

THE TRUTH ABOUT FICTION: SOME REFLECTIONS
ON PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

by

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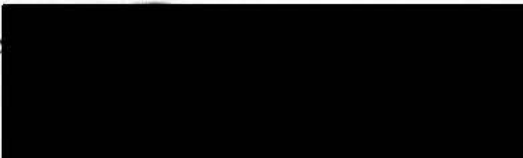


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Title: THE TRUTH ABOUT FICTION:

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This investigation is concerned with certain philosophical problems which arise in current discussions about reading fictional literature, and with philosophical problems and themes that arise in literature itself. A number of theories have been offered by philosophers as well as literary critics not only to account for what fiction is, but also as to how appreciation of fiction occurs. The two are related in that how we answer the question "What is fiction?" may bear upon the problem of reading. One of my goals is to show how attitudes towards literature have evolved from philosophic views regarding the nature of, and connection between, language and knowledge. The theories of reading that I will consider are enmeshed in problematic presuppositions about this connection.

I will also claim that fiction can be a source of

insight, and that insight is a form of knowledge. This is a robust claim that will be illuminated by exploring certain works of literature.

Novelists and other creative writers are often engaged with the same themes that philosophers are. In fact, some fictional works may even present a challenge to a given philosophical theory or view. However, most of the literature I will be examining does not set out to assess or even exemplify the views of particular philosophers, but rather pursues certain themes that authors share in common with philosophers, for instance, questions concerning truth, meaning, appearance and reality.

I intend to show how certain works of literature offer different approaches to, and expressions of, philosophical themes. I claim not only that literature can expand our scope for thinking about philosophical questions, but more importantly, that it may help us in rethinking them.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The investigation that follows concerns itself with those quarrelsome views that involve not only the appreciation of fiction, but those philosophical standards, beliefs, problems, and themes that arise in fiction itself, which I claim make fiction a source of insight and knowledge.

Philosophers and literary critics offer several accounts of what fiction is and how the appreciation of fiction is possible. But they tend to pose a paradox: If fictional literature has for its content that which is not true, either inherently or by definition, how can we both appreciate and learn from fiction in blatant disregard of this fact? Furthermore, there are those who suggest that if fictional literature is not true in this respect -- if it is thought not to refer to people and events that in fact never existed or occurred -- it must then be the opposite of true; in other words, false. The issue is epistemological in nature. If false or not true, fiction cannot be the source of knowledge I claim it to be. For how does one acquire knowledge or truth from that which is regarded as not true?

While this is perhaps too frivolous a formulation of the question, it is at the very heart of the problem that I address in this study.

The objection may be raised that I have merely responded in haste. Once the reasons why fiction presents a problem are developed, it may then become obvious how a treatment of it as such saves fiction from the charge of falsehood. But even if this is accomplished, fictional literature is treated on the premise that it is neither true nor about real people and events. It is important to recognize early in this investigation that a problem emerges only when fiction is so classified. When assertions are made that fictional characters do not exist, or that fictional sentences are false or untrue because the author does not intend to assert their truth, fiction becomes problematic.

The objection may also be raised that by narrowly focusing on the terminology applied to fiction, I am disregarding other problems and issues raised by philosophers and literary critics, such as the problem of interpretation. In theory, we may always find multiple and even contradictory interpretations of the same work. The question then arises as to whether it makes sense to talk about truth in fiction at all. This is a legitimate concern. Nevertheless, it is beyond the scope of this study to address the issue of interpretation. Those who are firmly

opposed to a discussion of truth in fiction because of the possibility of multiple interpretations neither would nor should be persuaded by any of my arguments. These reflections are not directed at such opponents.

Most of the philosophical literature dealing with fiction eludes the parameters of this thesis. Many of my discussions respond specifically to the concerns of the analytic tradition: the theories and solutions to the problem of truth in fiction as it is conceived, and how the consequences of those theories may undermine my claim that fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge. I will explore what is meant by saying that fiction is false or not true; how it differs from nonfiction; what follows from that distinction; why it is important to those who make it; and in what ways fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge. These are the questions and the arguments that take form in this thesis.

