apparently shot through with exceptions: some fish eggs get enucleated with sheep DNA and become sheeps, some fish eggs get eaten and become nutrients for a turtle, and some fish eggs get irradiated and turn into a strange and dysfunctional pile of flesh.<sup>6</sup> Yet, despite these apparent exceptions, this generalization seems true. That is because we do not tacitly understand the generalization to be making the evidently-false universal claim that *all* fish eggs turn into fish. Instead, we tacitly understand the generalization to mean that *ceteris paribus*, fish eggs turn into fish; the apparent exceptions are not genuine counterexamples to the generalization because they are already excluded by the *ceteris paribus* clause.<sup>7</sup>

Although it would be practically, if not theoretically, impossible to list every one of the infinite number of trajectories a fish egg might take that the *ceteris paribus* clause excludes, this generalization nevertheless has determinate meaning. Importantly, meanings of generalizations like this do not rest on the statistical typicality of the respective standard cases. Indeed, the number of fish eggs that do not turn into fish is likely to be greater than the number of fish eggs that do. Instead, meanings of generalizations like this ultimately depend on our tacit understandings of what would constitute genuine counterexamples and what would be mere apparent exceptions—

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<sup>6</sup>I borrow this example, including both the generalization and the apparent exceptions, from (Lance and Little 2004, 446).

<sup>7</sup>Ordinary language synonyms of *ceteris paribus* include—among many others—“in the absence of disturbing factors”, “defeasibly”, “in the standard condition”, “as a rule”, and “subject to provisos”. See (Lance and Little 2004) and (Lange 2002) for other ordinary language synonyms of *ceteris paribus*.

even if such tacit understandings are rarely, if ever, fully articulated. We understand what the generalization *fish eggs develop into fish* means because we tacitly understand which trajectories of fish eggs are *relevantly like* the apparent exceptions listed above, and so should be excluded by the *ceteris paribus* clause.

The point here is not that we cannot make explicit all the cases that are relevantly like the apparent exceptions listed above; perhaps in theory we can make such an infinitely-long list. Rather, the point is that our capacity for making of such an explicit list is itself derived from our tacit understanding of what would constitute genuine counterexamples to this generalization and what would be mere apparent exceptions. As (Lange 2002, 409) puts the point:

But in what sense would such an expression really *be* fully explicit? It would derive its content in just the way that the original qualifier did: by virtue of our implicit background understanding of what would count as compelling reasons for (or against) the correctness of applying it to a given case.

The meaning that such an explicit list would provide is not anything over and above, and is in fact fundamentally dependent on, the meaning that our tacit understanding already provides. Admittedly, cashing out this meaning is not easy. We would have to come to an agreement on what the canonical examples of exceptions are, what the criteria are with which we can compare a novel case to the canonical examples, and whether a given novel case counts as a genuine counterexample to the generalization or a mere apparent exception excluded by the *ceteris paribus* clause. However, trying to come to agreement on these matters is simply the standard mode of operation in actual scientific practices, especially in the special sciences.<sup>8</sup> Our tacit understandings

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<sup>8</sup>See (Lange 2002) and citations therein; *contra* (Earman and Roberts 1999). It is unclear how substantial their disagreement about the role of *ceteris paribus* clauses in the special sciences really is. Earman and Roberts think that the inclusion of a *ceteris paribus* clause indicates that a generalization is only a near-law—a work in progress—rather than a genuine law. However, they are also perfectly willing to grant that generalizations that contain *ceteris paribus* clauses—the near-laws—do play an important role in the actual practice of the special sciences, and fulfill many of the roles that genuine laws do in physics, such as supporting counterfactuals and grounding explanations. So Earman and

of particular *ceteris paribus* clauses are thus indispensable in scientific investigations.

Call a non-accidental generalizations that contains a *ceteris paribus* clause a ***ceteris paribus* law**, or **cp-law** for short.<sup>9</sup> As (Lange 2002, 412) notes, there is a pragmatic dimension to the *ceteris paribus* clause: it “[restricts] the law’s application to certain purposes”.<sup>10</sup> Cp-laws only do the works that laws are thought to do, such as supporting counterfactuals and grounding explanations, in suitable contexts—namely, contexts where the disturbing factors that the *ceteris paribus* clause rules out are irrelevant. Whether a particular cp-law can ground an explanation partly depends on the question that we are asking, or what we are trying to explain.

The ranges of counterfactuals that cp-laws support are neither identical to nor narrower than the ranges of counterfactuals that other laws, such as the fundamental laws of physics, support. We can see this point clearly via an example.<sup>11</sup> Suppose that *the popularity of organized religions declines when the population shifts due to industrialization* is a sociological law. This law supports the counterfactual *if the population were to shift due to industrialization, then the popularity of organized religions would decline*.

First, the range of our example counterfactual is not identical to the range of counterfactuals associated with fundamental laws of physics. There are scenarios where fundamental laws of physics hold but our example sociological law does not. For example, suppose that the fundamental laws of physics are the same as they actually are but that human beings are psychologically incapable of following organized religions. Then the population shifts due to industrialization would have no effect on

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Roberts appear to think, in agreement with Lange, that working to determine the meanings of *ceteris paribus* clauses is standard in the special sciences.

<sup>9</sup>Different accounts of cp-laws give different conditions for separating law-like *ceteris paribus* generalizations from accidental *ceteris paribus* generalizations. See (Reutlinger et al. 2011) for a survey of contemporary accounts of cp-laws.

<sup>10</sup>This is not just Lange’s esoteric view. Lange cites Mill as an early proponent of the aim-dependence of *ceteris paribus* clauses. Other contemporary developments of cp-laws, such as (Cohen and Callender 2009), similarly make room for their aim-dependence.

<sup>11</sup>For another example, see (Lange 2002) on the area law in island-biogeography. My example is structurally the same but easier to comprehend, or so I think.

the popularity of organized religions. (The failure of our example sociological law in this scenario is not troubling, however, because the pragmatic dimension of the *ceteris paribus* clause allows for the exclusion of this scenario due to its irrelevance for the aims and interests of sociology.)

Second, the range of our example counterfactual is also not *narrower than*—in the sense of *wholly contained in*—the range of counterfactuals associated with the fundamental laws of physics.<sup>12</sup> There are scenarios where fundamental laws of physics do not hold but our example sociological law does. For example, suppose that some fundamental parameter of physics is just slightly different from the way it actually is, but without any downstream effects on human sociological behavior. Then the population shifts due to industrialization would still have the same exact effect on the popularity of organized religions. The range of our example counterfactual is thus no narrower than the range of counterfactuals associated with the fundamental laws of physics because the former is not a proper subset of the latter. Instead of being identical or narrower, our example sociological law simply supports a different range of counterfactuals than the one that fundamental laws of physics support.

In general, it is a feature of the social sciences that they are *autonomous* domains of inquiry. (Reutlinger et al. 2011) surveys the different ways that philosophers of science explicate this notion of autonomy. On the account developed in (Lange 2002), a domain of inquiry is autonomous if it has a set of candidate laws that support a stable range of counterfactuals. Whether our example sociological law is a genuine (cp-)law is thus an open scientific question, depending on whether it supports a stable range of counterfactuals in conjunction with other sociological laws. Indeed, whether sociology is an autonomous domain of inquiry is an open scientific question,

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<sup>12</sup>Philosophers do not unanimously agree on what it means to say a range of possible scenarios is *narrower than* another range of possible scenarios. Given that all ranges are likely to contain an infinite number of scenarios, we cannot compare the size of ranges by simply counting. While *wholly contained in* is not an uncontroversial definition of *narrower than*, it is the most clear and workable definition available. At any rate, this is the sense of *narrower than* that I will employ throughout this chapter.



depending on whether the conjunction of all its candidate laws support a stable range of counterfactuals. My goal here is only to show that the cp-laws of autonomous social sciences—regardless of how autonomy is ultimately explicated—can support robust counterfactuals that range over distinct sets of scenarios, none of which is wholly contained in any other. Moreover, as the case above shows, none of these distinctive sets of scenarios is wholly contained in the range of counterfactuals associated with the fundamental laws of physics either.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3.2 Response to the Counterfactual Challenge

Now, let us return to the counterfactual challenge. Counterfactual robustness functions as an indicator of genuine explanations. To answer the counterfactual challenge, we must show that genre laws can support robust counterfactuals despite the numerous apparent exceptions to them. Conceiving of genre laws as cp-laws allows us to do so.

It is easiest to understand the strategy for responding to the counterfactual challenge through an example. Consider the generalization *decapitation scenes in horror comedies warrant laughter*.<sup>14</sup> As is the case with *fish eggs develop into fish*, we should not construe this genre generalization as an evidently-false universal claim, that *all* decapitation scenes in horror comedies warrant laughter. Instead, we should understand this genre generalization to mean that *ceteris paribus*, decapitation scenes in horror comedies warrant laughter. As explained earlier, this genre generalization is meaningful as long as we have a tacit understanding of what the *ceteris paribus* clause excludes, even if we can never fully articulate this understanding.

Suppose now that *decapitation scenes in horror comedies warrant laughter* is a genre law. (Whether it is in fact a genre law is an open question; the point here is only

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<sup>13</sup>(Lange 2002, 417) puts this point more technically: “generalizations from inexact sciences aren’t preserved under every counterfactual supposition consistent with the fundamental laws of physics”.

<sup>14</sup>Something warrants laughter just in case that laughter is a *fitting* response to it, in the sense explicated by (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000).

to illustrate the response strategy.) As the long history of unfunny horror comedies shows, a decapitation scene in a horror comedy could fail to warrant laughter due to a near-infinite number of disturbing factors being present: amateurish acting, incoherent plots, and cliched gags, to name just a few. This genre law therefore apparent admits of numerous exceptions, such as the decapitation scenes in the *Scary Movie* franchise films. Despite apparent exceptions like these, this genre law is still true because our tacit understanding of the *ceteris paribus* clause allows for the exclusion of numerous apparent exceptions. Specifically, the decapitation scenes in the *Scary Movie* franchise films are already excluded by the *ceteris paribus* clause because of the presence of relevant disturbing factors in these scenes—amateurish acting, incoherent plots, and cliched gags, to name just a few.

In addition to being meaningful and true, this genre law is also counterfactually robust. The counterfactual that it supports, *if a decapitation scene were in a horror comedy, then it would warrant laughter*, ranges over a wide variety of scenarios, including scenarios where fundamental laws of physics do not hold. For example, suppose that some fundamental parameter of physics is just slightly different from the way it actually is, but without any downstream effects on human aesthetic behavior. Then a decapitation scene in a horror comedy would still warrant laughter. The range of this genre counterfactual is thus no narrower than the range of counterfactuals associated with the fundamental laws of physics because the former is not a proper subset of the latter. For similar reasons, the range of this genre counterfactual is also no narrower than the range of counterfactuals associated with sociological laws, biological laws, or laws of any other autonomous special science.

We now have a strategy for responding to the counterfactual challenge: understanding the generalizations that genre explanations appeal to as cp-laws. Before moving on to responding to the fundamentality challenge, I want to emphasize two points concerning the foregoing discussion. First, I am not assuming that the notion

of cp-laws, or indeed the notion of *ceteris paribus*, is unproblematic. Rather, the centrality of cp-laws to the special sciences shows that, whatever problems cp-laws have, they are everyone's problems. The no-exception intuition is misguided because it is insufficiently attentive to actual scientific practices, especially in the special sciences. Once we reject the no-exception intuition, as we must, we can see that there is nothing uniquely problematic about the appeal to cp-laws in aesthetic explanations.

Second, I am not claiming that all generalizations that cite genre are genre laws. Rather, whether a generalization that cites genre is a genre law, or indeed whether there are any genre laws at all, is an open question. We can only answer this question by performing tasks typical of actual scientific practices: coming to an agreement on what the canonical examples of exceptions are, what the criteria are with which we can compare a novel case to the canonical examples, and whether a given novel case counts as a genuine counterexample to the generalization or a mere apparent exception excluded by the *ceteris paribus* clause. In responding to the counterfactual challenge, I am only explaining why genre explanations cannot be categorically ruled out as good aesthetic explanations simply because they appeal to generalizations that cite genre. Ultimately, we can only assess whether the genre explanations mentioned in §1.1 count as good aesthetic explanations by investigating the phenomena that they purport to explain. Bluntly put, evaluating the worth of those genre explanations requires doing aesthetics, not meta-aesthetics.

## 1.4 Genre Explanations and Informativeness

The smaller-grain intuition behind the fundamentality challenge is misguided too. Explanations at different levels provide different kinds of information, suitable for different aims and interests. Although physics is metaphysically more fundamental than the special sciences, physical explanations are not always preferable because they sometimes fail to provide information that higher-level special science explanations

do provide. Similarly, although genre classification depends on lower-level features, individualistic explanations need not be always preferable because they could fail to provide information that genre explanations provide. I will first present explanatory ecumenicalism, the view that explanations at different levels can be valuable in different respects, and then show how explanatory ecumenicalism allows us to respond to the fundamentality challenge.

### 1.4.1 Explanatory Ecumenicalism

Explanatory ecumenicalism is the view that “explanations of different levels of grain may be interesting in different ways” (Jackson and Pettit 1992, 2). Lower-level or smaller-grained explanations tend to provide more *contrastive information*, and higher-level or larger-grained explanations tend to provide more *comparative information*. Although there are some problems with Jackson and Pettit’s brand of explanatory ecumenicalism as applied to scientific explanations generally, it is useful enough for the general point that this section makes.<sup>15</sup>

We can see the distinction between contrastive and comparative information through one of Jackson and Pettit’s examples. A flask containing boiling water has cracked. Why? At a higher-level, we can explain the cracking of the flask by pointing to the boiling water inside. At a lower-level, we can explain the cracking of the flask by pointing to a specific vibrating molecule. The higher- and lower-level explanations each has a virtue that the other lacks. Learning the lower-level explanation gives us

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<sup>15</sup>(Potochnik 2010) develops an account of levels of explanations on which lower- and higher-level explanations need not differ in their generality, but only in the patterns that they illuminate. Potochnik’s account is partly motivated by cases where the lower-level explanation does not cite the supervenience bases of properties cited in the higher-level explanation, such as genetic and phenotypic explanations in biology. On her diagnosis, traditional anti-reductionist accounts, such as Jackson and Pettit’s, fail to capture the fundamental difference between lower- and higher-level explanations. However, for this chapter’s purpose, Jackson and Pettit’s account is sufficiently useful since the properties that genre explanations cite *do* supervene on the properties that individualistic explanations cite. So Potochnik’s worry will not get us into trouble here. Jackson and Pettit’s account also has the advantage of being widely accepted, at least currently. At any rate, the general point of this section can easily be made via Potochnik’s brand of explanatory pluralism as well.

information about what actually happened in this case, or what makes this instance of cracking different from the other instances of cracking. Appealing to lower-level features thus gives us **contrastive information**. Learning the higher-level explanation gives us information about what might have happened in similar cases, or what makes this instance of cracking similar to the other instances of cracking. Appealing to higher-level features thus gives us **comparative information**.

We need not jettison the higher-level explanation because it lacks the contrastive information that the lower-level explanation provides. After all, it also provides the comparative information that the lower-level explanation lacks. The two explanations complement one another. We learn about particularities of a case—such as the specific work done by that specific vibrating molecule—through lower-level explanations, and we learn about the patterns that the case instantiates—such as the general effects of boiling water on flasks—through higher-level explanations.<sup>16</sup> Lower-level explanations tell us about particularities, but not patterns; higher-level explanations tell us about patterns, but not particularities. None of this denies the *causal* fundamentality of the vibrating molecule: the boiling of the water depends on the vibrations of molecules. What is denied is that the explanation that cites the vibrating molecule is also *explanatorily* fundamental. Causal fundamentality does not entail explanatory fundamentality. Given that the two explanations give us distinctive kinds of information, neither explanation ought to be uniformly preferred over the other, contrary to what the smaller-grain intuition suggests.

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<sup>16</sup>On the brand of explanatory pluralism that (Potochnik 2010) advocates, what we learn from explanations at different levels are different patterns. In this case, the lower-level explanation tells us about patterns of energy transfer, vibration, and so on; and the higher-level explanation tells us about patterns of causal relationships between boiling water and flasks. I thank Lina Jansson for alerting me to this alternative way of capturing the difference between lower- and higher-level explanations.

### 1.4.2 Response to the Fundamentality Challenge

Now, let us return to the fundamentality challenge. To answer the fundamentality challenge, we must say what information genre explanations can provide that individualistic explanations cannot. Explanatory ecumenicalism readily suggests an answer: comparative information.

It is easiest to understand the strategy for responding to the fundamentality challenge through an example. Suppose my friend Curiosa and I are watching the horror comedy film *The Evil Dead*. I laugh in response to a decapitation scene. Curiosa, being rather philosophically sophisticated, asks: “why is your laughter the fitting response to that decapitation scene?” There are two ways that I can respond to her question. First, I can give her a genre explanation response: laughter is the fitting response to that decapitation scene because decapitation scenes in horror comedies warrant laughter. (As before, we are supposing that *decapitation scenes in horror comedies warrant laughter* is a genre law for the purpose of this example.) Second, I can give her an individualistic explanation response: laughter is the fitting response to that decapitation scene because some specific dialogues and depictions in *The Evil Dead* are similar in specific ways to specific dialogues or depictions in other specific films (say, *Evil Dead 2* and *Dead Alive*).<sup>17</sup> For this response to be adequate, I must also fill in what the specific dialogues and depictions are and what the specific similarities are.

The explanations that these two possible responses cite are informative in different ways. Specifically, the genre explanation can tell us more about the general relationships between decapitation scenes in horror comedies and the fitting response of

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<sup>17</sup>The terse formulation is meant to mimic to what (Currie 2004, 56) explicitly suggests: individualistic explanations appeal to “the specific way [the work] is (together with, perhaps, similarities between these specific ways and specific ways possessed by other specific works the people in the audience are familiar with)”. Of course, other individualistic explanations may be available, and even preferable. However, since Currie does not go into further detail regarding what individualistic explanations look like, I am extrapolating from what he does say about them.

laughter that is instantiated by my fitting response to that decapitation scene in *The Evil Dead*. Thus, the genre explanation can tell us why laughter is the fitting response to decapitation scenes in other horror comedies, such as *Shaun of the Dead*, even when they do not contain specific dialogues and depictions that are similar in specific ways to specific dialogues or depictions in *Evil Dead 2* and *Dead Alive*. The individualistic explanation cannot tell us this. Moreover, the genre explanation can also tell us why laughter would still be the fitting response to that decapitation scene in *The Evil Dead* even if *Evil Dead 2* and *Dead Alive* never existed. The individualistic explanation cannot tell us this either. What the individualistic explanation gains in information about the particularities of a case, it loses in information about the patterns that the case instantiates. Suppose that Curiosa lacks experience with horror comedies and wishes to extend her aesthetic knowledge from this particular case to similar cases, the genre explanation response might then be preferable. In general, whether an individualistic explanation or a genre explanation is preferable depends on contextual factors such as one's particular aims and interests.

We now have a strategy for responding to the fundamentality challenge: recognizing that genre explanations can provide comparative information that individualistic explanations cannot. Importantly, we can recognize the explanatory worth of genre without denying that a work's appropriate genre classification depends on its lower-level features. Dependence fundamentality does not entail explanatory fundamentality. Explanatory ecumenicalism situates genre explanations alongside other explanations in aesthetics, including individualistic explanations. Aesthetic explanations at different levels are complementary in the same way that scientific explanations at different levels are. Rather than insisting that one kind of aesthetic explanation is uniformly superior to another, we should use whichever kind of aesthetic explanation that best suits our aims and interests in a given context.

As is the case with the response to the counterfactual challenge earlier, my response

to the fundamentality challenge does not purport to show that the genre explanations mentioned in §1.1 are indeed good aesthetic explanations. What my response does show is that whether a genre explanation is a good aesthetic explanation depends on whether it can provide information that an individualistic explanation of the same phenomenon cannot. In responding to the fundamentality challenge, I am only showing why genre explanations cannot be categorically ruled out as good aesthetic explanations simply because they are higher-level explanations. The upshot is the same as before: evaluating the worth of those genre explanations requires doing aesthetics, not meta-aesthetics.

## 1.5 Reply to Currie

The previous two sections borrow resources from contemporary philosophy of science in order to respond to two intuitive challenges to genre explanations. With these resources in hand, I can now reply to the argument against genre explanations found in (Currie 2004).

### 1.5.1 Currie's Argument Against Genre Explanations

Currie argues that genre explanations cannot be good aesthetic explanations because they are neither informative nor robust. To begin, Currie objects to genre explanations on the grounds that they are not as informative as individualistic explanations:

Suppose we want to explain the effect of the work on the audience, and cite its being a tragedy. The objector will say that what really matters for explaining the effect of the work is the specific way it is (together with, perhaps, similarities between these specific ways and specific ways possessed by other specific works the people in the audience are familiar with). On this view, the work's being a tragedy does not explain anything left unexplained by the individualistic explanation. Indeed, the individualistic explanation explains more; different tragedies affect their audiences in



different ways, and the individualistic explanation cites details capable of accounting for these differences. We need not rest content noting that the effect was ‘generally of the kind we expect from a tragedy’. (Currie 2004, 56)

Furthermore, while some explanations that relatively lack informativeness make up for this lack by having more of other virtues, such as robustness, genre explanations do not.<sup>18</sup> Currie further objects to genre explanations on the grounds that they are not as counterfactually robust as higher-level sociological explanations:

In interesting cases, explanations by appeal to genre does not provide the sort of information about counterfactual states of affairs that explanation by appeal to industrialization does [referring to the earlier example of industrialization explaining the decline of organized religions]. *Hamlet* has the effects we associate with a Shakespearean tragedy, but its having them is due to highly specific and contingent features that its being a tragedy tells us nothing about; it could fail utterly to have these effects and still be a tragedy. While *industrialization* is counterfactually robust, *being a tragedy* is counterfactually fragile, or relatively so. . . . Why is *Hamlet* so intellectually and emotionally affecting? An informative answer may cite the fact that it is a tragedy, but no informative answer will be robust under changes to any of a vast range of details about the play: a small word change here or there would have altered the effect significantly. (Currie 2004, 56–57)

Genre explanations fail to possess counterfactual robustness because not only do they admit of a small number exceptions, they are in fact *shot through* with numerous exceptions. Whatever explanatory worth genre possesses, Currie concludes, it is not of artistic or aesthetic interest.

### 1.5.2 A Modest Defense of Genre Explanations

Before replying to the specific objections that Currie raises, let us note two implicit assumptions in Currie’s overall argument against genre explanations. First, Currie

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<sup>18</sup>Currie is aware of Jackson and Pettit’s explanatory ecumenicalism. So he seems to recognize that holistic explanations can be preferable to individualistic explanations in some domains of inquiry. However, he also seems to not think that genre explanations have the virtues that holistic explanations in other domains have, for reasons that I will explain shortly.

assumes that it is unproblematic to switch the comparison class for genre explanations between the two objections. Genre explanations are initially compared to lower-level aesthetic explanations and then compared to higher-level sociological explanations. Second, Currie assumes that it makes sense to talk about a unique best kind of explanation irrespective of the questions asked. Although he only mentions one particular question that one could ask, about why *Hamlet* is so intellectually and emotionally affecting, he draws the categorical conclusion that genre generally does not figure in “explanations that have *any* artistic or aesthetic interest” (Currie 2004, 57; my emphasis). Both of these assumptions turn out to be deeply problematic.

There is a pragmatic dimension to explanations. Whether an explanation is suitable depends on contextual factors such as the question asked and the aims and interests of the questioner. In answering questions about aesthetic phenomena, given the autonomy of different domains of inquiry, sociological explanations are simply irrelevant. Hence, even if Currie were right about genre explanations being relatively less robust than higher-level sociological explanations, higher-level sociological explanations are simply not in the salient comparison class when we are answering questions about aesthetic phenomena. Only comparisons to other aesthetic explanations, such as individualistic aesthetic explanations, and not comparisons to higher-level sociological explanations, are relevant for assessing the robustness of genre explanations.

But Currie is also wrong about genre explanations being relatively less robust than higher-level sociological explanations. As explained in §1.3.2, both kinds of explanations are counterfactually robust despite the apparent exceptions to them. More importantly, the range of counterfactuals that genre laws support is no narrower than the range of counterfactuals that sociological laws support. There are scenarios where a genre law holds but a sociological law does not. Suppose that the psychology of human beings are the same as it actually is, except that human beings are incapable of following organized religions. Then, in this scenario, it would still be true that

decapitation scenes in horror comedies warrant laughter but false that the popularity of organized religions declines when the population shifts due to industrialization. Given that each discipline is autonomous, each discipline's laws support counterfactuals that range over a distinct set of scenarios.

Let us now return to the case of *Hamlet*, and consider whether individualistic explanations are uniformly superior to genre explanations. Currie is right that, compared to a genre explanation, an individualistic explanation can provide a better answer to why *Hamlet* is so intellectually and emotionally affecting. The reason that an individualistic explanation can provide a better answer is that this question has a *contrastive* aim in discerning why *Hamlet* is *more* intellectually and emotionally affecting than other plays, even other tragedies. As I note in §1.4.2, individualistic explanations indeed tend to provide more contrastive information than genre explanations tend to do. However, not all artistic or aesthetic questions have contrastive aims. We can ask, for example, why pity is the fitting response to both Hamlet in *Hamlet* and Macbeth in *Macbeth*. Given the *comparative* aim of this question, a genre explanation can provide a better answer than an individualistic explanation can. As I note in §1.4.2, genre explanations tend to provide more comparative information than individualistic explanations tend to do. Which kind of explanation is preferable depends on the question that is asked.

Moreover, in this case, genre explanations are indeed robust. Consider the explanation *pity is the fitting response to Hamlet because protagonists in tragedies warrant pity*. Contrary to what Currie claims, it is not obvious to me that any small word change here or there would have altered the fitting response to Hamlet. The emotional response of pity would be just as fitting had Hamlet been named "Macbeth", had the play been set in Scotland rather than Denmark, and had the ghost been replaced by three witches. It is unlikely that we would pity Hamlet if he were not an admirable but flawed character, but then *Hamlet* would unlikely be a tragedy either.

Varying specific details concerning style, characterization, and plot often also varies the appropriate genre for the work. So, such variations do not constitute genuine threats to the robustness of genre explanations.

## 1.6 Characterizing Aesthetic Explanations

Although my substantive goal in this chapter is to defend genre explanations, the strategies employed also offer two valuable methodological suggestions for characterizing aesthetic explanations in general:

First, we should be *pragmatists*. What allows for a satisfying response to a given question depends on contextual factors, such as the aims and interests of the relevant discipline. There is a pragmatic dimension to which explanation counts as best; the answer partly depends on the context. In assessing the worth of an explanation, what matters is how it measures up to other explanations in the salient comparison class, as specified by the context.

Second, we should be *pluralists*. The pragmatic aspect of explanations means that explanations at different levels are good for answering different kinds of questions. Aesthetic explanations at higher levels of abstraction can tell us more about what similar works have in common, and aesthetic explanations at lower levels can tell us more about what makes a particular work stand out. So, we should not uniformly prefer explanations at one level over explanations at another because aesthetic explanations at different levels are complementary.

## CHAPTER II

### Imaginative Resistance: Theoretical

Since (Walton 1994), (Moran 1994), and (Gendler 2000) have brought *imaginative resistance* into philosophical consciousness, numerous accounts have surfaced. Among the variety of accounts in the literature, one explanatory factor of imaginative resistance phenomena has been mostly overlooked: genre. In this chapter, I argue that the recognition of genre's explanatory contribution is indispensable for a complete understanding of imaginative resistance.

I situate my proposal alongside a prominent group of accounts proposed by Tamar Szabó Gendler, Stephen Yablo, Kendall Walton, and Brian Weatherson—*actual evaluative attitude accounts*.<sup>1</sup> In their attempts to explain imaginative resistance, these accounts focus on the role of readers' evaluative attitudes and responses. Their explanation of imaginative resistance has gained currency outside of aesthetics and philosophy of mind, with alleged implications for conceivability, meaning, and moral psychology.<sup>2</sup>

I argue that actual evaluative attitude accounts, as they currently stand, cannot explain how the same morally deviant proposition could be puzzling in a fiction of one genre but not puzzling in a fiction of another genre. Consequently, even if readers' actual evaluative attitudes and responses constitute *an* important explanatory factor, it

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter focuses on only the actual evaluative attitude accounts and sets aside, for example, the character-of-imagination accounts developed in (Currie 2002) and (Stokes 2006).

<sup>2</sup>In addition to the works of these authors, see also (Driver 2008) and (Levy 2005).

cannot be *the only* important factor. Instead, on my view, imaginative resistance is best thought of as a collection of phenomena whose complete explanation involves *multiple, independent* factors. Genre is a factor in the same league of importance as readers' actual evaluative attitudes and responses. Of broader significance, the recognition of genre's explanatory importance urges us to rethink the alleged implications of imaginative resistance for conceivability, meaning, and moral psychology.

*Overview of the chapter:* §2.1 presents the phenomena that get grouped under the name “imaginative resistance” and the puzzles associated with them. §2.2 puts the puzzles in the proper context: imaginative engagements with fictions. §2.3 motivates genre's potential for explaining imaginative resistance through an illustration. §2.4 paints a picture of genre's influence on the normativity and psychology of fictions. §2.5 draws on the resources offered by the foregoing picture of genre to address the puzzles associated with imaginative resistance. §2.6 contrasts my genre account with predecessors and actual evaluative attitude accounts.

## 2.1 Phenomena and Puzzles

In recent years, philosophers have investigated some curious phenomena under the name “imaginative resistance”. Roughly, these phenomena occur when certain propositions, such as morally deviant claims, are presented in fictions and people refuse to go along with the story. To gain a preliminary understanding of the phenomena, consider the following short story:<sup>3</sup>

*Balondemu and Abbo.* In the small town of Njeru in the 1970s, Balondemu

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<sup>3</sup>One potential problem with the extremely short stories that are standard in the imaginative resistance literature is that when they appear in philosophy papers, it can be difficult to read them as *stories* rather than *thought experiments*. Moreover, some philosophers, such as (Stock 2005) and (Todd 2009), claim that the puzzle of imaginative resistance is rather artificial—a mere artifact of the bizarre stories that philosophers have presented—and consequently deny that there are genuine phenomena to be investigated. Nevertheless, other philosophers in this literature have used short stories like this to motivate their accounts, and *if* there indeed are phenomena to be investigated, hopefully this short story can direct us to their vicinity.

has fallen in love with Abbo. Although he has asked for her hand in marriage before, she has steadily refused. Out of his desperate love for her, Balondemu tricks Abbo into marrying him. When Abbo’s mother finds out what Balondemu has done, she appeals to the supreme leader of the land, General Kiyonda, to free her daughter from her bond to Balondemu. Against the mother’s wishes, however, General Kiyonda reaffirms the legitimacy of the marriage and declares Balondemu’s action to be morally permissible. So Balondemu’s trickery is okay, after all.

When reading the story, I find the last sentence **puzzling**. I experience *a sense of jarring confusion* and the story appears to stop “coming alive” phenomenologically.<sup>4</sup> It is *difficult for me to imagine* that Balondemu’s trickery of Abbo into marriage is indeed okay. On top of these psychological responses, it seems to me that it is *not even fictional*—true in the world of the fiction—that Balondemu’s trickery of Abbo is okay, whatever the story text explicitly says.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, my reactions are relatively *persistent*. Even after reading the story numerous times, I continue to find the sentence puzzling in these ways. Imaginative resistance is thus to be differentiated from **hermeneutic recalibration**, a common and non-puzzling literary technique to jar the reader *temporarily* and force her to reconsider and reinterpret the work in response.<sup>6</sup>

I trust that most readers can share the kinds of reactions that I have, even if there are individual differences in magnitude. The ways in which the last sentence is puzzling—evoking reactions as described—are what philosophers have in mind when they discuss “imaginative resistance”. Given that the phenomena in the vicinity

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<sup>4</sup>(Weatherson 2004) notes that puzzling sentences generate a striking, jarring reaction. The “pop-out” terminology in (Gendler 2006) suggests a similar phenomenological characterization.

<sup>5</sup>Reflections on one’s responses can help make the fictionality assessment explicit. Usually, I take what the text explicitly says to be indicative of what is true in the fiction. So when the fiction asserts  $\varphi$ , I typically judge  $\varphi$  to be fictional. But, as (Matravets 2003) suggests, I respond to puzzling sentences differently: I recast what is asserted as what the narrator (or a fictional character) thinks. When the fiction asserts  $\varphi$ , I judge only that *the narrator thinks that  $\varphi$*  to be fictional, and not  $\varphi$ .

<sup>6</sup>In hermeneutic recalibration cases, the reader is able to eventually make sense of the initially jarring sentence on a relatively stable reading of the work. The reader is then able to imagine and accept as fictional the proposition expressed by that sentence, and no longer finds it jarring. I thank Daniel Jacobson for calling my attention to the prevalence of this literary technique, coining the term “hermeneutic recalibration”, and challenging me to clarify my characterization of resistance phenomena.

concern more than the imagination, let us avoid future confusions by dropping the term “imaginative resistance” and instead dub them **resistance phenomena**. Call a sentence that evokes resistance phenomena a *puzzling sentence*, and the proposition expressed a *puzzling proposition*.

There are two aspects of resistance phenomena, normative and psychological, that demand explanations. As (Weatherson 2004) and (Walton 2006) point out, there are in fact multiple puzzles that are connected to resistance phenomena.<sup>7</sup> On the *normative* side, there is the **fictionality puzzle** that asks why puzzling propositions are comparatively difficult to make fictional, or true in a fiction.<sup>8</sup> In this respect, puzzling propositions bring out normative constraints on authorial freedom. Although authors usually have the authority to make a proposition fictional simply by saying so, it appears that they do not have the same freedom when it comes to puzzling propositions. The fictionality puzzle can thus be rephrased to ask why authors have comparatively less freedom in asserting puzzling propositions. On the *psychological* side, there are two puzzles that concern people’s actual responses to puzzling propositions. The **imaginative puzzle** asks why people have comparative difficulties with imagining puzzling propositions. The **phenomenological puzzle** asks why people experience a sense of jarring confusion when they encounter, and attempt to imagine, puzzling propositions. Despite the conceptual distinction, the imaginative difficulties and the jarring phenomenology often go hand in hand. An additional challenge on the psychological side is to explain the frequent co-occurrences of these responses to puzzling propositions.

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<sup>7</sup>One puzzle in the vicinity that this chapter will not address is the **aesthetic puzzle**, which concerns the relationship between a work’s moral value and its aesthetic value. (Walton 2006) notes that this puzzle is not unique to resistance phenomena, but is instead a part of the longstanding debate in aesthetics concerning the ethical criticism of art.

<sup>8</sup>I follow (Gendler 2000) in emphasizing that the difficulties with puzzling propositions are only *comparative*, relative to normal experiences with fictions.



## 2.2 Situating Resistance Phenomena

To accurately grasp the nature of resistance phenomena, we must put them in the proper context. There is an important feature of puzzling sentences and propositions that often goes unnoticed: puzzling sentences and propositions are not puzzling in themselves, but puzzling as, respectively, parts of story texts and parts of fictions. Early discussions of resistance phenomena make this feature evident. It is not an accident that (Gendler 2000), (Yablo 2002), and (Weatherson 2004) all present *short stories* in order to motivate their explanations of resistance phenomena. They do so because resistance phenomena arise during *imaginative engagements with fictions*.

Further support for situating resistance phenomena in this context comes from philosophers' explicit characterizations of resistance phenomena as involving stories or fictions. Consider the following quotes:

Can an author simply stipulate in *the text of a story* what moral principles apply in *the fictional world*, just as she specifies what actions characters perform? If the text includes the sentence, 'In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl' or 'The village elders did their duty before God by forcing the widow onto her husband's funeral pyre', are readers obliged to accept it as fictional that, in doing what they did, Giselda or the elders behaved in morally proper ways? Why shouldn't *storytellers* be allowed to experiment explicitly with worlds of morally different kinds, including ones even they regard as morally obnoxious? (Walton 1994, 37; my emphases)

The puzzle of imaginative resistance: the puzzle of explaining our comparative difficulty in imagining *fictional worlds* that we take to be morally deviant. (Gendler 2000, 56; my emphasis)

Walton makes it clear that sentences like 'In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl' are not puzzling *as such*, but puzzling *as a part* of a story's text. Gendler makes it clear that the propositions such sentences express are not puzzling *as such*, but puzzling *as a part* of a fictional world that readers explore

through imaginings. It is thus more appropriate to characterize resistance phenomena as evoked by story texts and fictions rather than by sentences and propositions.<sup>9</sup>

Some technical terms are necessary to regiment the notion of imaginative engagements with fictions. In this chapter, **fictions** are simply narrative representations that prompt make-believe. This technical usage of the term “fiction” originates from (Walton 1990). As (Friend 2008) clarifies, the class of representational works that Walton has in mind—what she calls “Walt-fictions”—includes both works that are fictive, such as novels, and works that are not, such as memoirs. Moreover, the class of fictions is inclusive with respect to media: oral folklores, novels, comics, and movies all count. And it is inclusive with respect to aesthetic value: classics of Western literature and trashy supermarket novels equally count.

As a rough characterization, imaginative engagements are mental projects that people typically undertake when they read stories, watch movies, and interact with narratives in other media. More technically, **imaginative engagements** require aiming imagination at fictionality for the sake of aesthetic pleasure, or enjoyment, from the work. To count as imaginatively engaging with a fiction, it is not enough to be immersed in it and be affectively involved with it, even though both are common characteristics. What makes imaginative engagement a special context is that it is done with an aim of enjoyment, even though enjoyment need not be the only aim. In order to derive enjoyment from the fiction—as opposed to from one’s own creative imagination, for example—another important characteristic of imaginative engagement is the normative requirement to place one’s imaginings and related psychological responses under the governance of the fiction’s prescriptions.

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<sup>9</sup>In contrast, (Todd 2009, 191) does characterize resistance phenomena as concerning “isolated, a-contextual single propositions”. Consequently, he concludes that philosophers like Gendler and Walton are mistaken in thinking that there are genuine philosophical puzzles concerning a special class of isolated, a-contextual single propositions. While I agree with Todd that there are no genuine puzzles concerning particular propositions, I disagree with his characterization of resistance phenomena. The foregoing discussion makes it clear that Todd’s characterization of resistance phenomena is not what the philosophers he criticizes have in mind either.

There are many ways to interact with narratives in various media that involve imaginings, but imaginative engagement is a special context. When people typically read stories and watch movies, they are undertaking these activities in order to get aesthetic pleasure, or satisfaction and enjoyment, from the work. For illustrations, consider the following interactions with narratives that intuitively seem not to be imaginative engagements. A student could read a novel solely in preparation for an upcoming test. Even if he recruits his imagination in order to truly understand the fictional world of the novel, he seems to not be genuinely imaginatively engaging with the novel. Likewise, a censor for the film ratings board could watch a movie solely for its sexual and violent content. Even if she recruits her imagination in order to dutifully accomplish these evaluations, and consequently have the requisite vivid emotional responses, she seems to not be genuinely imaginatively engaging with the movie either. On the more strict notion of imaginative engagement that I am employing, one could recruit imagination in interacting with a fiction but nevertheless fall short of imaginatively engaging with it. While imagination is central to imaginative engagements, the two are fundamentally different in kind.<sup>10</sup> Imaginative engagement, as I note earlier, is a mental *project* that one undertakes. However, imagination is a mental *attitude* that is recruited in a variety of mental projects.<sup>11</sup>

To see that resistance phenomena involve imaginings that are part of imaginative

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<sup>10</sup>One way to see this fundamental difference is to consider a case where there are imaginings but no imaginative engagement. Consider a fiction that prescribes readers to have certain affective responses in addition to certain imaginings. A reader who imagines, but does not affectively respond, as prescribed would be failing to imaginatively engage with that fiction. Although there surely are instances where imaginatively engaging with a fiction simply involves imagining what the fiction prescribes, most instances of imaginative engagements are far richer cognitively and affectively. Another way to see this fundamental difference is through an analogy. The relationship between imaginative engagement and imagination is analogous to the relationship between doxastic deliberation and belief that (Shah 2003) and (Shah and Velleman 2005) explicate. This relationship is between a mental project—what we conceive of ourselves as doing with our minds—and a mental attitude, state, or process that is central to the project. In most cases, doxastic deliberation employs mental processes, such as inferential mechanisms, in addition to the mental attitude of belief. On this characterization of imaginative engagement, we can distinguish imaginative resistance from a nearby activity, imaginative *disengagement*: when one disengages, one simply withdraws from the mental project of imaginative engagement altogether.

<sup>11</sup>See (Liao and Gendler 2011) for an overview of imagination’s various uses.

engagements, rather than all imaginings, consider imagination's function in counterfactual reasoning.<sup>12</sup> During moral deliberation, one might ask oneself the question *what if female infanticide were morally right*. In responding to this question, one may need to vividly imagine female infanticide to be morally right, and draw out the potential consequences by imagining what else would be true in such a world. As a matter of fact, people tend not to have comparative difficulties with imagining a morally deviant proposition, such as *female infanticide is morally right*, when they reason counterfactually during moral deliberation. Therefore, it would be more accurate to characterize resistance phenomena as resulting from imaginative engagements with fictions, rather than from imagination.

Recognizing that resistance phenomena arise from imaginative engagements with fictions has profound implications for situating and explaining these phenomena. Rather than attempting to explain resistance phenomena in isolation, they should be situated within a general framework of the *normativity and psychology of fictions*. The general *normative* question concerns the grounds on which a proposition gets to be fictional. The general *psychological* question concerns the factors that causally influence people's responses to fictions. In this light, the fictionality, imaginative, and phenomenological puzzles associated with resistance phenomena are narrow variants of the general normative and psychological questions regarding fictions. This conception of resistance phenomena and the puzzles increases, rather than diminishes, their philosophical importance. In the same way that explaining specific Gettier cases can give us insight into the nature of knowledge, explaining resistance phenomena can give us insight into the normativity and psychology of fictions. In the same way that Gettier cases can act as tests on theories of knowledge, the puzzles associated with resistance phenomena can act as tests on accounts of fictions.

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<sup>12</sup>(Byrne 2005) argues for the importance of imagination in counterfactual reasoning. (Williamson 2007) leans on Byrne's account and grounds an epistemology of modality on counterfactual reasoning.

## 2.3 The Explanatory Potential of Genre

To motivate genre’s potential for explaining resistance phenomena, let us consider another short story:

*Hippolytos and Larisa.*<sup>13</sup> In the small town of Latmus a long, long time ago, Hippolytos has fallen in love with Larisa. Although he has asked for her hand in marriage before, she has steadily refused. Out of his desperate love for her, Hippolytos tricks Larisa into marrying him. When Larisa’s mother finds out what Hippolytos had done, she appeals to the supreme leader of the land, Zeus, to free her daughter from her bond to Hippolytos. Against the mother’s wishes, however, Zeus reaffirms the legitimacy of the marriage and declares Hippolytos’s action to be morally permissible. So Hippolytos’s trickery is okay, after all.

I do not find the last sentence of “Hippolytos and Larisa” puzzling. My phenomenological experiences are similar to those with other typical fictions. It is easy for me to imagine that Hippolytos’s trickery of Larisa is okay. Indeed, it seems to me that it is fictional that Hippolytos’s trickery of Larisa is okay, because Zeus declared it to be so.

I trust that most readers can see that the last sentence of “Hippolytos and Larisa” is comparatively less puzzling than the last sentence of “Balondemu and Abbo”, even if their own reactions are not as diametrically opposed as mine. The different responses to the two stories are curious, considering the stories’ apparent similarities.<sup>14</sup> The only differences discernible on the surface are changes in fictional characters’ names. These superficial differences, by themselves, seem unable to account for the different reactions to the stories. Whether tricking someone into marriage is okay surely does not only depend on the name of the person who performs the trickery. Instead, these

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<sup>13</sup>A variant of this story is used in an empirical study of resistance phenomena in [chapter III](#), which supports identifying genre as a significant factor in explaining resistance phenomena.

<sup>14</sup>As is the case with other short stories philosophers have used to pump intuitions in the imaginative resistance literature, the point of this story is to illustrate and foreshadow a more general point that will be developed in §2.5. Rather than overly focusing on one particular case, I encourage readers to come up with their own examples, especially from existing fictions, that they think better illustrate the general point. See also the worries acknowledged in footnote 3.

superficial differences are important insofar as they cue readers to a more fundamental difference between the two stories.

What explains the different responses to the stories, a natural thought goes, is that the two stories are appropriately classified in different *genres*. On the one hand, “Hippolytos and Larisa” is appropriately read as a story in the tradition of Greek mythology, where plausibly divine command theory of morality applies and Zeus is the divine commander. On the other hand, “Balondemu and Abbo” is appropriately read as a realistic story, where General Kiyonda is certainly not the divine, regardless of whether divine command theory applies. Although the last sentences of these two stories are nearly identical, only the last sentence in “Hippolytos and Larisa” makes sense in that story. The same proposition, that tricking someone into marriage is okay, is puzzling in one fiction but not the other because different genre *conventions* apply to the fictions, and readers have different genre-informed *expectations* during their imaginative engagements. The different natures of stories—their appropriate classification in different genres—can make the same proposition puzzling in one fiction but not the other because resistance phenomena are, as emphasized earlier, evoked not by puzzling propositions as such, but by propositions that are puzzling as parts of fictions.