In addressing fiction as a problem, it may sound as though something is wrong with fiction. Discussions of fictional literature have become a kind of "stamping ground" for problems regarding the appropriate relationship between language and the world. Rather than reappraise the accuracy of their own views about the nature of language, truth, and the world, they often seek to align or reconstruct fiction in accordance with those views, as Richard Gale here

demonstrates:

The question of truth in fiction is inextricably connected with that of reference. If we are right in claiming that a fictive use of a sentence says something that is true or false, it follows that the fictive use of the subject expression of this sentence either succeeds or fails to refer to some existent individual.¹

Although the issues raised by philosophers regarding fiction vary, the above passage serves as an account of what I consider to be the predominant assumption underlying many of their discussions: that the truth or falseness of any reference is tied to the existence or non-existence of the object referred to. Bertrand Russell's position is consistent with the one stated above. The subject expression of sentences either succeeds or fails on ontological grounds. When a name such as "Hamlet" appears in a sentence, the word fails to refer to an existent individual, as Russell explains: Because the name "Hamlet" does not refer to a person who has ever lived, descriptions of and assertions by the character in the course of the play will be rendered false.

Other commentators claim that the failure of fictive sentences to refer is not in itself problematic, since they were never intended by their author to refer to existent individuals. John Searle suggests that we should not hold "the fictive use of a sentence" to the same standards or criteria held for non-fictive usage, since the sentences

that comprise fictional literature are used by the author or speaker in a different manner from those used in nonfictional discourse. Searle claims that authors pretend² to make assertions, propositions, and statements in fiction without in fact making any. The author of fiction uses what he calls "nonserious discourse," and therefore does not intend to make actual assertions and statements. Hence it is claimed by Searle (and by others, whom we will later explore) that sentences in fiction are not intended to refer to the real world.

But if intentions are indeed the sole criterion by which a sentence is evaluated either as true or false, serious or not, then appreciators are put in the precarious position of attempting to read the mind of the author. In my view, however, when a reader has to pretend in order to enjoy or learn from a literary work, it may be a sign that the text is not "working" for that reader, or that its story is not compellingly told.

Both Searle and Kendall Walton suggest that fiction is a kind of "game" in which authors pretend to make assertions and statements about characters that do not exist. Likewise, appreciators play along by "pretending" belief that the game is not a game but is indeed about the real world. Searle (though not Walton) argues that disengagement of the reader's critical faculties is necessary if the game is to

be successful.

I investigate these kinds of problems in depth in Chapter II, when considering whether notions such as "suspension of disbelief" or "pretending" belief adequately account for one's capacity to appreciate fiction. If appreciation hinges on the understanding that fiction is false or pretence, the question must be addressed whether this affects my thesis that fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge. However, after having explored what is meant by terms like "suspension of disbelief," "pretence," and "make-believe," it will become apparent not only that such terminology may be misapplied to fiction, but that it leaves us with a distorted view of both the nature of fiction and what goes on in the mind of the reader.

I am not denying that there are differences between fiction and nonfiction. But like Searle, I claim there is nothing about the words and sentences themselves in fiction that clearly distinguishes one case from the other. However, unlike Searle and others, I neither accept the premise that fiction is not true, nor conclude that "pretending" is therefore required for its comprehension and appreciation. I also disagree that sentences in fiction are used differently than in nonfiction, at least in the respect that Russell and Searle maintain.

It is, of course, difficult to say why this is so. It

seems obvious that a journalist is doing something altogether different from a novelist. But trying to identify some characterological separation between them is not so easy. We could say that the former is reporting facts about people and events, while the latter uses imagination in creating characters and events. But this is also problematic. There are often disputes over the accuracy of facts reported in newspapers, and, for that matter, how much imagination is actually exercised in the depiction of fictional characters and events.

Let us concede the point that there is a difference between fiction and nonfiction that most people would agree to. In Chapter II we will explore this issue and try to specify what that difference might be. But I want to preface such a discussion by saying that while I agree fiction and nonfiction are different, I am not confident that a satisfactory definition or explanation can be stated that will mutually exclude the two. It is my contention that attempts to distinguish one from the other conclusively are doomed to failure. As I have already suggested, the underlying presumptions regarding the ontological status of fiction are themselves often problematic.