Suggestions that that genre or genre-like distinctions could play a role in explaining the resistance phenomena have been made in the literature by (Gendler 2000), (Weinberg and Meskin 2006), (Weinberg 2008), and (Nanay 2010). I examine these proposals and their shortcomings in §2.6.1. Briefly, these accounts do not fully recognize the significance of genre in two respects. First, they focus only on the psychological aspect of resistance phenomena, and not the normative aspect that concerns fictionality. Second, despite the mention of genre, their interests are primarily elsewhere. Gendler focuses on readers’ actual evaluative attitudes, Jonathan Weinberg and Aaron Meskin focus on readers’ psychological mechanisms, and Bence Nanay focuses on an analogy

to conversational pragmatics. Despite these previous discussions, genre remains under-appreciated as an explanatory factor of resistance phenomena, partly because no extensive account has been given. The remainder of this chapter aims to fill in this lacuna in the literature by articulating genre’s role in imaginative engagements with fictions generally, and giving a unifying explanation of resistance phenomena—addressing the fictionality puzzle as well as the imaginative and phenomenological puzzles—with the resources developed.

## 2.4 The Normativity and Psychology of Genre

Literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov characterized genre as having dual functions: “as ‘horizons of expectations’ for readers and as ‘models of writing’ for authors” (Todorov 1990, 18).<sup>15</sup> Genre influences both artists’ constructions of fictions and audiences’ experiences with them—in other words, both what is fictional and what is imagined. Drawing inspiration from Todorov’s characterization of genre, I will paint in broad brush strokes a picture that highlights genre’s significance for the normativity and psychology of fictions. Let me now explicate three notions that are central to this picture: genre, convention, and expectation.

### 2.4.1 Genre

At the most basic level, genres are simply special groupings of fictions that are recognized by the relevant community as such. The notion of genre employed here is thus relatively broad and also includes what others might call medium, presentation, mode, or style.<sup>16</sup> One important role that genres play is as classifications of fictions.

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<sup>15</sup>For the most part, contemporary analytic aestheticians have overlooked the development of genre theory in literature, film, and other media studies. (Two notable exceptions are (Currie 2004) and (Laetz and Lopes 2008).) For a historical background, see the classic essays collected in (Duff 2000). For contemporary discussions, see articles in (Dowd et al. 2006). For an opinionated overview of genre theory, see (Frow 2006).

<sup>16</sup>In other words, I am including many groupings of fictions that are not always recognized as genres. However, whether a genre is *salient* and *significant* depends on the context. Thus, a genre

Everyday discussions of novels, movies, and narratives in other media often invoke specific genres. At libraries and bookstores, works are often organized according to genres. Following (Walton 1970), whether a work is *appropriately* classified in a genre depends on a variety of factors: its relevant resemblance to other works in that genre, the artist's intentions, critical judgments, and that genre's propensity for aesthetic pleasure. Usually, a work is appropriately classified in more than one genre, and the multiple genres of the work may overlap one another. Adjudicating the different factors when they conflict can sometimes be difficult, and undoubtedly interest- and context-dependent. Nevertheless, the frequent invocations of genres in everyday discussions of fictions demonstrate that people tend to have a good pre-theoretical grasp on how to classify fictions in the appropriate genres.

Genre is important for explanations in aesthetics because individual genres are more than mere classifications. Genre holds implications for the normativity and psychology of fictions. Disagreements about genre in everyday discussions of fictions are often more than just disagreements about classifications. When people disagree about whether a novel is appropriately classified in the genre of magical realism or realistic fiction, they might also be disagreeing about whether it is literally true in the fiction—as opposed to merely metaphorical—that a character was washed into the world by a great tide of tears. When people disagree about whether a movie is appropriately classified in the genre of horror or the genre of black comedy, they might be also disagreeing about whether it would be fitting for them to laugh at a gruesome decapitation scene. Genre influences the propositions that are warranted to be fictional in a fiction and the ways that one ought to, and actually does, imaginatively engage with a fiction.

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like experimental fiction can be salient and significant in the context of literary criticism, but not so in the context of casual conversations.



### 2.4.2 Convention

On the normative side, genre gives authors conventions that constrain what could be made fictional. Fictional worlds are rich entities; the propositions that are fictional often far exceed the propositions that are directly expressed by a fictional work. *Principles of generation* determine which non-explicitly-expressed propositions are warranted to be added to a fictional world outright, and which are warranted to be inferred from the explicitly-expressed propositions.<sup>17</sup> Only with these principles can rich fictional worlds be constructed from the relatively few propositions explicitly expressed by words on a page or images on a screen. For example, the proposition *Sherlock Holmes has only one heart* is plausibly fictional in the Sherlock Holmes novels, even though Arthur Conan Doyle never explicitly says so. The proposition is warranted to be fictional because real-world biological relationships tend to hold in the Holmes fictional world. We are warranted to infer the fictionality of the proposition *Sherlock Holmes has only one heart* from the fictionality of the explicitly-expressed proposition *Sherlock Holmes is human*.

As systematizations of the features common to works in a given genre, **genre conventions** constrain what is fictional because they constrain which implicit propositions and which inferential patterns are warranted for a fictional world. Conventions do not merely catalogue the common features, but also say something about the relationships between them. As a simplistic example, a convention of the science-fiction genre is that physical laws of the real world need not hold in the fictional world. In one sense, this convention is *descriptive*: it is in fact typical for works that are appropriately classified in science-fiction to include violations of real-world physical laws. In another sense,

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<sup>17</sup>(Walton 1990) articulates the role that principles of generation play in generating fictional worlds, but does not explicitly consider genre as a way of specifying the relevant principles of generation. (However, he does say, for instance, that criticism requires familiarity with a work's "medium, genre, and representational tradition" (Walton 1990, 184).) Discussions in (Lewis 1978, 1983) regarding "inter-fictional carry-overs" suggest some considerations of genre in generating fictional worlds. (Hazlett and Mag Uidhir 2011) explicitly brings out genre's role in determining the appropriate import and export rules for a given fiction.

this convention is also *normative*: being appropriately classified in science-fiction warrants a work's inclusion of violations of real-world physical laws. Considered in the normative sense, genre conventions constrain the nature of relevant fictional worlds by contributing to the relevant principles of generation that govern the propositions warranted to be added or inferred.

### 2.4.3 Expectation

On the psychological side, genre gives readers expectations that govern imaginings and related psychological responses. When people imaginatively engage with a fiction, they place their imaginings under that fiction's prescriptions. On the influential account of fictionality developed in (Walton 1990), what is fictional is what a fiction prescribes its readers to imagine. Hence, since the conventions of the fiction's genre constrain what is fictional, they also constrain what the fiction's readers are prescribed to imagine. In order to comply with a fiction's prescriptions, people align their expectations to the corresponding conventions.<sup>18</sup> As a simplistic example, when a reader imaginatively engages with a science-fiction work, she ought to accept as fictional and imagine claims that violate real-world physical laws. Generally speaking, genre conventions generate oughts about imaginings, and these oughts are the **genre expectations** that people employ when they imaginatively engage with fictions.<sup>19</sup> Think of the ability to employ the appropriate genre expectations as a practical competence, or know-how, with respect to imaginative engagements with fictions.

Let me put more psychological substance on philosophical theory by saying more

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<sup>18</sup>(Weinberg and Meskin 2005) makes similar suggestions about the relationship between genre conventions and readers' expectations.

<sup>19</sup>These oughts have only *conditional* normativity. Just because one should play by a game's rules does not mean that one (unconditionally) should play that game. Similarly, just because one ought to imagine according to a fiction's prescriptions does not mean that one (unconditionally) ought to imaginatively engage with that fiction. Unconditional normative constraints—moral, rational, or otherwise—dictate which games we should play, as well as which fictions we should imaginatively engage with. Conditional oughts about imaginings apply only once a reader has decided, consciously or unconsciously, to imaginatively engage with a fiction. I thank Allan Gibbard for pressing me to clarify the nature of normativity that is involved in genre expectations.

about genre expectations' place in the architecture of the mind. Speculatively, genre expectations are story schemas that people employ during imaginative engagements.<sup>20</sup> During successful imaginative engagements, readers employ genre schemas with high **fluency**: quickly, automatically, and unconsciously.<sup>21</sup> In ideal circumstances, readers of fictions employ the appropriate genre expectations in their constructions of the fictional worlds.<sup>22</sup> These expectations influence the readers' psychological responses to the fiction, including what they imagine. The presence of story schemas explains why, in typical imaginative engagements, people tend to simply "go along with the story". When readers of fictions do not possess the requisite practical competence—in other words, when no appropriate genre expectations are accessible to them—they fall short of the ideal.<sup>23</sup> In such cases, imaginative engagements lose their typical ease because deliberate conscious efforts are demanded from the readers of fictions.

There are reciprocal interactions between genre expectation, fluency in imaginative engagement, and aesthetic pleasure. On the one hand, when readers are able to imaginatively engage with a fiction fluently by adopting appropriate genre expectations, they derive more aesthetic pleasure from the experience.<sup>24</sup> When readers are unable to imaginatively engage with a fiction fluently due to a lack of access to appropriate genre expectations, they might then turn away from the fiction and overlook its

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<sup>20</sup>(Mandler 1984) articulates the notion of a schema in processing stories. (Frow 2006) also connects genre expectations with story schemas.

<sup>21</sup>(Winkielman et al. 2003) reviews the concept of fluency.

<sup>22</sup>However, it is a common literary technique to have readers experience a temporary lack of fluency initially and come to employ the appropriate genre expectations after only hermeneutic recalibration. See footnote 6 on hermeneutic recalibration, and the following two body paragraphs on the acquisition of genre schemas.

<sup>23</sup>Developmentally, children usually begin to acquire different expectations for different genres between ages 3 and 5 (Woolley and Cox 2007), shortly after they acquire the capacity to separate fantasy from reality (Skolnick and Bloom 2006).

<sup>24</sup>(Winkielman et al. 2003) and (Reber et al. 2004) review empirical findings suggesting that the fluency with which people imaginatively engage with fictions is a subjectual source of aesthetic pleasure. One possible explanation of the link between fluency and aesthetic pleasure is that fluency signifies an achievement of understanding. Thus, it might be especially pleasurable to imaginatively engage with a complex fiction fluently, when one is unable to do so on a first pass due to complexity, because of the achievement in understanding that fluency signifies. I thank Allan Gibbard for suggesting this possible explanation.

aesthetically worthwhile features. On the other hand, readers could also acquire appropriate genre expectations from compensating aesthetically worthwhile features and increased exposure to relevantly resembling works.<sup>25</sup> Readers are then able to imaginatively engage with a fiction fluently when increased aesthetic pleasure and familiarity nullify, and encourage them to overcome, an initial lack of fluency.

*The Rite of Spring* offers a stark, if romanticized, illustration of the reciprocal interactions between expectations, fluency, and aesthetic pleasure. Famously, Stravinsky's percussive and dissonant ballet caused a riot in the theatre on its premiere. There were shouts, fistfights, and the Paris police had to come in at intermission. It is hard to imagine that the audience members found much aesthetic pleasure in their experiences with the work. One plausible factor that contributes to the audience members' responses is their lack of fluency in engaging with the piece, which results from their expectations of a ballet at that time. However, it is now widely recognized that *The Rite of Spring* is a revolutionary masterpiece, and it has influenced many subsequent compositions. The piece's wide recognition and influence open up two possible, and compatible, explanations of why nowadays there are no longer shouts and fistfights, but only applause, at its performances. For one, even if an audience member experiences an initial lack of fluency in engagement, she might persist for the aesthetic pleasures to be found in the piece itself. For another, as the musical vocabulary used in *The Rite of Spring* became more commonplace as a result of its influence, the increase in familiarity with and exposure to this musical vocabulary also increases the fluency with which an audience member is able to engage with the piece. As people's experiences with *The Rite of Spring* demonstrate, a lack of appropriate

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<sup>25</sup>By no means are these the only ways that readers could acquire appropriate genre expectations. For example, intellectual understanding of the work's background, such as the importance of certain aesthetic features in a tradition, could also help readers form the appropriate genre expectations, especially regarding which features to attend to. I thank Victor Caston, Jason Konek, and Laura Ruetsche for calling my attention to the different ways that genre expectations could be acquired. However, compensating aesthetic pleasure and increased familiarity are particularly worth highlighting in this context because they are, in contrast with intellectual understanding, internal to aesthetic experiences.

genre expectations, and a corresponding lack of fluency, can sometimes be temporary rather than persistent.

## 2.5 Explaining Resistance Phenomena

The preceding picture reveals genre’s role in the normativity and psychology of fictions. Genre conventions contribute to grounding the notion of fictionality, and genre expectations influence people’s imaginative engagements. With the resources that this picture provides, I address the puzzles associated with resistance phenomena in turn. I elaborate on the difference between the two stories presented earlier, “Balondemu and Abbo” (which evokes resistance phenomena) and “Hippolytos and Larisa” (which does not). I then draw overarching lessons from the differences. Genre, I will argue, is *one of multiple* factors that contribute to addressing each puzzle.

### 2.5.1 The Fictionality Puzzle

Elaborating on the difference between “Balondemu and Abbo” and “Hippolytos and Larisa” is instructive for drawing out the role that genre conventions play in addressing the fictionality puzzle. “Balondemu and Abbo” contains genre cues, such as the present setting and the mention of a military junta, that suggest the fictional world is like ours. This fiction is thus appropriately classified in the genre of realistic fiction. The conventions of this genre allow readers to import only propositions that are actually true and preserve only inferential patterns that actually hold in generating the fictional world. Since tricking someone into marriage is morally impermissible according to real-world moral norms, as most people will agree, it is equally impermissible according to the imported fictional moral norms. The proposition *so Balondemu’s trickery is okay, after all* evokes the fictionality puzzle because it is **convention-discordant**: the genre conventions that govern the fictional world of “Balondemu and Abbo” forbid making violations of real-world moral norms fictional.

In contrast, “Hippolytos and Larisa” contains genre cues, such as the Greek mythological names, that suggest the fictional world differs importantly from ours. Specifically, they indicate that the fiction is appropriately classified in the tradition of Greek mythology. The conventions of this genre permit fictional worlds to differ from the actual world in the moral dimension. In particular, it is plausibly a convention of Greek mythology that divine command theory holds, so what is fictionally morally permissible depends on what the gods command to be morally permissible. Readers can infer from Zeus’s declaration that, in the fiction, the gods command that Hippolytos’s trickery of Larisa into marriage is morally permissible. As such, the proposition *so Hippolytos’s trickery is okay, after all* does not evoke the fictionality puzzle because it is **convention-concordant**: the genre conventions that govern the fictional world of “Hippolytos and Larisa” permit making violations of real-world moral norms fictional.

To generalize, one factor that contributes to the comparative difficulties with making a proposition fictional is that the proposition is genre convention–discordant. Although conventions, like other norms, can be broken or reshaped, more effort and skill on an author’s part is required. As “models of writing” for authors—in Todorov’s words—genre conventions constrain authorial freedom. A proposition is not fictional just because the author says so. Although authors have a great deal of control regarding the fictional worlds they create, they cannot decide which propositions get to be fictional simply by fiat. If all other features of a narrative were to indicate strongly that a work is a realistic fiction, then it would be comparatively difficult for the author to make the convention-discordant proposition *there is a spaceship that can travel faster than the speed of light* fictional. Moreover, although authors have a great deal of control regarding the appropriate genres for their works, they cannot decide which genre conventions apply simply by fiat either. Douglas Adams cannot make *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* a realistic fiction, no matter how much he sincerely intends it to be. It clearly does not resemble other realistic fictions, no

critic judges it as a realistic fiction, and engaging with it as a realistic fiction would not produce more interesting or pleasing aesthetic experiences. Since multiple criteria determine the appropriate genre for a fiction, authorial intention must be weighed against other criteria and may sometimes be overridden. Hence, authorial freedom is absolute neither when it comes to the appropriate genre of a fiction nor when it comes to the conventions that govern what could be made fictional.

Genre conventions' constraint on fictionality urges us to rethink our understanding of resistance phenomena. Much of the literature, going back as far as (Hume 1757), has singled out moral deviance in fictions as what primarily drives resistance phenomena. However, the variety of genres and genre conventions gives us reason to think that the heart of resistance phenomena cannot be simply moral deviance in fictions. Other philosophers, such as (Yablo 2002) and (Weatherson 2004), have argued that moral deviance is not necessary to evoke resistance phenomena. The variance in genre conventions that govern the moral dimension of fictional worlds shows that moral deviance tends not to be enough to evoke resistance phenomena by itself either. Instead, morally deviant propositions have a greater tendency to evoke resistance phenomena when they are also genre convention-discordant.

(Walton 1994, 37) asks, "There is science fiction; why not morality fiction?" Are there genres with conventions that permit deviations from real-world moral norms in the same way that the conventions of science fiction permit deviation from real-world physical laws? As "Hippolytos and Larisa" demonstrates, the answer is "yes". There is an important symmetry between physics and morality in fictions: violations of real-world physical laws are convention-discordant in some genres but not others, and violations of real-world moral norms are convention-discordant in some genres but not others.<sup>26</sup> In addition to Greek mythology, morality fictions might be found in other

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<sup>26</sup>In conversation, Kendall Walton points out a curious asymmetry between science-fiction and some genres of morality fictions. While science-fiction permits all kinds of deviations from real-world physical laws, some genres of morality fictions, such as Greek mythology, permit only specific deviations from real-world moral norms. Despite the curiosity, this asymmetry does not undermine

genres such as black comedy, experimental fiction, fairytales, and fables.<sup>27</sup> Although these genres are not defined by moral deviances, their conventions nevertheless permit violations of real-world moral norms. Once we expand our stock of examples beyond the realistic fictions that often serve as paradigms in aesthetic discussions, it becomes clear that morality fictions are possible—indeed, many of them are actual—and resistance phenomena are about far more than moral deviance.<sup>28</sup> The diversity found in the moral landscapes of fictional worlds is made possible by the different genre conventions that govern various fictional worlds.

### 2.5.2 The Imaginative Puzzle

Elaborating on the difference between “Balondemu and Abbo” and “Hippolytos and Larisa” is also instructive for drawing out the role that genre expectations play in addressing the imaginative puzzle. People are likely to experience more difficulties with imagining that tricking someone into marriage is okay when reading “Balondemu and Abbo” than when reading “Hippolytos and Larisa”. There exists this difference in the typical psychological responses because people typically employ different genre expectations when imaginatively engaging with the two stories. Ultimately, the different genre expectations are grounded in the different corresponding genre conventions that govern the stories. When reading the realistic story “Balondemu and Abbo”, readers typically automatically and unconsciously expect the fictional world to have the same moral norms as the real world. So they have comparative difficulties

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the present modest claim, that there are genres in which deviations from real-world moral norms are permitted.

<sup>27</sup>(Weinberg and Meskin 2006) mentions Wile E. Coyote cartoons as a morality fiction candidate within the black comedy genre. (Todd 2009) mentions Viking and Greek mythologies as candidates. I thank Brittani Sonnenberg for introducing me to experimental fictions by authors such as Aimee Bender, Lina Jansson for referring me to Scandinavian fables, and all others for suggesting plausible examples of morality fictions in conversations.

<sup>28</sup>On the flip side, there is an analogous problem with the use of realistic fictions as paradigms in the moral education literature. It blinds us to the complex relationships between the evaluative attitudes that we imaginatively adopt and the influences that fictions have on our actual evaluative attitudes. I discuss this problem in [chapter IV](#).



with imagining that Balondemu's trickery of Abbo into marriage is okay because it is **expectation-discordant**. In contrast, when reading the Greek mythology story "Hippolytos and Larisa", readers typically do not automatically and unconsciously expect the fictional world to have the same moral norms as the real world. After imagining that Zeus declared Hippolytos's trickery of Larisa into marriage to be morally permissible, they have no comparative difficulties with imagining that Hippolytos's trickery really is okay because it is **expectation-concordant**.

To generalize, one factor that contributes to the comparative difficulties with imagining a proposition is that the proposition is genre expectation-discordant. As Todorov suggests, genre expectations constrain what readers can easily imagine in the same way that genre conventions constrain what authors can easily make fictional. A proposition is puzzling when readers have no existing schemas to make sense of the proposition in the context of the fiction, and no inclinations to form new schemas or adjust existing ones. In such cases, readers default to expecting the fiction to be realistic in all respects. Although readers could exert deliberate and conscious mental effort to override the realist expectations in order to imagine the puzzling proposition, these expectations nevertheless make the puzzling proposition *comparatively* difficult to imagine due to the additional mental effort that is necessary.

As is the case with genre conventions, readers' expectations can sometimes be challenged and reshaped when there are rewards for doing so. Some of the best works, one might argue, are precisely the ones that challenge readers to form new genre expectations or reshape their existing ones. A diligent and skillful author might be able to make initially puzzling propositions more easily imaginable by rewarding readers with worthwhile aesthetic features in the work. Hence, it is only when readers cannot find compensating aesthetic pleasure for the recalibration and re-habituation of their expectations that they default to realist expectations. The default of realist expectations applies for all dimensions of a fictional world, not just the moral and

evaluative dimensions. Readers do not start off thinking every fiction that they encounter is a science fiction, and therefore expecting violations of real-world physical laws. Their default is simply to preserve systematic real-world features as much as possible unless genre cues indicate otherwise.

So, let us ask again, why does “Balondemu and Abbo” evoke resistance phenomena? To begin, although there are genres in which morality fictions can be found, this story does not exhibit cues for any of them. More importantly, there are no apparent aesthetically worthwhile features of the work that could compensate for or nullify the initial experience of imaginative difficulties. Frankly, and I say this as the author, “Balondemu and Abbo” is an unremarkable story in its own right: the characters are hardly identifiable, the storyline is hardly creative, and the writing is hardly stylish. However, such unremarkable short stories are standard in the resistance phenomena literature because—after all—it is philosophers, and not fiction writers, who have authored them. Talented flash fiction writers like Lydia Davis can use few words to great effect. Perhaps these writers could have challenged and reshaped readers’ expectations with the same word count without resorting to generic devices. Unfortunately for me and other participants in the resistance phenomena literature, we are not them.<sup>29</sup> Without a diligent and skillful author, an unremarkable fiction like “Balondemu and Abbo” simply cannot do enough to persuade readers to recalibrate and re-habituate their expectations. Consequently, readers have comparative difficulties with imagining a proposition that is discordant with respect to all of their accessible genre schemas.

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<sup>29</sup>(Todd 2009) also highlights the aesthetic flaws of philosophers’ stories. I deny that aesthetic flaws directly influence readers’ comparative difficulties with imagining puzzling propositions, as Todd suggests. Instead, on my account, they only indirectly influence readers’ imaginative engagements via the circuitous relationships that exist between genre expectations, fluency, and aesthetic pleasure. Uncovering those relationships increases our understanding of the imaginative puzzle specifically and the psychology of fictions generally.

### 2.5.3 The Phenomenological Puzzle

In addition to addressing the imaginative puzzle, genre expectations also have a role in addressing the phenomenological puzzle. What drives the phenomenological experience that “Balondemu and Abbo” evokes is the lack of the appropriate genre expectations that make sense of the story text. Without appropriate genre expectations, or schemas, people’s imaginative engagement with this fiction ceases to be fluent: quick, automatic, and unconscious. The lack of cognitive ease and the conscious effort demanded manifest themselves as the jarring confusion that characterizes resistance phenomenology.

As is the case with the difficulties associated with the imaginative puzzle, the experiences associated with the phenomenological puzzle could be either temporary or persistent. Some literary works purposefully evoke a temporary sense of jarring confusion as a distancing device to force readers to reconsider and reinterpret earlier parts of the work.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the phenomenology of resistance by itself need not be puzzling. It is only when this phenomenology persists even after repeated readings of the whole work that there is a puzzle to be explained.

Genre expectations help us understand why the jarring phenomenology frequently co-occur with the imaginative difficulties, whether they are temporary or persistent. Both psychological responses are the result of a lack of appropriate genre expectations and a corresponding lack of fluency in imaginative engagement. Although the imaginative puzzle and the phenomenological puzzle are conceptually distinct, they arise from the same psychological basis. Only by recognizing the role of genre expectations in the psychology of fictions generally can we arrive at a unifying explanation of the psychological aspect of resistance phenomena.

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<sup>30</sup>I thank Daniel Jacobson and Eric Swanson for emphasizing to me the variety of ways that the phenomenology of resistance could arise during imaginative engagements with fictions. This temporary sense of jarring confusion may be what (Harold 2007) has in mind when he claims that “imaginative resistance” is central to imaginatively engaging with *Catch-22*.

#### 2.5.4 Summary

We have arrived at an account of resistance phenomena that highlights genre's role. One important reason that puzzling propositions are comparatively difficult to make fictional is that they are genre convention–discordant. One important reason that puzzling propositions are comparatively difficult to imagine is that they are genre expectation–discordant. Puzzling propositions generate a sense of jarring confusion partly because readers lack the requisite genre expectations to imaginatively engage with the fiction fluently. Call this package of theses **the genre account**. As I have emphasized throughout this chapter, the genre account is not the whole story, but it is an important part of the complete understanding of resistance phenomena.

### 2.6 Situating the Genre Account

In the final section, I discuss the genre account's place in the complete understanding of resistance phenomena through comparisons with predecessors and other accounts in the literature. First, I consider the improvements that the genre account makes over its predecessors. Second, I examine a prominent group of accounts advanced by Gendler, Yablo, Walton, and Weatherston, which emphasize readers' actual evaluative attitudes and responses in explaining resistance phenomena. Considered as rivals, their accounts fare worse than the genre account at explaining the difference between people's responses to "Balondemu and Abbo" and to "Hippolytos and Larisa". Nevertheless, we can preserve the central insight of these accounts on a multi-faceted characterization of resistance phenomena and reconcile their accounts with the genre account.

#### 2.6.1 Predecessors

While suggestions that genre or genre-like distinctions could play a role in explaining the resistance phenomena have been made, each of the existing proposals falls short in

important respects. (Gendler 2000) mentions a genre-like distinction, but the proposal she presents fails to account for the complexity and variety of genres. (Weinberg 2008) and (Nanay 2010) both mention genre in their accounts, but their main focuses lie elsewhere. Consequently, their proposals fail to fully recognize the significance of genre and are, at best, incomplete.

Start with (Gendler 2000), which contains the first mention of a genre-like distinction in accounting for resistance phenomena. Gendler proposes taxonomizing fictions as either *nondistorting* or *distorting*. Which category a fiction belongs to, on this taxonomy, depends on its rules of *import* and *export*. As Gendler uses these terms, a fiction’s rule of import governs what information people can add to the fictional world from the real world, and a fiction’s rule of export governs what information people can extract from the fictional world to the real world. A fiction is *nondistorting* when it allows information about the real world to be “liberally” imported and exported, and a fiction is *distorting* when it allows information about the real world to be “stringently” imported and exported. On Gendler’s proposal, resistance phenomena arise when a puzzling sentence occurs in a work that is recognized as *nondistorting*, and the reader is “asked to export a way of looking at the actual world which she does not wish to add to her conceptual repertoire” (Gendler 2000, 77).

Although Gendler’s proposal hints at the significance of genre for explaining resistance phenomena, the genre-like categories that she actually employs are too coarse-grained to be explanatorily fruitful. The distinction between *nondistorting* and *distorting* fictions cannot adequately capture the complexities of conventions associated with genres. For example, the genre of science-fiction is plausibly *distorting with respect to* physical laws but *nondistorting with respect to* moral norms. Finer-grained categories—genres—are necessary to capture the various dimensions with respect to which a fiction can be *distorting* or *nondistorting*. The genre account improves on Gendler’s proposal and retains its spirit by employing finer-grained categories.

Turn now to (Weinberg 2008) and (Nanay 2010), both of which invoke genre in their proposals. Even though I am strongly sympathetic to the spirit behind Weinberg's and Nanay's proposals, they share similar shortcomings in their execution. Both proposals are, at best, incomplete as explanations of resistance phenomena for two reasons. First, they focus only on one half of resistance phenomena, the psychological aspect, and leave the other half unexplained. Second, they aim to explicate only the *mechanisms* that underlie psychology of resistance phenomena, or *how* resistance phenomena arise, without fundamentally explaining the *source* of the mechanisms, or *why* resistance phenomena arise. Because of this, they also fail to fully recognize the significance of genre for explaining resistance phenomena. Let us examine their proposals before elaborating on these criticisms.

Consider first Weinberg's proposal.<sup>31</sup> Weinberg's article focuses on imagination's place in the architecture of the mind. The main thesis is that comparative difficulties with imaginings arise when there is a conflict between the imagination and another part of one's mind. On Weinberg's view, imagination can be configured in various ways: different circumstances call for different input and output connections to other mental systems, modules, and states. In particular, he theorizes that comparative difficulties with imaginings can be explained by the hypothesis that there are different configurations of the imagination that are appropriate for imaginative engagements with fictions of different genres. Some genres call for imagination to interact with moral evaluation systems. Consequently, morally deviant propositions, which contradict people's actual moral evaluations, are puzzling when expressed by fictions in these genres. Other genres call for imagination to not interact with moral evaluation systems, and consequently morally deviant propositions are not puzzling when expressed by fictions in those genres. Genre thus contributes to explaining comparative difficulties with imaginings because it determines which configuration of the imagination is

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<sup>31</sup>(Weinberg 2008) expands and develops ideas presented in (Weinberg and Meskin 2005, 2006). For brevity, I focus on Weinberg's most recent proposal.

appropriate for a given fiction, and therefore also whether there are any mismatches between the imagination and other relevant parts of one's mind.

Consider second Nanay's proposal. Nanay's article focuses on an analogy between comparative difficulties with imaginings and violations of conversational norms. The main thesis is that comparative difficulties with imaginings arise when an assertion of the fiction violates the relevant cooperative principle of the fiction. On Nanay's view, imaginative engagements with fictions are akin to conversations, except that the author does all the talking. Following this analogy, authors are governed by principles that are analogous to the Cooperative Principle proposed in (Grice 1975, 45): "Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". On a first pass, comparative difficulties with imaginings arise when authors utter a deviant sentence and that utterance violates the fiction's cooperative principle. In particular, readers' attentions are directed away from the suspension of disbelief when they attempt to reconcile the utterance with the fiction's cooperative principle. Here, the analogy between imaginative engagements with fictions and conversations breaks down in an important respect. While the same Cooperative Principle governs all conversations, different cooperative principles are appropriate for different genres. Some genres, such as realistic fictions, call for strict cooperative principles, and consequently morally deviant utterances in fictions of these genres are puzzling because they violate those strict cooperative principles. Some other genres, such as nouveau roman-style works, call for loose cooperative principles, and consequently morally deviant utterances in fictions of these genres are not puzzling because they do not violate those loose cooperative principles. (Nanay does not say much about what the various cooperative principles are, and which ones count as "strict" and which ones count as "loose", besides their dependence on genres.)<sup>32</sup> Genre thus contributes

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<sup>32</sup>While Nanay acknowledges criticisms against Grice's account, especially in his footnote 10, he fails to recognize the seriousness of these criticisms and their analogous applicability to his account.

to explaining comparative difficulties with imaginings because it determines which cooperative principle is appropriate for a given fiction, and therefore also whether a deviant utterance violates the relevant cooperative principle.

The first problem that Weinberg's and Nanay's proposals share is their limited focus on the psychological aspect of resistance phenomena, specifically comparative difficulties with imaginings. An equally important part of the phenomena, the normative aspect, is simply left out. Without addressing the fictionality puzzle, both proposals provide only partial explanations of resistance phenomena. In addition, given the frequent conflation of the fictionality puzzle and the imaginative puzzle in early discussions, it is natural to expect some connection between them. The potential connection cannot be explored without attempting to explain resistance phenomena as a whole.

The second problem that Weinberg's and Nanay's proposals share is their limited explanatory power. A crucial component of Weinberg's proposal is that different configurations of the imagination are *appropriate* for different genres. Similarly, a crucial component of Nanay's proposal is that different cooperative principles are *appropriate* for different genres. Appropriateness, in both proposals, appears to be a normative notion, rather than a psychological or a pragmatic notion. In which case, the ultimate explanation for each notion of appropriateness lies outside the scope the respective mechanism. Although it can indeed be helpful to explicate the mechanisms that underlie the imaginative puzzle in familiar terms, these explications do not constitute fundamental explanations. Ultimately, we want to know *why* different configurations of the imagination and *why* different cooperative principles are appropriate for different genres. To answer this question, it is necessary to elaborate

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The gist of the criticisms, as offered in (Wilson and Sperber 1981) and (Davis 1998), both of which Nanay cites, is that the Cooperative Principle, as vaguely as Grice has formulated, cannot by itself be explanatory of linguistic phenomena. What Nanay is attempting to do, however, seems exactly to be using the analogous cooperative principles, which are not explicated further, to explain the comparative difficulties with imaginings by themselves. The present worry resurfaces in the discussion of the second problem with Nanay's account.



on what genres are and how they exert normative influences. Indeed, the structural similarities between Weinberg’s and Nanay’s proposal suggest that genre, and not the intermediary mechanisms that Weinberg and Nanay respectively focus on, is what *fundamentally* contributes to explaining resistance phenomena.

The genre account addresses both problems. One component of the genre account explicitly deals with the fictionality puzzle. Drawing from a broader picture of genre’s role in the normativity and psychology of genre, the genre account gives a unifying explanation of resistance phenomena and reveals the connections between the puzzles. Given that genre is what fundamentally contributes to explaining resistance phenomena, the genre account elaborates on the notion that carries the explanatory load, in addition to explicating the intermediary mechanisms.

### 2.6.2 Rivals

The attraction of the genre account can be further bolstered through comparisons with accounts advanced by Gendler, Yablo, Walton, and Weatherston, which emphasize readers’ actual evaluative attitudes and responses in explaining resistance phenomena. To begin, I consider these actual evaluative attitude accounts as rivals and argue that they cannot explain the difference between people’s responses to “Balondemu and Abbo” and to “Hippolytos and Larisa” as the genre account can.

The accounts proposed in (Gendler 2000, 2006), (Yablo 2002), (Walton 1994, 2006), and (Weatherston 2004) all emphasize readers’ actual evaluative attitudes and responses in explaining resistance phenomena. They differ, however, in the mechanistic underpinnings they propose for resistance phenomena. Gendler and Yablo focus on the concepts invoked in puzzling propositions. Fiction authors cannot determine how moral concepts apply. Thus, according to these philosophers, asking readers to apply a moral concept differently than they *actually* would tends to evoke resistance phenomena. Walton and Weatherston focus on the supervenience relations that link

higher-level claims to their lower-level bases. Fiction authors can change the lower-level claims that are fictional, but they cannot change the supervenience relations that link higher-level claims, such as moral claims, to their lower-level bases. Thus, according to them, violating the moral supervenience relations that are taken to *actually* hold tends to evoke resistance phenomena.

Despite their differences, these actual evaluative attitude accounts all suffer from the same problem when considered as rivals to the genre account: as they currently stand, they cannot help us explain why “Balondemu and Abbo” evokes resistance phenomena but “Hippolytos and Larisa” does not. The last sentences of both stories are claims that involve the concept of moral permissibility. For Gendler and Yablo, the relevant *actual* concept application regarding the moral permissibility of tricking someone into marriage is the same irrespective of which story we are engaging with. For Walton and Weatherston, the relevant supervenience relations that *actually* hold between moral permissibility and relevant lower-level bases is the same irrespective of which story we are engaging with. Therefore, they all have to say the same thing about the last sentences of “Balondemu and Abbo” and “Hippolytos and Larisa”: either both sentences are puzzling or neither are. So, regardless of whether it is actually morally permissible to trick someone into marriage and regardless of whether readers tend to take it to be actually morally permissible to trick someone into marriage, these accounts are all forced to say the wrong thing about one of the two stories. They must either say that “Hippolytos and Larisa” evokes resistance phenomena (but it does not), or say that “Balondemu and Abbo” does not evoke resistance phenomena (but it does). In contrast, the genre account can avoid this problem because it allows fictional worlds of different genres to have different concept-applicability conditions and different fictional supervenience relationships.

### 2.6.3 Reconciliation

The source of these rival accounts' problem is not their identification of readers' actual evaluative attitudes and responses as a factor in explaining resistance phenomena, but their neglect of other important factors, such as genre. We can reconcile the actual evaluative attitude accounts and the genre account by recognizing the independent contributions of the two explanatory factors that the two accounts highlight.

In fact, this reconciliation is necessary for a sophisticated understanding of resistance phenomena because the normativity and psychology of fictions are complex and multi-faceted. As the field of literary criticism demonstrates, theorists lean on multiple factors—some formal, some historical, and some institutional—in deciding what is fictional in a given narrative. In everyday disagreements about fictions, multiple factors influence people's psychological responses. The same heartbreak soliloquy can cause a romantic to cry and a cynic to laugh. Putting resistance phenomena in their proper context—imaginative engagements with fictions—therefore urges us to recognize their complexity.

On the sophisticated understanding, as I have emphasized throughout this chapter, genre does not exhaustively explain resistance phenomena either. For example, there may be differences in *degrees* of puzzlingness that genre cannot explain. One story can be comparatively less puzzling than another story in the same genre. Consider a variation of "Hippolytos and Larisa" where Zeus rejects the legitimacy of the marriage, declares Hippolytos's action to be morally impermissible, and so Hippolytos's trickery is said to be not okay. It seems that this story would be comparatively less puzzling than the original. However, genre cannot explain why because, after all, the two stories are appropriately classified in the same genre. Instead, we may need to appeal to, say, readers' evaluative attitudes and responses in order to explain this difference in degrees of puzzlingness between the two stories.

Given the multi-faceted nature of resistance phenomena, we should not expect one

thing to lie at the heart of the puzzles, or one factor to primarily carry the explanatory load. In fact, we should not rest contently with having identified two independent explanatory factors. Aesthetics is inherently messy, and diverse fictions differ from each other in a variety of ways. The best we can do is to explicate the different patterns of variations that we can discern and highlight the explanatory factors that underlie these patterns. In addition to the factors that our discussions have focused on, readers' identification with characters and readers' personality traits are but a couple amongst many others that can impact imaginative engagements with fictions.<sup>33</sup> We should aim to explain resistance phenomena through multiple, independent factors that may need to be adjudicated against one another. What I have done in this chapter is to argue that genre, which has been mostly overlooked, is an explanatory factor in the same league of importance as actual evaluative attitudes and responses. The recognition of genre's explanatory contribution is therefore indispensable for a complete understanding of resistance phenomena.

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<sup>33</sup>I thank Chandra Sekhar Sripada for emphasizing the multi-faceted nature of resistance phenomena to me, and the audiences at the Buffalo Experimental Philosophy Weekend and National Yang Ming University of Taiwan for their suggestions of possible explanatory factors.

## CHAPTER III

### Imaginative Resistance: Empirical

Imaginative resistance occurs when certain propositions, such as morally-disagreeable claims, are presented in fictions, and people resist going along with the story. More carefully, there are two ways in which people resist going along with the story that generate two distinct puzzles. The imaginative puzzle asks why those puzzling propositions are comparatively difficult to *imagine*. The fictionality puzzle asks why those puzzling propositions are comparatively difficult to *be made fictional*. (We clarify this distinction a bit later.) So far, philosophers have by and large addressed these puzzles from the armchair. Most prominently, despite their differences, the accounts of imaginative resistance that Tamar Szabó Gendler, Stephen Yablo, Kendall Walton, and Brian Weatherson propose all emphasize people's actual evaluative attitudes and responses in explaining imaginative resistance.

In this chapter, we argue that another crucial factor plays a role in the imaginative and fictionality puzzles: the genre of the fiction. Although genre's significance might be argued for from the armchair, empirical investigation provides a complementary perspective that has certain critical advantages. Evaluative attitudes and responses such as moral judgments are high in *psychological salience*—easily accessible via

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introspection—and it is not surprising that their role in imaginative resistance has been readily discerned from the armchair. The automatic deployment of genre expectations, we claim, is in contrast low in salience and its role in generating the imaginative and fictionality puzzles is not easily available to introspective access. We thus turn to empirical methods as an *additional* strategy to support our genre hypothesis. In short, we believe the influences of genre in generating the imaginative and fictionality puzzles are sufficiently psychologically subtle that these effects may be more readily and persuasively demonstrated by empirical means.

*Overview of the chapter:* §3.1 clarifies and expands on the initial rough characterizations of the imaginative and fictionality puzzles. §3.2 discusses the explanation of imaginative resistance that Gendler, Yablo, Walton, and Weatherson have converged on, which we dub the *evaluative-attitude hypothesis*. §3.3 sketches an alternative, *the genre hypothesis*, that highlights genre as an *additional* factor in explaining imaginative resistance. §3.4 presents two empirical studies that collectively assess these hypotheses. §3.5 discusses methodological concerns and upshots of empirically investigating imaginative resistance.

### 3.1 Imaginative Resistance

To get a sense of the phenomena that philosophers call **imaginative resistance**, consider the following short story from (Weatherson 2004, 1):

*Death on a Freeway.* Jack and Jill were arguing again. This was not in itself unusual, but this time they were standing in the fast lane of I-95 having their argument. This was causing traffic to bank up a bit. It wasn't significantly worse than normally happened around Providence, not that you could have told that from the reactions of passing motorists. They were convinced that Jack and Jill, and not the volume of traffic, were the primary causes of the slowdown. They all forgot how bad traffic normally is along there. When Craig saw that the cause of the bankup had been Jack and Jill, he took his gun out of the glovebox and shot them. People then started driving over their bodies, and while the new speed hump caused

some people to slow down a bit, mostly traffic returned to its normal speed. So Craig did the right thing, because Jack and Jill should have taken their argument somewhere else where they wouldn't get in anyone's way.

That last sentence should have produced a puzzled reaction. Most people to whom we have told this story experience a sense of jarring confusion, as if waiting for further explanation; they think to themselves *how could Craig's action be morally right?*; and the story stops coming alive for them. Although these descriptions of phenomenology are relatively broad and somewhat vague, we think they are our best shot at giving a non-theory-laden initial characterization of what imaginative resistance is.<sup>1</sup> Following (Weatherson 2004), call any sentence that generates similar reactions a *puzzling sentence* and the proposition expressed a *puzzling proposition*.

Disentangling our reactions further, notice two aspects in which people resist the puzzling proposition in this story. Compared to propositions people normally encounter in fictions, such as other propositions presented in “Death on a Freeway”, people have a hard time *imagining* that Craig did the right thing, and people also have a hard time *accepting as fictional*—as true in the fictional world—that Craig did the right thing.

To tease apart the notions of imagining and accepting as fictional, consider the following two quick examples. Sometimes one imagines something that one does not accept as fictional. For example, in the course of reading *Oedipus*, one might imagine what would have happened had Oedipus not discovered that his lover is also his mother, but does not accept it as fictional. Sometimes one does not imagine something that one accepts as fictional. For example, when one is only trying to learn facts about *Oedipus* by reading a plot summary on Wikipedia, rather than imaginatively engaging with the story, one might accept as fictional that Oedipus discovered that his lover is also his mother, but without imagining it.

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<sup>1</sup>(Weatherson 2004) notes that the puzzling sentences generate a striking, jarring reaction. The “pop-out” terminology in (Gendler 2006) suggests a phenomenological characterization of imaginative resistance as well.

What other kinds of propositions generate similar puzzling reactions? In sketching out the scope of the relevant phenomenon, discussions tend to begin, as we have done so here, with propositions that disagree with commonsense morality. As a rough definition, a **deviant** proposition is one that significantly differs from how people (or the relevant subgroups) think the real world is in the relevant respect. For example, the puzzling proposition in “Death on a Freeway” is *morally* deviant: it significantly differs from how people think morality functions in the real world.<sup>2</sup> For another example, a proposition in a science-fiction story that says a spaceship could travel faster than the speed of light is *nomically* deviant: it significantly differs from how people think physical laws function in the real world. However, there is an important difference between these two examples: while the former deviant proposition is puzzling, the latter is not. The challenge, then, is to explain why some deviant propositions are puzzling but not others.

In the literature, there are some disagreements about the scope of imaginative resistance, or which kinds of deviant propositions are puzzling. (Gendler 2000, 2006) stresses the centrality of moral deviance to imaginative resistance. However, (Walton 1994) argues that aesthetically deviant propositions are also puzzling. (Weatherson 2004) further extends the scope of imaginative resistance to include propositions that are deviant in the respects of epistemic evaluations, attributions of mental states, attributions of content, ontology, and constitution. Furthermore, (Yablo 2002) argues that imaginative resistance can be provoked by a peculiar class of descriptive deviance, in addition to being provoked by evaluative deviance: a proposition that employs descriptive *response-dependent* concepts, such as shape concepts, in a way that deviates from people’s actual responses can also be puzzling.

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<sup>2</sup>Following (Weatherson 2004) and (Walton 1994, 2006), we could understand this in terms of the supervenience relationship between moral claims and the bases of those claims. A proposition is morally deviant when it contradicts the supervenience relationship that people, implicitly or explicitly, take to hold in the real world.