But not everyone who characterizes a fictional work as untrue or not true means that it is also false. Very few philosophers consider fiction to be untrue, in the sense

that it is a sham or lie -- although Plato is sometimes (and with some reason) accused of holding this view. However, the philosophers and literary critics that we will explore do accept the premise that fiction is not true, or at least not intended to be taken as true. This becomes evident in their discussions. However, I am less concerned with trying to disprove various theories of language than with clearing a path for a discussion of fiction as a source of knowledge and insight, unhindered by them.

Prior to focusing on fictional works (this will be covered in Chapter III), we first need to ask what is meant by the term "insight." I will specifically discuss this question in the introduction to Chapter III, but perhaps it will do for the moment to address another question as a preliminary response: Does fiction offer a kind of knowledge or insight that nonfiction does not offer? Certainly Martha Nussbaum thinks it does. She claims that some kinds of knowledge can only be expressed through literature. According to Nussbaum, certain novels are in and of themselves answers to the question posed by Aristotle: "How should we live?" But it seems that this question could be likewise addressed in philosophical texts, psychology journals, or other nonfictional materials. It may be argued that we do not need to read Dostoevsky if we want to know about alienation or depression. There are any number of

"self-help" books on the subject, and for the more sophisticated reader there are Freud and Marx. Why read literature if our thirst for knowledge may be satisfied by confining ourselves to nonfictional models? John Wisdom responds in a reading of Dostoevsky:

Is it that under the chapter headings 'The Psychology of Errors,' 'Fixation upon Traumas,' 'The theory of the Libido,' something is lost? The scientific terms give a wider but too distant view of reality -- so distant that we no longer feel the sorrow and the joy. And as the detail of the concrete diminishes one loses grasp of what is being talked about.... Isn't the remedy for that to move to and fro from the concrete, presented by the artist, to the general, presented by the scientist?³

Here Wisdom has his finger precisely on the problem. Fiction provides the reader with "concrete," detailed presentations, as Nussbaum would also attest. The insights of fictional literature are embodied, personal, and contextual. They flow from an epistemology often at odds with the dominant, analytic, and impersonal one that we have been discussing. Nussbaum makes a similar point throughout much of her own investigation of literature. She suggests that fictional literature is frequently ignored by a traditional philosophy that models itself after science, and that has its own methodology for determining what is true and what counts as knowledge.

But to say that fiction can offer insight is nothing ground-breaking. People have been telling stories, reciting poems, and writing songs for millennia. Philosophers

themselves have been using fiction and fictional examples to illustrate and argue their views since Plato; the cave allegory, the myth of Ur, and the ring of Gyges are proof of this. Camus, as both author and philosopher, demonstrates that fiction can be insightful; Kierkegaard uses the Abraham and Isaac story to exemplify his views concerning the nature of faith; and even the utilitarian often uses fantastic examples to support his case.

However, philosophical examples that are fictional are not the same as philosophical insights found in fiction. I mean to claim more than merely that fiction serves philosophers with examples. Indeed, novelists and other creative writers often engage in themes similar to those expressed by philosophers -- even those philosophers who wish to discredit them. But most of the literature we will explore does not set out to assess or exemplify the views of particular philosophers (Voltaire's Candide being the exception), but instead pursues certain themes that authors share in common with philosophers. Questions concerning moral change, responsibility, determinism, self-reflection, deception, and knowledge are prevalent in both philosophy and literature. In some cases, fiction may even challenge or possibly undermine a given theory or position, as in Candide. We will explore Nussbaum's view of novels, along with a study of specific literary works (James' "The Tree of

Knowledge," Voltaire's Candide, and Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata"), when we address those questions.

In the chapters to come, I set out to explain such terms as "suspension of disbelief," "pretending," "nonserious discourse," and "make-believe." I also will show how such notions affect our thinking about fiction as a source of insight and knowledge. The focus of this study is twofold. First, I am interested in how particular theories regarding the appreciation of fiction, if not wrong, are at the very least problematic; and whether they undermine my claim that fiction can be a source of knowledge and insight. Second, I investigate specific works of fiction in order to expose their relevance (i.e., their insights) to ongoing philosophical reflection on various problems and themes.