Setting aside the issue with scope, there are two puzzles concerning the puzzling propositions.<sup>3</sup> The **imaginative puzzle** asks why people tend not to imagine puzzling propositions. Formulated this way, the imaginative puzzle straightforwardly concerns a psychological phenomenon: people’s comparative difficulties with imagination.<sup>4</sup> To address the imaginative puzzle, we must uncover the factors that causally influence people’s experiences of these imaginative difficulties.

The **fictionality puzzle** asks why puzzling propositions tend not to be fictional, or true in the fiction. Although the fictionality puzzle does not straightforwardly concern a psychological phenomenon, we think ordinary people’s judgments of what counts as fictional offer strong, albeit defeasible, evidence of what really is fictional. In other words, we are assuming that ordinary people’s conception of fictionality does not deviate significantly from aestheticians’ conception. In making this assumption, we are sidestepping thorny issues concerning the nature of fictionality that have persisted in the aesthetics literature. The thought is that whatever fictionality consists in, ordinary people tend to have a good sense of what is fictional and what is not. While some might contest this assumption, the burden is on them to explain why ordinary people would be mistaken, either in general or in some particular cases. Absent such an explanation, we think that uncovering the factors that causally influence people’s judgments of fictionality provides a good guide to uncovering factors that determine what is fictional.

### 3.2 Evaluative-Attitude Hypothesis

In recent years, a popular explanation of imaginative resistance has emerged. According to the **evaluative-attitude hypothesis**, the difference between puzzling

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<sup>3</sup>(Weatherson 2004) and (Walton 2006) helpfully provide a taxonomy of the puzzles associated with imaginative resistance. In this chapter, we will not address, in Weatherson’s terms, the phenomenological puzzle and the aesthetic puzzle.

<sup>4</sup>We follow (Gendler 2000) in emphasizing that the difficulties with puzzling propositions are only comparative, relative to normal experiences with fictions.

propositions and other merely deviant ones is the involvement of people's actual *evaluative attitudes* or *responses*.<sup>5</sup> The imaginative and fictionality puzzles arise because while beliefs simply do not enter into imaginative engagements, actual evaluative attitudes and responses do. As such, people tend to resist imagining and accept as fictional propositions that are contrary to their actual evaluations and responses.

This hypothesis, in its basic form, is endorsed by accounts proposed in (Gendler 2000, 2006), (Yablo 2002), (Walton 1994, 2006), and (Weatherson 2004).<sup>6</sup> Certainly, there are important differences between these accounts.<sup>7</sup> As we note earlier, they disagree about the *scope* of imaginative resistance, or *what* propositions provoke imaginative resistance. Moreover, they disagree about the *mechanistic underpinnings* of imaginative resistance, or *how* imaginative resistance is generated. On the one hand, Gendler and Yablo focus on the concepts invoked in puzzling propositions. Fiction authors cannot determine how moral concepts—and for Yablo, other evaluative concepts and descriptive response-dependent concepts—apply. As such, according to Gendler and Yablo, prompting people to apply a moral concept differently than they actually would tends to evoke imaginative resistance. On the other hand, Walton and Weatherson focus on the supervenience relations that link higher-level claims to their lower-level bases. Fiction authors can change the lower-level claims that are fictional, but they cannot change the supervenience relations that link higher-level claims, such as moral claims, to their lower-level bases. As such, according to Walton and Weatherson, violating the moral supervenience relations that are taken to *actually* hold tends to evoke imaginative resistance. Still, although these accounts differ on

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<sup>5</sup>This phrasing of the hypothesis is intentionally ambiguous in order to acknowledge, and to accommodate, the differences between these accounts.

<sup>6</sup>In addition to the accounts discussed so far, evaluative attitudes and responses also play an important role in the accounts given in (Currie 2002), (Driver 2008), (Levy 2005), (Mullin 2004), and (Stokes 2006).

<sup>7</sup>Another aspect on which these accounts differ is their construal of imaginative resistance as imaginative *unwillingness* or as imaginative *impossibility*. For discussion of this difference, see (Gendler 2006) and (Weinberg and Meskin 2006).

*what* propositions provoke imaginative resistance and *how* these propositions do so, they do give the same answer to the fundamental *why* question. They all say that it is people’s actual evaluative or response-dependent commitments that drive the imaginative and fictionality puzzles, whether these commitments are best cashed out in terms of concepts or supervenience relationships.<sup>8</sup> In other words, notwithstanding their disagreements about the scope and mechanistic underpinnings of imaginative resistance, these accounts all emphasize actual evaluative attitudes and responses in explaining imaginative resistance.

### 3.3 Genre Hypothesis

Although the role of genre has been noted in the imaginative resistance literature, its significance has not been fully developed.<sup>9</sup> On the **genre hypothesis** that we endorse,

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<sup>8</sup>The following quotes illustrate these accounts’ common endorsement of the evaluative-attitude hypothesis:

(Gendler 2006, 150–151): “The basic claim here—as [in (Gendler 2000)]—is that resistance phenomena arise because imaginative engagement is also a form of actual engagement. When we imagine, we *draw on our ordinary conceptual repertoire and habits of appraisal*, and as the result of imagining, we may find ourselves with novel insights about, and changed perspectives on, the actual world” (our emphasis).

(Yablo 2002, 485): “Imaginative resistance arises not only with evaluative predicates, but also with (certain) descriptive ones: ‘oval’, ‘aquiline’, ‘jagged’, ‘smooth’, ‘lilting’. What do these predicates have in common? *P* makes for imaginative resistance if, and because, the concept it expresses is of the type we have called ‘grokking’, or response-enabled. . . . Why should resistance and grokkingness be connected this way? It’s a feature of grokking concepts that their extension in a situation depends on how the situation does or would strike us. ‘Does or would strike us’ *as we are*: how we are represented as reacting, or invited to react, has nothing to do with it” (original emphasis).

(Walton 2006, 145–146): “‘My best suspicion’ as to why we resist allowing fictional worlds to differ from the real world when we do, I said [in (Walton 1994)], is that it ‘has something to do with an inability to imagine [certain kinds of dependence relations, including in the normative domain, as] being different from *how we think they are*, perhaps an inability to understand fully what it would be like for them to be different.’ . . . What seems to me to be important is a very particular kind of imaginative inability, one that attaches to propositions expressing certain sorts of supervenience relations, which the imaginer rejects” (our emphasis).

(Weatherson 2004, 23): “The author gets to describe the [fictional] world at whichever level of detail she chooses. But once it has been described, the reader has just as much say in which higher-level concepts apply to parts of that world. When the concepts are *evaluative concepts* that directly reflect on the author, the reader’s role rises from being an equal to having more say than the author, just as we *normally* [in reality] have less say than others about which evaluative concepts apply to us” (our emphases).

<sup>9</sup>The first mention can in fact be found in (Gendler 2000), but the notion of “genre” that she employs—distorting versus nondistorting—is too coarse-grained. More recently, Jonathan Weinberg

an *additional* reason behind the comparative difficulties involved in the imaginative and fictionality puzzles is that puzzling propositions violate the genre *conventions* and the corresponding reader *expectations* of the fictions in which puzzling propositions appear.<sup>10</sup> In this section, we briefly sketch genre's place in people's imaginative engagements with fictions: its important influences on what could be fictional and what people are inclined to imagine. We devote special attention to explain why, despite its important influences, genre has relatively low psychological salience.

We adopt an inclusive notion of genre in this chapter that encompasses what others might call medium, presentation, mode, or style. For us, a genre is a special grouping of fictions, or narrative representations, that are recognized by the relevant community as such. Genre plays an important role as a scheme for classifying fictions. Following (Walton 1970), whether a work is *appropriately classified* in a genre depends on a variety of factors: its relevant resemblance to other works in that genre, the artist's intentions, critical judgments, and that genre's propensity for aesthetic pleasure. Usually, a work is appropriately classified in more than one genre, and the multiple genres of the work may overlap one another. Although adjudicating the different factors when they conflict can sometimes be difficult, and undoubtedly interest- and context-dependent, the invocations of genres in everyday discussions of fictions demonstrate that people tend to have a good pre-theoretical grasp on classifying fictions in the appropriate genres.

Genre conventions, as we are employing the term, are systematizations of the features common to works in a given genre. A work is better classified in a genre

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and Aaron Meskin have also noted the importance of genre in a series of articles, even though they primarily focus on mental architecture. See (Weinberg and Meskin 2005, 2006) and (Weinberg 2008). In the same spirit, (Nanay 2010) mentions genre, but primarily focuses on an analogy with conversational pragmatics. Neither Weinberg and Meskin nor Nanay discusses genre's significance for addressing the fictionality puzzle. For a different development of the genre hypothesis, and comparisons with existing accounts, see my [chapter II](#).

<sup>10</sup>We are thus endorsing a *multiple-factors* view on which genre is one factor and evaluative attitude is another, potentially amongst others. On this view, neither factor wholly explains imaginative resistance. In contrast, Weinberg and Meskin's account and Nanay's account both appear to claim that genre exhaustively explains imaginative resistance.

when it satisfies more of that genre’s conventions, but a work could nevertheless fit into a genre even if it also violates some of that genre’s conventions.<sup>11</sup> Think of some commonsensical generalizations: science-fictions allow the violation of physical laws, romantic comedies have happy endings, and horrors contain monsters that provoke fear. By picking out what a set of relevantly resembling works have in common, genre conventions also pick out systematic features that the respective fictional worlds have in common. As a simplistic example, a convention of the fantasy genre is that fictional worlds can admit of the existence of magical items. On a descriptive reading, this convention says that it is typical for works appropriately classified in the fantasy genre to include the existence of magical items. More importantly, on a normative reading, this convention says that a work’s appropriate classification in the fantasy genre is what *warrants* its admittance of magical items into its fictional world.<sup>12</sup> If the work were a realistic fiction, no such warrant could be found. Thus, genre influences what could be fictional because genre conventions normatively constrain what features could be found in fictional worlds of that genre.

Moreover, the same normative constraint applies to people’s imaginative engagements with fictions because genre conventions inform people’s expectations of a fiction. The expectations result from people’s internalization of genre conventions. People would not be surprised by the mention of a psychic healing ring in a fantasy fiction because they expect, on the basis of the genre’s conventions, that the fictional world admits of magical items. To be clear, we are not claiming that there is a fixed, precise link from judging a work’s genre to deriving the oughts of imaginative engagement. Instead, we think that the relevant psychological processes are quite fluid, and involve

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<sup>11</sup>For more on this point, see the discussion on the weighing of works’ *standard* and *contrastandard* properties, with respect to its appropriate category, in (Walton 1970). Since Walton focuses solely on perceptually-distinguishable categories, the standard and contrastandard properties of a category must be perceptually-distinguishable. The present notion of genre is more inclusive, and thus allows a genre to have non-perceptually-distinguishable standard and contrastandard properties.

<sup>12</sup>The idea that genre conventions warrant inferences in imaginings has its origins in the notion of “inter-fictional carry-overs” discussed in (Lewis 1978, 1983). The same idea is developed in (Currie 2004) and (Laetz and Lopes 2008) with some differences in details.

subtle back-and-forth adjustments between a work's genre membership and its fictional contents.

In fact, we think genre expectations tend to be formed and deployed *quickly*, *automatically*, and *effortlessly*. In typical imaginative engagements, people simply “go along with the story”. They attend to what happens in the fiction instead of the subtle back-and-forth adjustments between a work's genre membership and its fictional contents that happen psychologically. In this regard, genre expectations function as a kind of practical competence with respect to fictions. Like other practical competences, the quickness, automaticity, and effortlessness of the formation and deployment of genre expectations make them relatively low in psychological salience.

On the genre hypothesis, genre conventions and expectations contribute to explaining, respectively, the fictionality puzzle and the imaginative puzzle. For the fictionality puzzle, one factor that drives the comparative difficulties with making a proposition fictional in a fiction is that the proposition is contrary to the systematic features picked out by the conventions of the respective work's genre. For the imaginative puzzle, one factor that drives the comparative difficulties with imagining a proposition when imaginatively engaging with a fiction is that the proposition is contrary to the systematic features that are expected based on the respective work's genre. The genre hypothesis thus explains the imaginative puzzle in a similar fashion as it explains the fictionality puzzle, with one notable difference. Whereas it is the genre the work is *appropriately classified* in that explains the comparative difficulties with making a puzzling proposition fictional; it is the genre that a reader *takes the work to be classified in* that explains her comparative difficulties with imagining a puzzling proposition.

Theoretical support of the genre hypothesis comes from the variety of moral landscapes found in fictional worlds. It is not difficult to think of genres that permit the inclusion of moral deviance, albeit sometimes very specific ones. (Todd 2009)

mentions Viking and Greek mythologies as candidates. Another candidate is black comedy; (Weinberg and Meskin 2006) mentions Wile E. Coyote cartoons as an example. In addition, moral deviance might be found in genres like fairytales and fables, experimental fiction, and religion-influenced texts. The diversity of fictional moral landscapes gives us reason to think that the evaluative-attitude hypothesis, as it stands, cannot be right. Moral deviance cannot exhaustively explain imaginative resistance. Instead, genre is an additional reason behind the comparative difficulties involved in the imaginative and fictionality puzzles. Morally deviant propositions have a greater tendency to evoke resistance phenomena when they are also *genre-discordant*.

### 3.4 Empirical Investigation

Increasingly, philosophers have looked to empirical methods to provide insights on longstanding philosophical debates.<sup>13</sup> Although papers in this experimental philosophy tradition have been published on a wide range of philosophical topics—free will, ethics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language—aesthetics has been mostly neglected. Empirical findings of what ordinary people find easy to imagine and accept as fictional constitute important evidence for adjudicating the two aforementioned hypotheses regarding imaginative resistance. In this section, we discuss potentially relevant empirical works and two studies we conducted.

#### 3.4.1 Psychological Literature

While there is little precedent for our studies within philosophy, there is a literature in psychology that is potentially relevant. Within philosophy, there are two unpublished studies on imaginative resistance, (Brock 2008) and (Levine 2009). While both studies successfully demonstrate that ordinary people do experience imaginative resistance in response to stories discussed in the literature, and thus

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<sup>13</sup>For a sample, see the papers collected in (Nichols and Knobe 2008).

that there are genuine phenomena to be investigated, neither conclusively establishes what factors are driving people’s responses. Outside of philosophy, the literature on *transportation* in psychology is potentially relevant to philosophical discussions of imaginative resistance.<sup>14</sup> Roughly, a reader is transported when she is phenomenally immersed in a fictional world. More precisely, as (Green and Brock 2000, 701) characterizes it, transportation is “a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings”. On this characterization, imaginative resistance might be seen as the undermining of transportation. A puzzling proposition forces audiences to cease the experiences that are typical of being immersed in a story. In this light, the findings in (Bilandzic and Busselle 2008) that familiarity with some genres is positively correlated with transportation give tentative support to the genre hypothesis.

The psychological literature, however, has limitations. First, while we have briefly suggested a way in which transportation might connect to imaginative resistance, more theoretical work is necessary to substantiate that link. Second, psychologists have focused solely on readers’ responses to (non-response-dependent) descriptive claims in fictions, rather than the evaluative (and response-dependent) claims that have interested philosophers. It is an open empirical question whether people respond to evaluative claims in the same way that they respond to descriptive claims. Given these limitations, the preliminary evidence from the transportation literature is no substitute for an empirical investigation of the phenomena that philosophers are interested in: imaginative resistance.

### **3.4.2 Study 1: Moral Deviance in Greek Myth**

To test the evaluative-attitude and genre hypotheses, we began with a correlational study. Participants read a short story loosely based on the Greek myth “The Rape of

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<sup>14</sup>For an elaboration on the potential links between the philosophical literature on imaginative resistance and the psychological literature on transportation, see (Liao and Gendler 2011, 84–86).



Persephone” and answered questions about it. Participants were University of Michigan undergraduates (age 17–22, paid or given course credit). 74 participants received Questionnaire 1, which contained questions about participants’ actual evaluative attitude, and 33 participants received Questionnaire 2, which contained questions about participants’ genre competence. The study was run using pen and paper and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. We used the following story in our questionnaires:

*The Story of Hippolytos & Larisa.* Hippolytos fell in love with Larisa. Out of his love for her, he played a trick on her by giving her a mint leaf to eat. Unaware of the consequences, Larisa proceeded to consume the leaf. Little did she know that this mint leaf was special. Consuming this special leaf would bind her to be with him for the rest of eternity. When Larisa’s mother found out what Hippolytos had done, she appealed to Zeus to get her daughter back. But Zeus declared Hippolytos’s action to be just, and that Larisa indeed must fulfill her obligations. And that was how Larisa came to be the wife of Hippolytos.

Although we intended for “The Story of Hippolytos & Larisa” to be read in the tradition of Greek mythology, participants were not given any information about the story’s genre outside of what appears in the text.

Responses to the following questions were used in our analysis:<sup>15</sup>

- *Fictionality Puzzle.* In the fictional world, is it morally right for Hippolytos to trick Larisa in order to be with her?
- *Imaginative Puzzle.* How easy was it for you to imagine that it is okay for Hippolytos to trick Larisa to be with her?
- *Genre Competence.* How familiar do you consider yourself with Greek mythology?
- *Evaluative Attitude.* Do you personally agree with Zeus’s command that Hippolytos’s action is just?

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<sup>15</sup>Balancing philosophical rigor with questions that participants can understand is tricky. For example, we cannot simply ask participants whether they are experiencing imaginative resistance, since this is not part of the folk lexicon. Our probes reflect this tradeoff between precision and clarity.

The order of the questions was as listed, such that the questions about genre competence and evaluative attitude came after questions about the imaginative and fictionality puzzles. Responses were given on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

As the evaluative-attitude hypothesis predicts, we found that readers’ evaluative attitude is one factor that drives both imaginative and fictionality puzzles. Actual disapproval of trickery has a strong and significant positive correlation with comparative difficulties with imagining that Hippolytos’s trickery is just,  $r=0.50$ ,  $p<0.0001$  (Figure 3.1a). Similarly, actual disapproval of trickery has a significant, albeit weaker, positive correlation with comparative difficulties with accepting as fictional that Hippolytos’s trickery is just,  $r=0.39$ ,  $p=0.0006$  (Figure 3.1b).

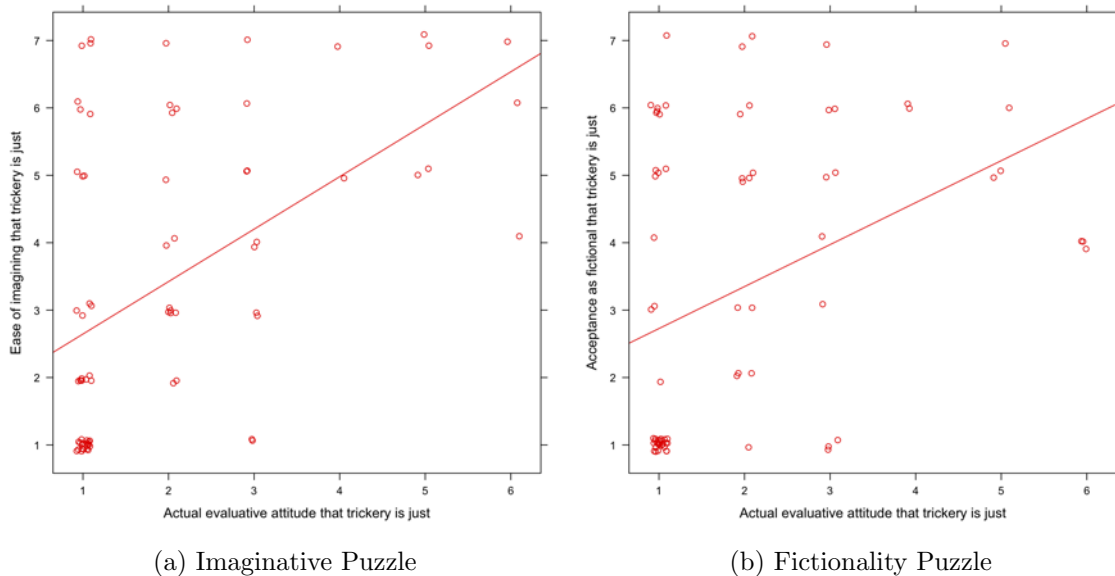


Figure 3.1: *Evaluative Attitude’s influences on Imaginative and Fictionality Puzzles*

Moreover, as the genre hypothesis predicts, we found that readers’ genre competence is another factor that drives both imaginative and fictionality puzzles. The more familiar a reader is with stories in the tradition of Greek mythology, the less comparative difficulties he or she experiences with imagining and accepting as fictional the morally deviant proposition in “The Story of Hippolytos & Larisa”. Lack of genre competence

has a strong and significant positive correlation with comparative difficulties with imagining that Hippolytos’s trickery is just,  $r=0.52$ ,  $p=0.002$  (Figure 3.2a). Lack of genre competence also has a strong and significant positive correlation with comparative difficulties with accepting as fictional that Hippolytos’s trickery is just,  $r=0.54$ ,  $p=0.001$  (Figure 3.2b).

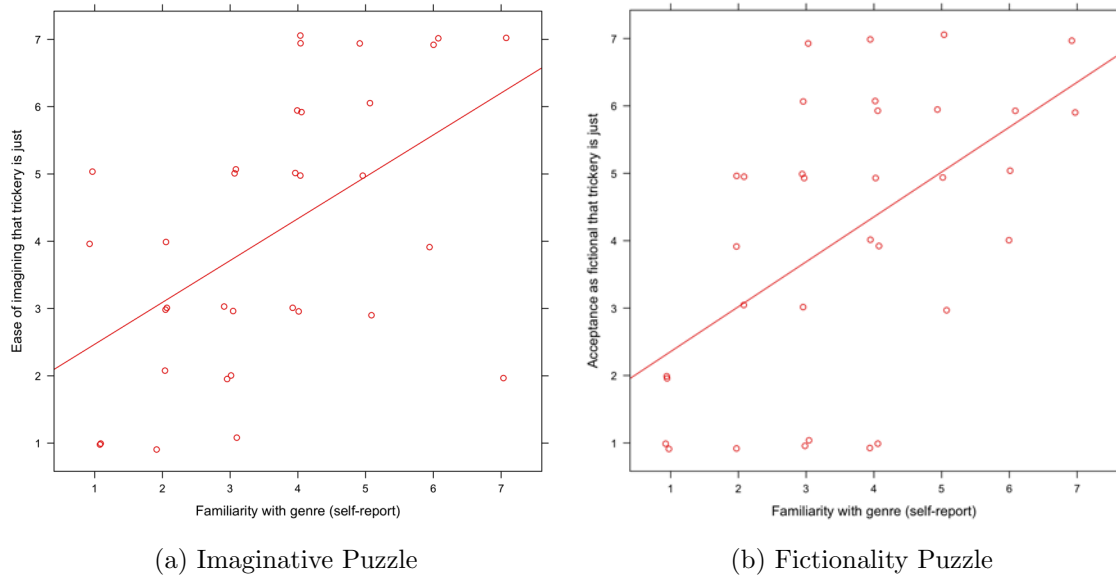


Figure 3.2: *Genre Competence’s* influences on *Imaginative* and *Fictionality Puzzles*

Finally, we did not find significant correlations between genre competence with Greek mythology and the evaluative attitude that trickery is just. Hence, we have reasons to think that these factors independently contribute to imaginative resistance. Study 1’s results suggest that imaginative resistance is multi-faceted and best explained by multiple factors. Genre is a factor that is as crucial in the complete explanation of imaginative resistance as actual evaluative attitudes and responses.