Notes

1. Richard Gale, "The Fictive Use Of Language," Philosophy 46 (1971), 328.

2. Searle's usage of the term " 'pretend' ... for the lack of a better word." See John Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," New Literary History 6 (Winter 1975), 319-32.

3. John Wisdom, Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), 261.

CHAPTER II

FICTION AND NONFICTION

Introduction

Where are we to place Darwin's Origin of Species, Prescott's History of the Conquest of Peru ... not to mention philosophical treatises, mathematics textbooks, instruction manuals, recipes, legal documents, and requests to pass the salt? How do such "works of nonfiction" compare with novels and other works of fiction?¹

In the introduction to this thesis, I acknowledged that a distinction between fiction and nonfiction exists, a distinction that is often taken for granted. I also expressed skepticism as to whether or not a satisfactory definition or explanation could be arrived at to account for the difference between them. The focus of this chapter is to explore in what respects fiction and nonfiction are said to differ from one another, and to investigate the implications that follow.

While differences may be acknowledged, there is no fundamental distinction that would make them mutually exclusive. Yet some philosophers and literary critics insist that the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is indeed ontologically derived, and thus epistemologically

problematic. By examining the terms employed as a consequence of a supposed fundamental distinction, such as "suspension of disbelief" and "pretending," I attempt to debunk the premise itself that fiction is neither true nor about the real world.

Both fiction and nonfiction are broad classifications enacted for any number of purposes, including finding one's way through bookstores and libraries. I do not mean to minimize the differences as merely superficial or practical, although they may be in some cases. But I have set out to disprove the assertion that there is some one critical earmark or set of them leading to the kinds of epistemological quandaries that we will be investigating.

I have already said that the notion of fictional literature as inherently or by definition not true conflicts with my claim that it can be a source of insight and knowledge. By the end of this chapter, it will be evident how problematic this notion, and all that it entails, really is. I also want to show that I am not without company in claiming that fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Martha Nussbaum also makes the similar claim that some literary works are "a major candidate for truth." Though her project is primarily Aristotelian, showing how certain novels answer the question "How should we live?", she is

likewise concerned with how the philosophical investigation of novels may be undermined by a philosophy whose principles are generally rationalistic. Nussbaum is critical of the traditional analytic approach to ethics, which makes difficult the project of studying novels for their moral content. I would extend her criticism of that approach to the ontology of fiction, given that those principles come from the same conceptual framework and temperament. According to Nussbaum, certain assumptions behind the traditional approach to ethics are never justified, and are themselves a part of a particular moral view. That moral view is characterized in Cora Diamond's discussion of Nussbaum's book Love's Knowledge, in which she describes Nussbaum (as well as Iris Murdoch) as challenging the "neutral standpoint," the unbiased spectator:

If we already know the nature of moral thinking, there is nothing about what it might be which we need to turn to novels to see.... The assumptions on which it rests were criticized years ago by Iris Murdoch: assumptions about what moral philosophy itself is (i.e., what its domain includes), about moral psychology, and about language and life. The assumptions themselves, she argued, were tied to a particular moral view, influenced by Kant, by Protestantism, by liberalism. Martha Nussbaum's book may be seen as a sustained and detailed criticism of those assumptions, a demonstration that they are not part of some neutral philosophical standpoint definitive of moral philosophy but belong to a moral view antithetic to that expressed through the novels she discusses.²

The neutral standpoint she refers to is that of absolute objectivity, in which the observer supposes herself

detached from the world.³ The notion that one gazes at the world from "the view from nowhere," as perhaps Kant and Protestantism envision themselves doing, is still part of a specific philosophical perspective that in turn has specific notions regarding what counts as truth and knowledge.⁴