### 3.4.3 Study 2: Police Procedural vs. Aztec Myth

We then conducted an experimental follow-up study that manipulated participants’ genre expectations. Participants were recruited online via Amazon Mechanical Turk

(age 18–82, age median=27.5, paid).<sup>16</sup> The study was run using Qualtrics software and took approximately 5 minutes to complete. Those who failed an initial instruction-comprehension question were excluded from the analysis and 30 participants remained.

Participants read two stories that appear to be similar in basic plot but differ in their genres, responded to questions about each story, and explained their responses.<sup>17</sup> The order in which participants received the stories was counterbalanced. In the *police procedural* condition, participants were told that they will read an excerpt from a police procedural short story, similar to what they might find on TV shows such as *Law & Order* and *CSI*. In the *Aztec myth* condition, participants were told that they will read an excerpt from an Aztec creation myth, similar to what they might find in creation myths in Greek, Norse, or other cultures. The stories are reproduced below:

(Police procedural) *Seeing the Light*. February 14th, 2010. Texas. There was only darkness. Everyone gathered around the preacher, Wayne Howell, for an announcement. “A message from the almighty came to me. The youngest girl must be sacrificed in order to bring back the light.” They believed his every word. All eyes then turned to Mary, who had just given birth to a baby girl. Reluctantly, Mary gave her baby to the preacher to be sacrificed.

(Aztec myth) *The Sun of the Second Creation*. A long, long time ago, in the valley of Mexico, there was only darkness. Everyone gathered around the high priest, Cihuacoatl, for an announcement. “A message from the gods came to me. The youngest girl must be sacrificed in order to renew the sun.” They believed his every word. All eyes then turned to Ixchel, who had just given birth to a baby girl. Reluctantly, Ixchel gave her baby to the high priest to be sacrificed.

Participants were then asked, in random order, two questions about each story:

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<sup>16</sup>(Buhrmester et al. 2011) examines the use of Amazon Mechanical Turk and finds that the data gathered are at least as reliable as data gathered via traditional methods. Furthermore, the participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk are found to be more demographically diverse than traditional college samples.

<sup>17</sup>Prior to reading the two stories, participants were told, “In this study, you will read two fictional short stories or excerpts that are randomly chosen from our database, and then answer a couple of questions about each. Some participants may receive stories that appear similar at first. Please carefully read them on their own terms and answer the questions on that basis”.

- *Morality*. In the world of the story, Mary/Ixchel did the right thing.
- *Belief*. Mary/Ixchel believed she did the right thing.

Responses were given on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Our use of these questions accomplishes two aims. First, having the belief question in addition to the morality question helps to make sure that participants were not confusing what a fictional character thinks is morally right with what really is morally right in a fictional world.<sup>18</sup> Second, since neither the belief nor the morality proposition was explicitly expressed in the stories, these questions allow us to assess participants' ability to infer fictional truths from what is explicitly expressed. In other words, they allow us to check that ordinary people indeed have a conception of fictionality that is similar to philosophers'.

The patterns of responses that we found are as the genre hypothesis predicts. Participants did not judge that Mary did the right thing in the police procedural,  $mean=3.03$ . However, participants did judge that Ixchel did the right thing in the Aztec myth,  $mean=4.17$ . We found a moderate and significant difference between the means,  $t=3.421$ ,  $p=0.002$  (Figure 3.3). The different genre expectations that participants were given indeed influenced the way that participants interpreted these two apparently-similar stories, specifically whether they thought that giving up a baby girl for sacrifice is morally right in the respective fictional worlds.

Furthermore, participants did not confuse what Mary/Ixchel believed to be morally right with what really is morally right in the respective fictional worlds. Participants thought both that Mary believed that she did the right thing,  $mean=5.60$ , and that Ixchel believed that she did the right thing,  $mean=5.93$ . We found no significant

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<sup>18</sup>We thank an anonymous referee for noting this potential limitation of Study 1. In the previous study, since we only ask a question about what really is morally right in a fictional world, we cannot rule out the possibility that participants misunderstood the question to be about what a fictional character thinks is morally right. All participants of the imaginative resistance debate agree that a fictional character's morally deviant beliefs need not evoke imaginative resistance. So, it is important for us to verify that participants are not misinterpreting the morally deviant propositions in the stories to be merely what a fictional character thinks.

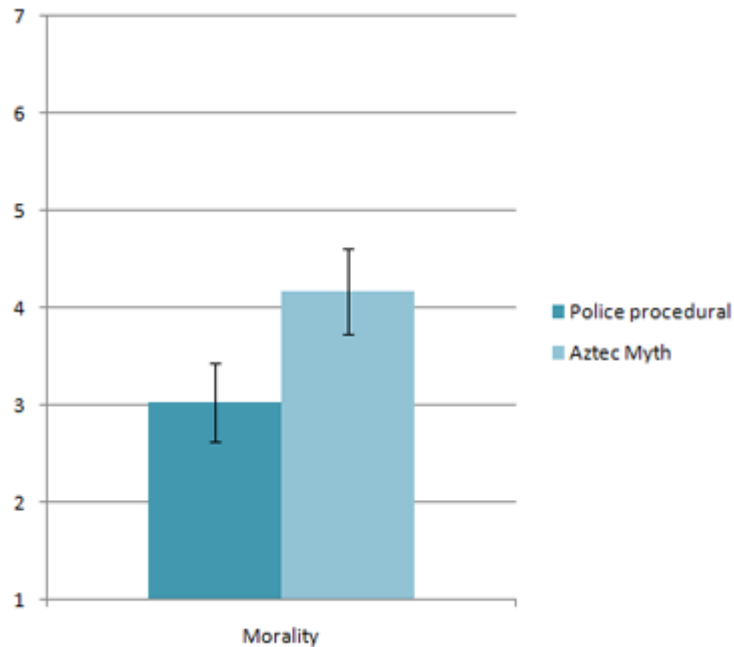


Figure 3.3: *Morality* ratings in police procedural and Aztec myth conditions

difference between the means (Figure 3.4). In both cases, participants’ thoughts are in line with what we expect philosophers’ conceptions of fictionality would deliver.

Finally, the explanations that participants gave for their responses support our claim that genre expectations tend to be relatively low in psychological salience. For the most part, participants appealed to differences in other fictional contents, such as different societal norms. For example, one participant said of the police procedural fictional world: “This is a different society, with different norms. Sacrificing a baby would not be moral here.” As we expected, no participant explicitly attributed the difference in his or her judgments about whether Mary/Ixchel did the right thing to the difference in the stories’ genres.

### 3.5 Methodological Issues

In the last section, we address some methodological issues surrounding our empirical investigation of imaginative resistance. First, although we have identified our project

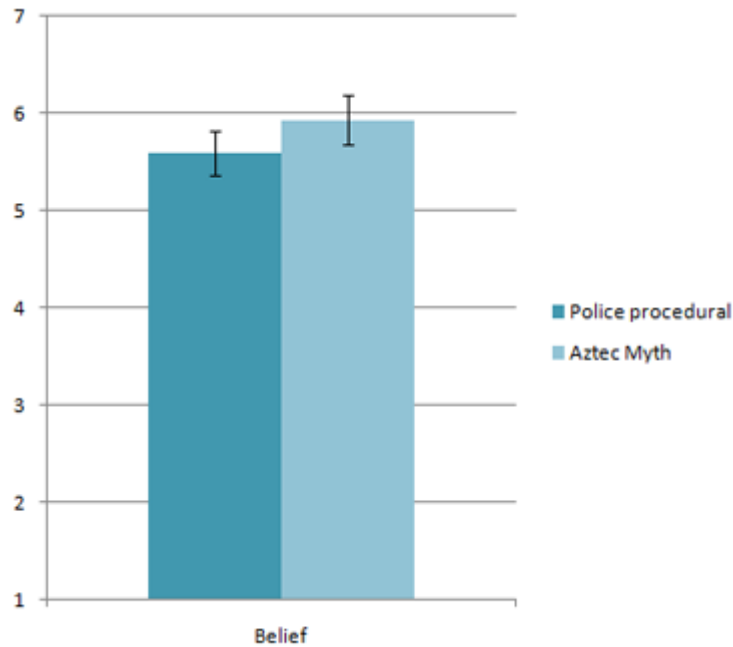


Figure 3.4: *Belief* ratings in police procedural and Aztec myth conditions

in the broad tradition of experimental philosophy, it is importantly different from many studies that have characterized the tradition, and it will be useful to highlight some differences. Second, we defend the legitimacy of using folk introspective reports in our studies, in the present context of investigating imaginative resistance. Third, we discuss why empirical investigations are important for understanding imaginative resistance.

### 3.5.1 The Differences in Aim and Method

Our project fundamentally differs from other projects in the experimental philosophy tradition in both aim and method. (Nadelhoffer and Nahmias 2007) divides the terrain of experimental philosophy into three broad camps. First, experimental analysts aim to uncover the contours of philosophically-relevant concepts by systematically soliciting ordinary people’s intuitions. Second, experimental descriptivists aim to explain the psychological underpinnings of intuitions by uncovering the processes that

drive ordinary people's intuitions. Third, experimental restrictionists aim to debunk the traditional philosophical reliance on intuitions by empirically demonstrating the diversity and instability of ordinary people's intuitions. Although the differences between these three broad camps demonstrate that experimental philosophy is far from a monolithic enterprise, two commonalities nevertheless stand out. First, they all aim to say something about intuitions. Second, to accomplish their respective aims, experimental philosophers by and large employ the thought-experiment-and-intuition paradigm: they present participants with *thought experiments* and collect data on participants' *intuitive judgments*.

The aim and method of these experimental philosophers simply do not apply to the topic of imaginative resistance. Here, philosophers are interested in giving a psychological explanation of why people experience imaginative resistance. Our aim is thus to say something about experiences of imaginative engagements with fictions rather than intuitions. We are trying to discover what factors psychologically influence the comparative difficulties that ordinary people sometimes experience with imagining and accepting as fictional certain propositions. Our method is fictional-story-and-introspection rather than thought-experiment-and-intuition. Despite surface similarities, the two methods are fundamentally distinct. Rather than presenting participants with a thought experiment that prompts intuitive judgments, we are presenting them with a *fictional story* to imaginatively engage with. Rather than asking for participants' intuitions, we are asking for *introspective reports* on their experiences of imaginatively engaging with the fiction—what they find easy to imagine and what they are willing to accept as fictional.

We emphasize these differences between the aim and method of our studies and the predominant aim and method of experimental philosophy to avoid unnecessary scrutiny and criticism. Experimental philosophy has been, to say the least, a controversial endeavor. The debate between proponents and opponents of experimental philosophy



has often focused on the philosophical relevance of ordinary people's intuitions. We stand altogether outside of this debate because our method employs fictional stories rather than thought experiments and folk introspections rather than folk intuitions. As we have been at pains to point out, our understanding of imaginative resistance as a collection of phenomena to be explained is shared by other philosophers who have participated in this debate.

### 3.5.2 The Legitimacy of Introspective Reports

However, we acknowledge that the use of introspective reports is not without its own problems. Indeed, some worries that (Kauppinen 2007) raises for the use of folk intuitions in experimental philosophy have their analogues for our use of folk introspective reports. First, there might be performance errors: philosophically irrelevant factors might influence ordinary people's introspections. Second, ordinary people's introspective reports might not accurately reflect their genuine introspections. Given that these worries put into doubt the reliability of the introspective reports that we have collected and used in our analysis, they need to be addressed to ensure that our results are philosophically significant.

To begin, note that these issues are not unique to empirical research, but inherent in investigating imaginative resistance, even from the armchair. Instead of collecting ordinary people's introspective reports, as far as we can gather, philosophers who have participated in this debate have used reports of their own introspections about what they find comparatively difficult to imagine and accept as fictional as data for their philosophical theorizing. This inherent reliance on introspective reports is one reason why, as we note earlier, there are disagreements about the scope of imaginative resistance. Thus, philosophers who have participated in this debate cannot be skeptics about the reliability of introspective reports in general.<sup>19</sup> Taking that position would

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<sup>19</sup>(Schwitzgebel 2008) argues that introspective reports of current conscious experiences are categorically untrustworthy. While this is an intriguing position, we will set it aside in this chapter

put into doubt the introspective reports that they themselves employ in motivating their accounts, and indeed, the whole enterprise of investigating imaginative resistance.

Can philosophers who have participated in this debate be skeptics about the reliability of folk introspective reports only? One response to the use of folk intuitions in experimental philosophy has been *philosophical exceptionalism*. With respect to intuitions, it is at least *prima facie* plausible that, given their training and experience with reflective thinking, philosophers would be better at tracking the philosophically relevant concepts and preventing their intuitions from being distorted by irrelevant factors.<sup>20</sup> However, philosophical exceptionalism is not even *prima facie* plausible with respect to introspective reports. There is no obvious reason why philosophers' training and experience with reflective thinking would be at all relevant for their abilities to reliably introspect and accurately report their introspections about imaginative engagements. Indeed, given how frequently ordinary people and philosophers alike imaginatively engage with fictions and discuss their experiences with other people, there is instead reason to think that ordinary people and philosophers alike are generally reliable at introspecting and reporting on psychologically salient aspects of their experiences.<sup>21</sup>

### 3.5.3 The Role of Empirical Studies

The final methodological issue concerns the role of empirical investigation. Why do experiments at all? Can we not figure out what factors drive imaginative resistance

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because, as Schwitzgebel himself notes, the position enjoys little support in the philosophical community.

<sup>20</sup>See (Weinberg et al. 2010) for references to defenses of philosophical exceptionalism with respect to intuitions, and an argument against philosophical exceptionalism from empirical findings about expertise in general.

<sup>21</sup>As (Nisbett and Wilson 1977) convincingly demonstrates, although people can reliably report their responses to stimuli, they have no introspective access to higher-order processes that influenced their responses. Hence, our present claim regarding people's introspective access to the comparative difficulties that they experience with fictions (or lack thereof) is compatible with our later claim that people have little introspective access to one of the influences on those comparative difficulties (or lack thereof)—genre expectations.

without recourse to empirical studies? Before answering this question, it is worth considering another one. Notice the current state of the literature on imaginative resistance, in which a half dozen philosophers focus on the role of evaluative attitudes and responses in producing imaginative resistance, but there is hardly any recognition at all that genre plays a more or less equal role in producing the phenomena.<sup>22</sup> Why does this current asymmetry exist?

Here is our somewhat speculative suggestion: philosophers start theorizing about imaginative resistance when they notice their comparative difficulties with imagining and accepting as fictional certain propositions in fictions. They begin the process of constructing candidate theories to explain the phenomena by introspecting about what is going on in their mind that might be the source of resistance. Of course, these introspections are naturally biased towards noticing and focusing on factors that have a high degree of psychological salience. (By definition, factors with low salience are not readily noticed and thus do not become the objects of further scrutiny.) Sure enough, there is a factor that is highly psychologically salient that does explain, in part, imaginative resistance: the deviance of a proposition with respect to an evaluative or response-dependent domain, such as morality.<sup>23</sup> Thus evaluative attitude becomes the focus of philosophical theorizing, with multiple theorists offering accounts in the same spirit.

Genre, in contrast, is not so psychologically salient. Genre conventions exert their influences by generating expectations in the reader. As we note earlier, these expectations are formed and deployed quickly, automatically, and effortlessly. When readers encounter a sentence such as “the spaceship is traveling faster than the speed of light” in a science-fiction story, they do not consciously think to themselves *this story*

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<sup>22</sup>See footnote 6 for references.

<sup>23</sup>(Sripada and Konrath 2011) argues that normative variables, such as moral ones, are overemphasized in explaining asymmetries in attributions of intentionality, and the high psychological salience of these variables is the root cause. Sripada and Konrath speculate that normative variables may be more psychologically salient and consciously accessible because evaluations in these domains tend to involve high affect.

*seems to be a science-fiction, so violations of physical laws are to be expected, and so I should indeed imagine that the spaceship is traveling faster than the speed of light.* They simply imagine the proposition expressed with the appropriate expectations already in place. Like many other fast, automatic processes, the formation and deployment of genre expectations tend not to be open to introspective access. Since genre has a low degree of psychological salience, it has for the most part been overlooked by philosophers as a candidate factor that explains imaginative resistance.<sup>24</sup>

Let us return to the question we posed earlier: Can we not figure out what factors drive imaginative resistance without recourse to empirical studies? Our answer is twofold. First, empirical methods provide a means to readily demonstrate that some factor is indeed influencing one’s judgments, even when that factor is not very psychologically salient or introspectively accessible. For example, tests of association (such as correlation tests) can provide strong evidence that two psychological variables (such as two judgment processes) are linked, though the link itself may not be readily detectable from introspection alone. Using correlation tests in Study 1 and an experimental manipulation in Study 2, we showed that genre conventions and expectations are likely exerting strong influences on people’s experiences of imaginative resistance, a fact that has eluded the majority of philosophers who have focused on the far more psychologically salient variable of evaluative attitude. It is highly unlikely that participants themselves were aware that their competence with genre conventions was affecting what they imagine and accept as fictional—though the statistical tests provided strong evidence for this influence.

Second, the question posed above offers a false dichotomy in which one must choose between armchair methods versus empirical methods. Other disciplines do not

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<sup>24</sup>In congruence with our speculation, (Weinberg and Meskin 2006, 186) raises doubts about philosophers’ uses of introspection in the imaginative resistance literature: “The feeling of [imaginative resistance] is, after all, not much more than an experienced incapacity, perhaps combined with a sense of frustration with the author whose work might thus be asking the impossible of us. It offers to introspection no sense of *why* we face such an incapacity, and this is surely part of why it has remained an interesting philosophical problem” (our emphasis).

mandate either/or choices of this sort, but rather recognize that theoretical reflections and empirical studies can both make important contributions. One of us has separately argued for genre's role in explaining imaginative resistance using more traditional armchair methods in another work. The present studies complement and extend the theoretical developments in that work. There is in fact no competition.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we empirically investigate imaginative resistance. Our project makes substantive contributions to the imaginative resistance literature. The results of our studies demonstrate that although evaluative attitude is an important factor in explaining imaginative resistance, it is not the only important factor. Genre is another important factor, despite being relatively low in psychological salience and mostly overlooked by philosophers in the current literature. Imaginative resistance is best thought of as a multi-faceted collection of phenomena that is best explained by multiple factors. Further empirical research may allow us to uncover other factors that influence what people imagine and accept as fictional.

## CHAPTER IV

### Moral Persuasion

Against continuing skepticism, philosophers have defended fictions' power to *morally persuade*—reading novels and watching films can, and ought to, influence the way that we think and act with respect to moral matters.<sup>1</sup> (The present conception of fictions is sufficiently broad to include poems, theater, films, novels, comic books, video games, and other works that prompt the use of the imagination.<sup>2</sup>) In defending the thesis that fictions have the power to morally persuade, philosophers have proposed *models of moral persuasion*, models of how (some) fictions morally educate and corrupt.<sup>3</sup> This chapter shows that existing models of moral persuasion have an important limitation: they cannot make sense of how fictions *generally* morally educate and corrupt.

By and large, discussions of moral persuasion in the philosophical literature take *realism*—the kind of fictions that are morally and psychologically realistic—as the

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<sup>1</sup>Saying which matters count as moral is notoriously difficult. As a rough gloss, we can think of issues having to do with fairness and harm, as exemplified by topics that one encounters in applied ethics. The gloss offered is not an attempt to define what morality involves, but only to show that no unusual assumptions are employed.

<sup>2</sup>This broad conception of fictions has its origins in (Walton 1990). The conception is also broad enough to include works of various aesthetic worth: literary classics and trashy supermarket novels equally count. Moreover, as (Friend 2008) clarifies, the class of works under consideration includes both non-fictive works, such as memoirs, and fictive works, such as novels.

<sup>3</sup>This chapter focuses on the models proposed in (Currie 1995), (Jacobson 1996), and (Kieran 1996). Other defenders of fictions' power to morally persuade include (Booth 1988), (Carroll 2002), (Depaul 1988), (Murdoch 1970), (Nussbaum 1990), and (Robinson 2005). (Liao and Gendler 2011) surveys empirical findings that tentatively support fictions' power to morally persuade.

paradigm for model-building.<sup>4</sup> The resulting **realist model** of moral persuasion basically says that a fiction is responsible for getting us to *believe* a moral (or immoral) outlook when it is responsible for getting us to *imagine* a similar moral (or immoral) outlook. However, the diversity of fictions exposes the limitation of the realist model. One way that various fictions differ is the way that they morally persuade; *The Golden Bowl* and *Catch-22* do not teach us moral lessons in the same way. While the realist model unsurprisingly makes sense of how realist fictions like *The Golden Bowl* morally educate, it fails to make sense of how satires like *Catch-22* morally educate. More generally, the realist model cannot capture how non-realist fictions morally persuade.

Recognizing the limitation of the realist model presents us with two questions of philosophical interest. First, how do non-realist fictions, such as satires, morally persuade? Second, how can we devise a general account of moral persuasion that makes sense of the different ways that different kinds of fictions morally persuade? I primarily focus on the second question. In this chapter, I argue that the recognition of genre's explanatory contribution is indispensable for a complete understanding of moral persuasion. We can devise a general account of moral persuasion with the help of genre: different models of moral persuasion are appropriate for fictions of different genres. En route to answering the second question, I will speculatively answer the first question as well. However, my argument for the recognition of genre's explanatory contribution does not depend crucially on this speculative answer. Although this chapter ultimately does not provide a complete understanding of how fictions generally morally educate and corrupt, its modest aim is to point us toward the right direction through the questions that it asks and the answers it offers.

Recognizing the limitation of the realist model has practical significance as well as philosophical interest. The claim that fictions have the power to morally persuade

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<sup>4</sup>As (Harold 2007, 145) notes, "Philosophical discussion has therefore focused primarily on [realist fictions]. In fact, it is difficult to find any sustained discussion of novels outside of this tradition (broadly conceived) in the entire philosophical literature".

pervades everyday ethical debates. We can hear it in campaigns for including “great books”—the classics of Western literature—in primary education curricula. We can hear it in criticisms of violent video games’ effects on the teenagers that play them. We can hear it in feminist criticisms of pornography, especially those that focus on pornography’s adverse impact on its consumers and women in general.<sup>5</sup> To properly evaluate the arguments advanced in these ethical debates, we need an understanding of how fictions generally morally educate and corrupt.

*Overview of the chapter:* §4.1 characterizes the realist model of moral persuasion and clarifies the relevant concepts and terms. §4.2 surveys variations of the realist model. §4.3 demonstrates the limitation of the realist model via an examination of how the satirical novel *Catch-22* morally educates. §4.4 highlights genre’s role in providing a general account of moral persuasion. The way that a fiction morally persuades partly depends on the genre it is appropriately classified in. §4.5 identifies areas where further research is necessary for a complete understanding of how fictions generally morally educate and corrupt.

## 4.1 Characterizing the Realist Model

To accurately characterize the realist model, let us begin by clarifying the relevant concepts and terms. Recall the earlier basic characterization: a fiction is responsible for getting us to believe a moral (or immoral) outlook when it is responsible for getting us to imagine a similar moral (or immoral) outlook. First, I differentiate the *real-world perspective* that a fiction gets us to believe and the *make-believe perspective* that a fiction gets us to imagine. As it will turn out, adopting a real-world perspective is more than merely believing a set of propositions and adopting a make-believe perspective is more than merely imagining a set of propositions. Second, I clarify the notion of

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<sup>5</sup>(Liao and Protasi 2011) extends the present discussion to the pornography debate. It argues that participants of the pornography debate should recognize that pornographic works in different genres impact their audiences differently, and refine their arguments in light of this recognition.



*responsible for* employed. Roughly, a fiction is responsible for what a normal audience under normal circumstances would come to believe and come to imagine as a result of imaginatively engaging with the fiction. We now take these two points of clarification in turn.

#### 4.1.1 Real-World and Make-Believe Perspectives

Our task here is to draw a theoretical distinction between the moral outlook that a fiction gets us to imagine and the moral outlook that a fiction gets us to believe as a result of our imaginative engagement. Before starting on this task, it makes sense to ask why we sometimes fail to make this intuitive distinction. My answer is that the ordinary language used in the ethical criticism of art leads us astray.

When we criticize a fiction for its “moral flaws”, we do not always make the target of our criticism clear. As (Jacobson 1997) and (Mullin 2004) point out, there are at least two kinds of criticism that we could be making. On the one hand, we might be criticizing a fiction for being *morally troubling*, for asking us to imagine an immoral outlook. On the other hand, we might be criticizing a fiction for being *morally dangerous*, for influencing us to come to believe or accept as true an immoral outlook. Ordinary uses of the term “moral flaw” encompass both moral troublingness and moral dangerousness. Thus, ordinary language blinds us to the distinction between the targets of these two kinds of ethical criticism. In the same spirit, (Hanson 1998) warns against confusing the outlook that a fiction *represents* and the outlook that it *recommends*, and (Giovannelli 2007) specifically criticizes Noël Carroll for not carefully distinguishing these two kinds of ethical criticism. The fact that numerous theorists continue to emphasize this distinction, between the moral outlook that we imagine and the moral outlook that we come to believe or accept as true, underscores the ease with which one might confuse them.

Perhaps it will be easier for us to remember this distinction if the two targets

have simpler names. Call the moral outlooks that various fictions ask us to imagine **make-believe perspectives**. Call the moral outlooks that we in fact have, and the moral outlooks that fictions influence us to believe or accept as true, **real-world perspectives**. (That these perspectives have to do with morality is hereafter implicit.) To truly capture what we mean by “moral outlook”, one more refinement is necessary: the notions of make-believe and real-world perspectives must be broadened beyond, respectively, imaginings and beliefs.

Moral outlooks are what influence the judgments we make and the actions that we take. Beliefs are undoubtedly important. Still, personal experiences and psychological research give us ample reason to think that our judgments and actions do not always cohere with our professed beliefs.<sup>6</sup> In thinking about the psychological influences on how we judge and how we act, we must also consider other components of the mind, such as desires, emotions, and dispositions. In general, our real-world perspectives include non-cognitive morally-relevant attitudes in addition to beliefs.

Similarly, the moral outlooks that we adopt during imaginative engagements with fictions are more than just collections of propositional imaginings. Consider the familiar example of *Triumph of the Will*, which asks us to adopt a moral outlook that glorifies Nazism. The film does not mandate us to only propositionally imagine certain moral claims, such as that Nazism is morally praiseworthy. The film mandates us to also imaginatively adopt non-cognitive attitudes that comport with the relevant propositional imaginings, such as positive affective responses toward Nazism. In general, make-believe perspectives include non-cognitive morally-relevant attitudes in addition to imaginings.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, make-believe perspectives can include both the

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<sup>6</sup>See (Gendler 2008a) and (Gendler 2008b) for philosophical discussions of and references to the relevant empirical studies.

<sup>7</sup>It is debatable whether we need to posit imaginative analogues of non-cognitive attitudes in order to explain certain phenomena peculiar to fictions. (Walton 1978) argues for imaginative analogues of emotions. (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002) and (Doggett and Egan 2007) argue for an imaginative analogue of desire. My own view is that we do not need to posit distinctive non-cognitive attitudes to account for the relevant phenomena, but this chapter is officially neutral on these debates. What is important is that the desires, emotions, and dispositions—or their imaginative analogues—that we

moral worldview of the fictional world and the moral outlooks adopted by characters whom the fiction depicts sympathetically. (A complication: many fictions present conflicting make-believe perspectives. To properly assess the moral effect of a fiction, we must assess the relative contributions of all the various make-believe perspectives that a fiction presents. I briefly take up this complication in §4.5.)

#### 4.1.2 What a Fiction is *Responsible for*

Persuasion, in the sense that is relevant to assessing the morally educative or corruptive effects of fictions, is neither straightforwardly causal nor straightforwardly normative. Recall the earlier rough characterization: a fiction is responsible for what a normal audience under normal circumstances would come to believe and come to imagine as a result of imaginatively engaging with the fiction. What morally educative or corruptive effects that fictions can be said to be **responsible for** includes both a causal element, concerning imaginative engagement's influence on the audience, and an evaluative element, concerning what is normal—which audiences and circumstances count as normal. We can get a grasp on the (admittedly elusive) notion of *being responsible for* through an example.

To see that we are not just concerned with the actual moral effects of a fiction, consider the following case. Suppose that there is a fiction that is, content-wise, just like the Harry Potter books. This fiction has only one reader, Psycho. As a matter of fact, this fiction influences Psycho to come to have strong negative emotions toward boys with scars on their foreheads and accompanying desires to murder them. The real-world perspective that this fiction actually gets Psycho to have is, safe to say, rather immoral. Yet, it seems unfair to call this fiction morally corruptive. Intuitively, Psycho has misunderstood the fiction in important respects. A *normal* audience would not respond to this fiction in the same way. In assigning moral blame for the immoral

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have in response to fictions could have different *warrant* conditions, or conditions about when they are fitting.

real-world perspective that actually results from imaginative engagement, we place the blame squarely on the eccentric reader and not on the fiction.

What this exaggerated case shows is that when we think about whether a fiction is morally educative or corruptive, what matters are not the effects it actually has, but the effects that it is *responsible for*—in just the elusive sense that we are pursuing. Roughly, we might think of the effects that a fiction is responsible for as the effects that it would have on *normal* audiences under *normal* circumstances.<sup>8</sup> (A complication: some fictions, such as pedophilia fantasies, target audiences that we might antecedently consider psychologically abnormal. To properly assess the moral effect of such fictions, the notion of normality needs to be relativized accordingly. I briefly take up this complication in §4.5.)

Normality, in the sense relevant here, is not synonymous with or reducible to statistical typicality. In the case above, the statistically typical effect—by stipulation—just is the effect on Psycho’s real-world perspective. Since we do not think that the effect on Psycho is the normal one, the relevant sense of normality must differ from statistical typicality. Instead, the relevant sense is irreducibly evaluative. Consider an example from (Lance and Little 2004). A *normal* soccer game, we say, is played between two teams of 11 players. We could say this while acknowledging that many variants—such as “little league” soccer that is played by two teams of 20 players—exist, and that these variants statistically predominate. What makes 11-on-11 soccer normal, then, cannot be statistical typicality. Rather, 11-on-11 soccer is normal because we understand the variants by referring to and recognizing deviations from it. This is the evaluative sense of normality that is relevant for assessing what a fiction is responsible for. As a practical matter, we might use statistical typicality as an imperfect proxy for evaluative normality, but we must also recognize the theoretical distinction between the two.

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<sup>8</sup>As I will explain shortly, the sense of normality here is essentially evaluative. One standard of correctness that informs our evaluation is whether the audience has correctly understood the work.

## 4.2 Identifying the Realist Model

Although the realist model of moral persuasion makes sense of how realist fictions morally persuade, it cannot serve as an account of how fictions generally morally educate and corrupt. Attempting to generalize the realist model results in an implausible view of moral persuasion: **persuasion invariantism** says that *all* fictions are responsible for getting us to believe a moral (or immoral) outlook when they are responsible for getting us to imagine a similar moral (or immoral) outlook. Essentially, persuasion invariantism claims that all fictions morally persuade in the same way, the way captured by the realist model. To avoid this implausible view, the realist model is best understood as presenting *one (but not the only)* way that a fiction can morally persuade. In this section, I examine the discussion of fictions' power to morally persuade in (Currie 1995), (Jacobson 1996), and (Kieran 1996). Charitably, these philosophers should be interpreted as advancing models of moral persuasion that are limited in scope—namely, their models are best restricted to realist fictions.

### 4.2.1 Commonalities

Before we examine Currie's, Jacobson's, and Kieran's models individually, let me highlight their thematic commonalities. The question of *how* fictions morally educate and corrupt is relatively overlooked in the moral persuasion literature. Instead, the question that philosophers have primarily focused on is *whether* fictions morally educate and corrupt. Currie, Jacobson, and Kieran all take on the challenge of developing a model of moral persuasion that allows us to affirmatively answer this *whether* question. The insight that their models share is that fictions do not morally educate and corrupt by directly influencing our moral beliefs. Instead, they do so by influencing the other components of our moral perspectives: desires, emotions, dispositions, and so on. Each model develops this insight in slightly different ways: Currie says that fictions get us to have certain *values*, Jacobson says that fictions give

defeasible *warrant* for what would be fitting to feel, and Kieran says that fictions grant us *appropriate* imaginative understandings to be deployed in moral assessments. In this chapter, I will not assess the relative merits of these different developments. Instead, I want to focus on what they say about how fictions influence the non-cognitive components of our moral perspectives: how fictions get us to have certain values, how fictions give defeasible warrant for what would be fitting to feel, and how fictions grant us appropriate imaginative understandings to be deployed in moral assessments.

To show that these models cannot be fully general, I dialectically charge them with committing the *fallacy of norm-equivocation*: trading on an ambiguity between what we *imaginatively* value and what we *really* value, or between what *fictionally* makes sense and what *really* makes sense.<sup>9</sup> Attempting to resolve the ambiguity presents these models with a dilemma: either they implicitly endorse persuasion invariantism or they must be limited in scope. Since persuasion invariantism is an implausible view of moral persuasion, these models are best understood to only be elucidating one, but not the only, way that a fiction can morally educate and corrupt. Let us now see how the dilemma applies to Currie’s, Jacobson’s, and Kieran’s models.

#### 4.2.2 Currie

First, consider Currie’s model, which centers on *secondary imaginings*. Unlike primary imaginings, which are simply about what is true in a fictional scenario, secondary imaginings are about how *we* the readers would experience a fictional scenario. Fictions encourage us to have certain secondary imaginings and, in turn, these secondary imaginings show us how we would respond to the situation in reality—

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<sup>9</sup>The fallacy that I am alleging is inspired by Jacobson’s forceful denial of the thesis of *norm-equivalence*: “that the same norms (whether of morality or warrant) apply to our responses toward fictional events and persons, as would apply were they actual” (Jacobson 1997, 186). The norm-equivocator accepts the thesis of norm-equivalence. Consequently, the norm-equivocator either ignores the difference between fictional norms and real norms, or thinks that their contents are uniformly equivalent. Norm-equivocating is a fallacy because the thesis of norm equivalence is, in Jacobson’s words, “not merely false, but patently absurd” (Jacobson 1997, 186).

namely, what we would really value and disvalue. In addition to educating us, fiction can also corrupt us when it persuades us to have incorrect values:

Fictions that encourage secondary imaginings, while providing signposts for those *imaginings* which systematically distort their outcomes, may do moral damage by persuading us to *value* that which is not valuable. (Currie 1995, 258; my emphases)

There is an ambiguity in the move from secondary imaginings to values. Does Currie mean that secondary imaginings only show us what we should *imaginatively* value or also what we should *really* value?

Suppose secondary imaginings only show us what we should imaginatively value, either in the fictional world or in the shoes of a fictional character. Then secondary imaginings do not show us what we should really value. If secondary imaginings do not show us what we should really value, then they alone cannot be what accounts for the real-world moral effects of fictions.

Suppose secondary imaginings also show us what we should really value, or what is appropriate to value in reality. We must then ask: do the secondary imaginings that a fiction prescribes *always* show us what we should really value? Answering this question affirmatively would commit Currie to the implausible view of persuasion invariantism. Hence, Currie should be interpreted as saying that the secondary imaginings a fiction prescribes *only sometimes* show us what we should really value. Therefore, Currie's model must be limited in scope.

### 4.2.3 Jacobson

Second, consider Jacobson's model, which centers on *emotional responses to fictions*. Fictions show us that it might make sense to see the world in different lights. Exposure to a variety of perspectives makes us more fully-informed, which prepares us for ethical debates in a pluralistic society. So how do fictions show us that it might make sense to

take on perspectives different from the ones we currently hold? According to Jacobson, our emotional responses to fictions come with a presumption of warrant:

That we find ourselves feeling a certain way puts a powerful, although defeasible, pressure on us to grant that this is how it makes sense to feel. (Jacobson 1996, 335)

There is an ambiguity in the move from what we feel in response to the fiction to the defeasible warrant for what makes sense to feel. Does Jacobson mean that the way that we do feel only gives defeasible warrant for the way that it *fictionally* makes sense to feel or also the way that it *really* makes sense to feel?

Suppose emotional responses to fictions only give defeasible warrant for the way that it fictionally makes sense to feel—that is, the way we should imaginatively respond to the fiction. Then the way that we do feel does not show us the fitting way to feel in reality. If the way that we do feel does not give defeasible warrant for the way that it really makes sense to feel, then it alone cannot be what accounts for the moral effects of fictions.

Suppose emotional responses to fictions also gives defeasible warrant for the way that it really makes sense to feel. We must then ask: does the way that we do feel in response to a fiction *always* give defeasible warrant for the way that it really makes sense to feel? Answering this question affirmatively would commit Jacobson to the implausible view of persuasion invariantism. Hence, Jacobson should be interpreted as saying that the way that we do feel in response to a fiction *only sometimes* gives defeasible warrant for the way that it really makes sense to feel. Therefore, Jacobson's model must be limited in scope.

#### 4.2.4 Kieran

Lastly, consider Kieran's model, which centers on *imaginative understandings*. Although Kieran does not explicitly characterize what imaginative understandings are,



we can think of them as non-theoretical, intimate, and emotive acquaintances with possibilities that are relevant for moral assessments. According to Kieran, imaginative understandings are indispensable for making moral assessments of situations and persons, both in make-believe and in reality. Fictions guide us to have certain imaginative understandings in response to fictional scenarios and, in turn, these imaginative understandings are brought to bear on moral assessments of analogous situations in reality. Here is what Kieran says about how *Triumph of the Will* morally corrupts:

... the imaginative understanding promoted [in *Triumph of the Will*] constitutes a fundamental and radical misunderstanding of what it *represents*. Far from being an appropriate description, it *cultivates* a radically unsound imaginative understanding. (Kieran 1996, 346–347; my emphases)

There is an ambiguity in the move from the immoral representations in *Triumph of the Will* to the immoral imaginative understanding that it cultivates. Does Kieran mean that the immoral representations cultivate only a *fictional* immoral imaginative understanding or also a *real* immoral imaginative understanding?

It cannot be the former. As before, if the immoral representations only cultivate a fictional immoral imaginative understanding, then we do not yet have an account of moral persuasion. Moreover, it is implausible that the moral outlook that *Triumph of the Will* represents should be understood as immoral in the fiction itself.

So it must be the latter. Kieran thus moves swiftly from the immoral make-believe perspective that *Triumph of the Will* get us to imagine to the immoral real-world perspective that *Triumph of the Will* get us to believe. We must then ask whether Kieran's diagnosis of how *Triumph of the Will* morally corrupts fully generalizes: do immoral representations in fictions *always* cultivate real immoral imaginative understandings? Answering this question affirmatively would commit Kieran to the implausible view of persuasion invariantism. Hence, Kieran should be interpreted as

saying that immoral representations in fictions *only sometimes* cultivate real immoral imaginative understandings. Therefore, Kieran's model must be limited in scope.

### 4.3 Restricting the Realist Model

Considering why persuasion invariantism is implausible also shows us why the realist model must be limited in scope. The problem is simple: there are many different kinds of fictions out there. An aspect of this diversity is the way that different kinds of fictions morally persuade: although the realist novel *The Golden Bowl* and the satirical novel *Catch-22* both teach us important moral lessons, they do so in different ways. A case study of *Catch-22* shows the implausibility of persuasion invariantism, and consequently the need to restrict the realist model to apply only to some fictions.<sup>10</sup> In this section, I speculatively suggest one model of how satires like *Catch-22* morally persuade and examine two alternative models. The take-away lesson is that, in order to adequately account for how non-realist fictions like satires morally educate, we must supplement the realist model with a distinct model.

#### 4.3.1 The Diversity of Fictions

Once we step outside of the comfortable confines of realism, persuasion invariantism begins to encounter problems. Consider horror comedies, which are neither morally nor psychologically realistic. For example, the fitting response to a decapitation scene in the film *Evil Dead 2* is to laugh rather than be morally outraged. Laughter is the fitting response because a decapitation scene in a horror comedy is fictionally worthy of laughter. Of course, *Evil Dead 2* does not get us to really think that a decapitation is any more really worthy of laughter than we thought before imaginative engagement. Despite getting us to imaginatively adopt a make-believe perspective

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<sup>10</sup>This section owes a great deal of intellectual debt to (Harold 2007), which, in addition to providing a careful case study of *Catch-22*, emphasizes the importance of non-realist fictions for theorizing about fictions in general.

from which laughing at a decapitation is fitting, *Evil Dead 2* is not responsible for—contrary to what persuasion invariantism would say—getting us to really adopt a real-world perspective from which laughing at a decapitation is fitting. Similar cases are easy enough to find once we know where to look: fictions that are morally and psychologically non-realistic.

Ultimately, we theorists want to furnish a general account of how fictions morally educate and corrupt. To do so, we must attend to *all* fictions and examine the ways that they morally persuade. (Or, if they do not morally persuade, we must examine why this is so.) The diversity of fictions means that there are fictions that are importantly unlike the realist fictions that often serve as paradigmatic cases in discussions of fictions' power to morally persuade. Attending to non-realist fictions allows us to see why a general account of moral persuasion must abandon persuasion invariantism. Hence, doing so also allows us to see why the realist model must be restricted to apply to some fictions but not others. To further bolster the challenge to persuasion invariantism, let us consider another case, the satirical novel *Catch-22*.

#### 4.3.2 Case Study: *Catch-22*

As readers, we draw moral lessons from *Catch-22*. The novel persuades us to question and challenge the moral absurdities that are associated with wars, militaries, and bureaucracies. What make it an interesting case for our present purpose is that it morally educates in a way that is distinct from the way that realist fictions do. Essentially, on my speculative interpretation, *Catch-22* is responsible for getting us to really adopt a moral real-world perspective because it is responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt an immoral make-believe perspective.

The fictional world of *Catch-22* is importantly unlike ours with respect to morality. As (Harold 2007, 149–150) notes:

First, there are cases ... where the narrator baldly claims that something

that is clearly immoral was in fact justified: “Clevinger was guilty, of course, or he would not have been accused, and since the only way to prove it was to find him guilty, it was their patriotic duty to do so.” Second, sometimes characters advocate horrifying moral views, which go unchallenged by the other characters. In these cases the implication is that in the world of the novel, these ideas are not reprehensible.

When engaging with this fiction, we are prescribed to imaginatively adopt a make-believe perspective that treats the morally absurd as normal and sensible. Perhaps we imaginatively adopt this perspective in order to be immersed in this morally odd fictional world. Perhaps we imaginatively adopt this perspective in order to empathize with the morally odd characters who have similar views. What matters is that, at some point in reading the novel, we imaginatively adopt an immoral make-believe perspective as the fiction prescribes us to do.

Despite being responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt a make-believe perspective that treats the morally absurd as normal and sensible, *Catch-22* is not responsible for getting us to really adopt a real-world perspective that treats the morally absurd as normal and sensible. In fact, it does the opposite. It persuades us to really adopt a real-world perspective that questions and challenges the moral absurdities that are associated with real wars, militaries, and bureaucracies. *Catch-22* thus constitutes another counterexample to persuasion invariantism. Persuasion invariantism would tell us that *Catch-22* is morally corruptive because it is responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt an immoral make-believe perspective. Accepting persuasion invariantism would therefore lead us to seriously misunderstand *Catch-22*'s moral achievement.

That is how I interpret *Catch-22*, at least. Importantly, even if my interpretation were to turn out to be actually incorrect for *Catch-22*, we could still conceive of an artwork for which my interpretation would be correct.<sup>11</sup> The possibility of such an artwork is sufficient for posing a challenge to persuasion invariantism. My foregoing,

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<sup>11</sup>I thank Jonathan Gilmore for pointing out this dialectical move.

admittedly speculative, interpretation is only meant to illustrate one way that a fiction can educate us that is distinct from the way that realist fictions do.

Since I do not want to stake too much on one particular interpretation of *Catch-22*, I will examine two alternatives next.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, on these alternative interpretations, *Catch-22* still requires us to imaginatively accept norms different from the norms that we really accept. The models that these interpretations illustrate therefore still differ from the realist model. Hence, no matter which of these interpretations is ultimately accepted, persuasion invariantism remains implausible and the realist model remains limited in scope.

Consider Harold's imaginative resistance interpretation. Harold claims that engaging with *Catch-22* mandates us to resist imagining the morally outrageous and contradictory claims that the novel makes. Mandating imaginative resistance, he says, is what makes the work aesthetically valuable and successful:

In *Catch-22*, however, imaginative resistance serves to engage the reader more fully with the events and ideas of the work. The book is filled with contradictions, and with morally outrageous propositions, which escalate as the book goes on. Our inability to imagine these propositions contributes to the work's value and success. (Harold 2007, 149)

On the first pass, Harold appears to have a strong case. Imaginative resistance is associated with a jarring phenomenology, and many of the claims in *Catch-22* certainly evokes that “what-is-going-on” feeling.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>By no means are these the only other alternative interpretations available. For example, we could incorporate the notion of an *implied author* into a model of moral persuasion. This model would say that *Catch-22* is responsible for getting us to question and challenge the moral absurdities that are associated with wars, militaries, and bureaucracies because it is responsible for getting us to imaginatively identify with the implied author, who also questions and challenges the moral absurdities that are associated with wars, militaries, and bureaucracies. Since the notion of an implied author remains controversial in both philosophical aesthetics and literary criticism, adequately presenting and evaluating this model would take us far beyond the scope of this chapter. Regardless, this alternative model constitutes a radical departure from the realist model also. I thank Sarah Buss for suggesting this possibility and Daniel Jacobson for further discussion.

<sup>13</sup>(Weatherson 2004) notes that sentences that evoke imaginative resistance tend to generate a striking, jarring reaction. (Gendler 2006)'s “pop-out” terminology, as applied to these sentences, suggests a similar phenomenological characterization.

On the second glance, however, we can see important differences between *Catch-22* and paradigmatic imaginative resistance cases. *Imaginative resistance*—as I understand the phenomenon—involves more than just the jarring phenomenology. Readers must also *persistently* resist imagining and accepting as fictional the claims that the work makes. There is a nearby phenomenon, *hermeneutic recalibration*, that shares the phenomenology of imaginative resistance but differs in that readers’ resistance is only *temporary*. It is a common literary technique to evoke hermeneutic recalibration; we frequently see it in, amongst other places, magical realist novels. In cases of hermeneutic recalibration, the jarring phenomenology is employed by the author to prompt readers to reconsider and reinterpret the work. For example, if one were new to magical realism, one might initially find jarring the claim that a character was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears. However, after realizing that magical realist worlds come with their own sets of rules, claims like this cease to be jarring. This example would thus be a case of hermeneutic recalibration rather than a case of imaginative resistance. In contrast with paradigmatic imaginative resistance cases, in hermeneutic recalibration cases readers are able to come to a relatively stable reading of the fiction on which the initially jarring claims cease to be so.<sup>14</sup>

*Catch-22* seems to evoke hermeneutic recalibration rather than imaginative resistance.<sup>15</sup> We are able to imagine the morally outrageous and contradictory claims once we recognize that the fictional world is importantly unlike ours. What is morally outrageous in our world could be perfectly sensible there. The rules that apply in our world need not apply there. On the relatively stable reading of the work, the morally outrageous and contradictory claims do make sense—not according to the norms that apply in the real world, but according to the norms that apply in the

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<sup>14</sup>The foregoing characterizations of imaginative resistance and hermeneutic recalibration are defended in my [chapter II](#).

<sup>15</sup>Harold could also be using the term “imaginative resistance” to refer to the emotional distance that *Catch-22* mandates readers to maintain. As is the case with hermeneutic recalibration, it is a common literary technique to emotionally distance readers where appropriate. More importantly, as is the case with hermeneutic recalibration, emotional distance does not entail the lack of imaginings.

fictional world. Engaging with *Catch-22*, on this reading, mandates us to not only imagine the propositions asserted, but also to imaginatively adopt some norms that are opposites of the ones that we really hold.

Consider now the ironic assertions interpretation.<sup>16</sup> On this interpretation, all the moral absurdities and contradictions in *Catch-22* are only instances of verbal irony. As is the case with ordinary ironic assertions, the fiction asserts absurdities and contradictions only to bring out, to the readers, how ridiculous its subjects—including wars, militaries, and bureaucracies—really are. Does this interpretation entail that audiences need not imaginatively adopt immoral make-believe perspectives while engaging with *Catch-22*?

To answer this question, we must consider the cognition of ordinary ironic assertions. While the matter remains controversial, there are plausible pretense accounts of figurative language in general, and irony in particular.<sup>17</sup> Notably, (Clark and Gerrig 1984) defends a pretense theory of irony. Drawing on Clark and Gerrig’s account, Walton provides the following general account of irony:

To speak ironically is to mimic or mock those one disagrees with, fictionally to assert what they do or might assert. . . . One shows what it is like to make certain claims, hoping thereby to demonstrate how absurd or ridiculous it is to do so. (Walton 1990, 222)

On Walton’s account, ordinary ironic assertions involve mini-games of make-believe. A speaker *pretends* that some absurd claim  $\varphi$  is not absurd in order to *really* convey that  $\varphi$  is absurd. In order to understand what is conveyed, a listener *imaginatively* judges that  $\varphi$  is not absurd in order to *really* recognize that  $\varphi$  is absurd. The centrality of imaginative perspective-taking to irony recognition is evidenced by psychological research. Individuals with deficits in imagination, such as autistics and schizophrenics,

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<sup>16</sup>I thank Kendall Walton for pressing me to address this alternative interpretation.

<sup>17</sup>(Walton 1993) and (Egan 2008) defend pretense theories of, respectively, metaphor and idiom.

tend to have difficulties with recognizing and comprehending irony.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, recognition of ordinary ironic assertions plausibly requires the use of imagination: to really recognize an absurdity as such, one must imagine as if it were not so.

If ironic assertions in fictions function like ordinary ironic assertions, then imaginative perspective-taking is central to understanding them too. Hence, even if the moral absurdities and contradictions in *Catch-22* are best characterized as instances of verbal irony, readers are nevertheless required to exercise their imagination—specifically, they must imaginatively adopt different norms—in order to engage with the fiction. In fact, the pretense account of irony shows that persuasion invariantism is fundamentally misguided because it disregards the possibility that we learn about what-it’s-like by pretending what-it’s-*not*-like.

#### 4.4 Genre and Moral Persuasion

The implausibility of persuasion invariantism shows that multiple models are necessary to make sense of the different ways that different fictions morally persuade. How can we put together the different models into a general account of moral persuasion? In this section, I suggest that we can do so by incorporating genre into the general account as a *selector*: the model of moral persuasion that is appropriate for a given fiction *partly depends* on the genre that the fiction is appropriately classified in. The resulting account, *genre persuasion variantism*, stands in opposition to persuasion invariantism. I outline one development of genre persuasion variantism that incorporates both the realist model and my model for satires developed in §4.3.

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<sup>18</sup>(Happé 1991) documents the difficulties with irony recognition that individuals with Asperger’s syndrome encounter. (Langdon et al. 2002) surveys the literature on schizophrenia and difficulties with irony recognition. To be precise, these psychologists have attributed difficulties with irony recognition to deficits in meta-representation and theory-of-mind, respectively. However, there is an extensive literature in both philosophy and developmental psychology, surveyed in (Liao and Gendler 2011), on the close ties between imagination, pretense, theory-of-mind, and meta-representation. The differences in details therefore do not threaten the present claim that imaginative perspective-taking is central to irony recognition.



Genre persuasion variantism is an attractive position because it both captures the variations that exist in the landscape of diverse fictions and preserves the explanatory power necessary for philosophical theorizing.

#### 4.4.1 Motivation and a Sketch

Before examining genre persuasion variantism, we should think about why we need genre. As a foil, let us consider another position that also stands in opposition to persuasion invariantism. **Anti-theoretic persuasion variantism** is the position that different fictions can morally educate or corrupt in different ways but nothing more principled can be said. Although we can say true things about particular fictions, no true *theory* exists.<sup>19</sup>

As theorists, we should find anti-theoretic persuasion invariantism unsatisfying. In trying to understand fictions' power to morally persuade, we want to understand more than what happens in individual cases. We want to say, for example, that *Triumph of the Will* and *Birth of a Nation* morally corrupt in similar ways, and understand where the similarity lies. We want an explanation of the difference between the ways that realist fictions like *The Golden Bowl* and satires like *Catch-22* morally educate, and not merely acknowledging that there is a difference. Explanatory considerations thus place a presumptive demand of generality on the accounts that we develop. Anti-theoretic persuasion variantism's lack of explanatory power prompts us to find a better alternative. Such an alternative can be had, I argue, if we consider genre's role in moral persuasion.

Genres are special groupings of fictions that are recognized by a community as such.<sup>20</sup> There are indeed a variety of fictions, but we have ways of grouping them

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<sup>19</sup>I borrow this characterization of anti-theoretic persuasion variantism from how the anti-theoretic position in the ethical criticisms of art debate is characterized in (Jacobson 2005).

<sup>20</sup>Context plays a role in specifying who the community includes. Which groupings are special for a given community is an empirical matter, and why they are special may require us to look to sociology or literary theory for a non-philosophical explanation. For more elaborate developments of the philosophical conception of genre, see (Walton 1970), (Currie 2004), and (Laetz and Lopes 2008).

sensibly that allow us to recognize theoretically-important similarities and differences amongst the diversity. Indeed, we have already done so when we invoked terms like “horror comedies”, “satires”, and “realist fictions”. The groupings that these terms pick out allow us to both recognize the diversity of fictions and preserve some theoretical unity. Genre thus gives us a way to develop persuasion variantism that maintains some explanatory power. **Genre persuasion variantism** is the position that, all else being equal, different models of moral persuasion are appropriate for different *kinds* of fictions.

Next, I develop a version of genre persuasion variantism that takes the realist model and my model for satires as starting points. On this development of genre persuasion variantism, the relationship between the real-world perspective that a fiction is responsible for getting us to really adopt and the make-believe perspective that it is responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt *partly depends* on the genre of the fiction. Since my primary focus is on genre’s role in the general account of moral persuasion, I will set aside other aspects of such a general account, such as the underlying psychological mechanisms. Currie’s secondary imaginings, Jacobson’s emotional responses to fictions, and Kieran’s imaginative understandings are all plausible ways of filling in the underlying psychological mechanisms and are all compatible with what I say about genre’s role in moral persuasion.

It takes two steps to see how genre can vary the relationship between the make-believe and real-world perspectives that are appropriately associated with a fiction. First, we must recognize the symmetry that exists between *import*, or what we put into imaginative engagements with fictions, and *export*, or what we take away from imaginative engagements with fictions. Second, we must recognize genre’s influence on import: it partly determines what is warranted to be fictional and what we ought to imagine. I now elaborate on these two steps that connect genre to export.

#### 4.4.2 The Symmetry between Import and Export

The terminology of import and export is introduced in (Gendler 2000) to capture two important aspects of our interactions with fictions: what we put in and what we take away. To grasp these notions, we first consider a realist fiction case and focus on propositions that are believed and imagined. As we will see later, however, import and export involve more than just the contents of beliefs and imaginings, and the symmetry between import and export holds for non-realist fictions too.

Start with import. Fictional worlds are rich entities: the propositions that are true in a fiction often outnumber the propositions that are explicitly expressed. We have rules about which of the non-explicitly-expressed propositions are allowed to be added to a fictional world outright, and which inferences we are allowed to make from what is explicitly expressed.<sup>21</sup> These are the **import** rules that tell us how to construct rich fictional worlds from the relatively few propositions explicitly expressed by words on a page or images on a screen. As an illustration, we can see import rules at work in our imaginative engagements with *Pride and Prejudice*. Even though Jane Austen never explicitly states that pride is a vice, we are nevertheless allowed to think so in the fictional world. We are allowed to think so because the fictional worlds of realist fictions are, for the most part, like ours. Since *Pride and Prejudice* reasonably counts as a realist fiction, we can import much of what is true in our world (with some exceptions) into the fictional world, including the fact that pride is a vice.<sup>22</sup> Import rules of a realist fiction thus warrants us to imagine much of what we believe.

Similarity is a symmetric relation. The symmetry here is *epistemic*, not *metaphysical*.<sup>23</sup> Metaphysically, the fictionality of imported propositions depend on their

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<sup>21</sup>(Walton 1990) calls these rules *principles of generation* and discusses their central role in make-believe. See also (Lewis 1978, 1983) and (Currie 1990) for further discussion.

<sup>22</sup>I do not want to stake too much on this particular example. Although (Gendler 2000) also calls *Pride and Prejudice* a realist fiction, the novel does contain parts that are melodramatically saccharine as well as parts that satirize societal norms. Perhaps the Henry James novels that (Nussbaum 1990) invokes are better examples of the kind of works that I have in mind.

<sup>23</sup>I thank Kendall Walton for pressing me to clarify the sense in which there is a symmetry between

actual truths, but the truth of exported propositions clearly do not depend on their fictionality. However, epistemically, if we have good reasons to think that, in a given domain, a proposition is fictional if and only if it is true, then we have good reasons to both judge a proposition to be fictional once we know it is true (import) and judge a proposition to be true once we know that it is fictional (export). So the similarity between the fictional world of *Pride and Prejudice* and ours tells us more than what we can import; it also tells us what we can export. Specifically, the export rules of realist fictions warrant us to believe much of what we imagine, at least the relatively general propositions.<sup>24</sup> Gendler outlines two ways that export can happen:

The first sort are those which make use of the *narrative as clearinghouse*: export things from the story that you the storyteller have intentionally and consciously imported, adding them to my stock in the way that I add knowledge gained by testimony. . . . The second sort are those which make use of the *narrative as factory*: I export things from the story whose truth becomes apparent as a result of thinking about the story itself. These I add to my stock the way I add knowledge gained by modeling. (Gendler 2000, 76–77)

Return to our example. Using *Pride and Prejudice* as clearinghouse, we might come to believe the facts about social norms of the period that we also imagined. Using *Pride and Prejudice* as factory, we might come to believe that it is unwise to judge people by their first impressions because we imagined so in response to Elizabeth Bennet’s initial assessment of Mr. Darcy. There is a symmetry between the import and export rules of realist fictions because they are both ultimately grounded in the symmetric relation of similarity that exists between realist fictional worlds and ours.

It is worth emphasizing that import and export are about more than the contents of beliefs and imaginings. (Hazlett 2009) and (Hazlett and Mag Uidhir 2011), for example, what is fictional and what is true.

<sup>24</sup>What exactly are we warranted to export? Obviously, we should not export propositions regarding the existence of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. As I suggest earlier, plausibly we should export psychological generalizations and broad moral norms. While it is difficult to give any precise answer, a good rule of thumb is that we are not warranted to export the particulars but we are warranted to export the generalities.

adopt Gendler’s terminology but narrowly construe import and export only in terms of propositions. However, as (Gendler 2006, 150–151) clarifies, import and export also apply to other components of the mind: “When we imagine, we draw on our ordinary conceptual repertoire and habits of appraisal, and as the result of imagining, we may find ourselves with novel insights about, and changed perspectives on, the actual world”. Conceptual repertoire and habits of appraisal are not reducible to beliefs; they involve our non-cognitive attitudes such as desires, emotions, and dispositions. So, import and export apply to all components of real-world and make-believe perspectives.

It is also worth emphasizing that the symmetry between import and export holds for non-realist fictions too. What matters is that there exists some symmetric relation or relations between a fictional world and ours that grounds both import and export. Consider the fictional world of a science fiction that is similar to ours with respect to morality but not with respect to physics. The import rules are thus such that we are allowed to add real-world moral norms to the fictional world, but not allowed to add real-world physical laws to the fictional world. Consequently, we are allowed to take away what the fiction tells us about moral permissibility, but not allowed to take away what the fictions tells us about physical possibility. In this case, the symmetry between import and export—again, only epistemic and not metaphysical—is grounded in the similarity *and the dissimilarity* between the fictional world and ours.

In addition to similarity and dissimilarity, another symmetric relation is opposition. Consider a fictional world that is the opposite of ours with respect to morality. Such a fiction might be responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt a make-believe perspective that is the opposite of what we really hold. Since opposition is symmetrical, we are thus to export the opposite of what the fiction tells us to make-believe. Indeed, these are plausibly the import and export rules that govern the satirical parts of *Catch-22*. Understanding the symmetry between import and export, and the relations that ground the symmetry, is thus an important step toward understanding how *Catch-22*

morally educates. More generally, it is also an important step toward understanding how genre influences export.

#### 4.4.3 Genre and Import

We now consider the other important step: how genre influences import. Genres are special groupings of fictions that are recognized as such. Whether a fiction is appropriately classified in a genre depends on factors such as its relevant resemblance to other works in that genre, the artist's intentions, critical judgments, and that genre's propensity for aesthetic pleasure.<sup>25</sup> The conventions that are associated with a genre constrain which implicit propositions are warranted to be fictional and which inferential patterns are appropriate. In turn, genre conventions inform our expectations about the appropriate ways to approach a fiction, such as what we are warranted to imagine.<sup>26</sup>

Outside of philosophy, writers, literary theorists, and psychologists have all recognized the significance of genre. Writer Henry James claims that our imaginative engagements with fictions are informed by our recognitions of genre conventions: “‘Kinds’ are the very life of literature, and truth and strength come from the complete recognition of them, from abounding to the utmost in their respective senses and sinking deep into their consistency” (James 1899, xvii). Literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov extends James's insight and characterizes genre as having dual functions: “as ‘horizons of expectations’ for readers and as ‘models of writing’ for authors” (Todorov 1990, 18). Genre partly determines what is true in a fictional world and what our expectations during imaginative engagements should be. Finally, psychologists have found that genre influences the way that audiences' engage with fictions and the claims that they accept as fictionally true (Bilandzic and Busselle 2008; Woolley and Cox

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<sup>25</sup>These factors are outlined in (Walton 1970) for his account of perceptually-distinguishable categories.

<sup>26</sup>My [chapter II](#) explicates the relationships between genre, convention, and expectation in detail.

2007; Zwaan 1994). The convergence of opinions attests to genre's influence on our imaginative engagements with fictions.

As systematizations of the features common to works in a given genre, *genre conventions* do not merely catalogue the common features, but say something about the relationships between them. As a simplistic example, a convention of the science-fiction genre is that physical laws of the real world need not hold in the fictional world. In one sense, this convention is descriptive: it is in fact typical for works that are appropriately classified in science-fiction to include violations of real-world physical laws. In another sense, this convention is also normative: being appropriately classified in science-fiction warrants a work's inclusion of violations of real-world physical laws. Considered in the normative sense, genre conventions constrain the nature of relevant fictional worlds by contributing to the relevant import rules.

Genre influences our responses to fictions because it influences the extent to which we bring our real-world perspective to bear on make-believe. The example above shows that there are variations in the extent to which fictions demand us to bring our physical beliefs to bear on make-believe; realist fictions demand us to do so, but science fictions do not. There are similar variations in the extent to which fictions demand us to bring our moral perspectives to bear on make-believe. For example, the conventions of horror comedies allow fictional worlds to morally deviate from the real world in the same way that the conventions of science-fictions allow fictional worlds to nomically deviate from the real world. Consequently, while we must bring our moral perspectives to bear on realist fictions, we need not do so with horror comedies.

#### 4.4.4 Back to *Catch-22*

Put the previous two points together: genre partly determines the export rules that govern a fiction because it partly determines the import rules that govern a fiction. Let us illustrate this version of genre persuasion variantism by reconsidering

the case of *Catch-22*. What persuasion invariantism fails to explain is how a fiction can morally persuade in a way that is distinct from realist fictions. Genre persuasion variantism can easily explain how.

As a fiction in the genre of satire, *Catch-22* does not ask us to import our moral perspectives into make-believe. Instead, we are to import the opposite: what we really find morally reprehensible, we are to imaginatively find it morally unproblematic. Given the symmetry between import and export, we are warranted to export the opposite of what we make-believe. Hence, even though the fiction is responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt an immoral make-believe perspective, the fiction is responsible for getting us to come to really adopt a moral real-world perspective.

Undoubtedly, even this is a simplification of how *Catch-22* morally educates. We need not come to really adopt a real-world perspective that is the exact opposite of the make-believe perspective imagined. For some, the novel simply challenges them to examine more carefully their existing attitudes toward wars, militaries, and bureaucracies. The symmetry between import and export is only an imprecise heuristic, and genre's contribution to import and export rules is only partial. Still, simplifications have theoretical worth: they illuminate interesting general relationships that hold. Genre persuasion variantism is by no means the whole story, but its approximate truth does highlight the importance of genre in furnishing a complete account of how fictions generally morally persuade.

## 4.5 Directions for Future Research

The central, substantive theme of this chapter is that diverse fictions morally persuade in different ways. Persuasion invariantism, which assumes all fictions morally persuade in the way that is captured by the realist model, fails to account for the diversity of fictions. A general account of moral persuasion should incorporate genre to capture the variations that exist in the landscape of diverse fictions. On the version



of genre persuasion variantism developed in §4.4, genre influences the relationship between the real-world perspective that a fiction is responsible for getting us to really adopt and the make-believe perspective that it is responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt.

In addition, there is a subsidiary methodological theme. As I note earlier, philosophers' efforts to date have been primarily directed toward answering *whether* fictions morally persuade. Now that a consensus—"yes"—is emerging, it is time to move on to answering questions about *how* fictions morally persuade. This chapter asks, and answers, one such question. However, we must also address other *how* questions in order to furnish a complete account of how fictions generally morally persuade. Let me briefly mention two directions for future research.

In reasoning about the educative or corruptive effects of a fiction, we must consider all the various make-believe perspectives that a fiction prescribes. In addition to imaginatively adopting the omniscient make-believe perspective, or the morality of the fictional world, we also frequently imaginatively adopt make-believe perspectives of fictional characters during engagements with fictions. A nuanced fiction typically includes both moral and immoral make-believe perspectives, but it often does not portray them with equal sympathy. A fiction can make clear that its overall outlook is a moral one when it portrays an immoral character with ridicule. Conversely, a fiction can also make clear that its overall outlook is an immoral one when it portrays an immoral character with praise. Assessing the overall make-believe perspective that a fiction is responsible for getting us to imaginatively adopt requires assessing the relative contributions of all the various make-believe perspectives and the way that they are portrayed. Only then can we assess the real-world perspective that the fiction is responsible for getting us to really adopt.

We should also consider the different audiences that different fictions target. Initially, I characterized the moral effects that a fiction is *responsible for* as the moral

influences that it has on a *normal* audience. An implicit assumption in my initial characterization is that what counts as a normal audience is the same for different fictions. However, this assumption is evidently false. Another way that fictions are diverse is that they target different audiences. In thinking about the morally educative and corruptive effects of children's stories, for example, we should consider the normal effects on children, not the normal effects on all human beings. Hence, we must figure out how to relativize the notion of normality to what is normal for a fiction's target audience in assessing what a fiction is responsible for. My suspicion is that genre can help us with answering that question too.

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