This issue may seem merely academic, appealing only to those philosophers and literary critics concerned with epistemology or literary appreciation. But I do not think it is so limited. The belief that fiction is not about the real world and real people is a popular view. Even within the context of the classroom, some students protest the use of literature to discuss philosophical issues. Frequently a student will raise the objection that what we are reading is "not real," therefore unworthy of appraisal or attention. When I use Jonathan Bennett's article "The Consciousness of Huckleberry Finn" in my ethics class, student protest and outcry usually takes this form: "Huckleberry Finn is a fictional character. Why are we comparing his deliberations to those of real people?" Students also object when I show a film, such as Spike Lee's Do The Right Thing, on the grounds that we are reacting to something that never actually happened.⁵ Even if such things do happen, it is suggested by some, we should study the real events or people involved, not "some movie." There are, of course, important differences between the medium of literature and that of

film; nevertheless, both Huckleberry Finn and Do The Right Thing are fictional, which disturbs some people. They object to the philosophical use of fiction on the grounds that it is, after all, fiction. We could discuss the Rodney King incident when contemplating questions of race, instead of using related films or works of literature. In fact, I do discuss it. But using a fictional account may reflect some of the reasons why such violence occurs, which is why both films and novels are relevant.

The attitude I have been describing is not confined to the classroom. I am confident that most of us have either known or met people -- intelligent people -- who hold the attitude that reading fiction is without value because "it isn't about the real world." One could reply that such people are either ignorant or narrow-minded. But one should, I think, ask where this sentiment, which amounts to prejudice, comes from.

It is relevant to an inquiry of this kind to look at Plato, one of the earliest and most influential critics of fiction. We find in his views not only the privileging of nonfiction over fiction, but also a budding argument for censorship. (Curiously, he expresses his views in the form of fictional, dramatic dialogues that incorporate myths and parables.) Subsequent thinkers, such as Bertrand Russell, John Searle, and Kendall Walton, all have their own

diagnoses for dealing with the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. But rarely are the assumptions behind the distinction questioned -- assumptions about the nature of knowledge, where it comes from, and how language conveys truth. Yet they must be questioned if we are to have a clearer understanding of what follows in their criticism and theory, and perhaps why non-philosophers express disdain towards fiction as well.

I begin this inquiry by briefly summarizing some Platonic views regarding the nature of fiction, from which certain key "assumptions" first surfaced. In Section 2, I will discuss the ways in which some of these views are prevalent in more contemporary thinking and criticism, such as we find in Bertrand Russell's work. In Section 3, I examine John Searle's view of "nonserious discourse" as a form of "pretending." In Section 4, I continue my discussion of Searle, along with Kendall Walton's views of "fictional worlds" and "make-believe." Finally, I will address some important questions that remain upon examining these appraisals of fictional literature as they relate to my claim, and I think Nussbaum's as well, that fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge.

1. False Representations

In this section I consider Plato's contribution to the

problem of truth in fiction by focusing on the Ion, in which Socrates questions the validity of both the composition of fiction and responses to it. The Ion is a kind of antiquated challenge to those writers, such as Nussbaum and myself, who claim that fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge.

Plato's views regarding the creative arts are derived from a metaphysics that links the emotions with representation, distinct from the rational and real. His conclusions regarding the status of creative arts such as poetry and theater are consistent within the context of a larger vision that champions a certain understanding of knowledge and reality. This understanding may inevitably undermine the value of the poem or play, since their origin is conceived to be primarily emotional, rather than rational in nature. Socrates suggests in the Ion that when an author is composing or an orator reciting, he is under a kind of spell enabling him to practice his art so that "reason is no longer with him." On this view, the audience becomes enraptured until they, too, are no longer in their "senses." Even though he refers to this process as "divine," he clearly devalues its effects as irrational, and even confounding. This is why Socrates challenges the rationale behind one's "recoiling in fear" or crying on account of a story. When I say he challenges Ion, however, I do not mean that he offers a direct argument against responding to

fiction in the way the orator describes. If the origin of fiction is predominantly emotional and thus devoid of reason, as Socrates suggests, then it should not be surprising that the response be likewise emotional, given its "contagious" nature.

The belief that the emotions are separate and distinct from, but tempered by, the faculty of reason is the kind of "assumption" (often dogmatically held) with which Nussbaum and I take issue. This critical distinction inspires other epistemological questions: Can literature be a source of knowledge if it is produced without the faculty of reason? Is it even true that fiction is produced without that faculty? In Homer's Iliad there are frequent references to and descriptions of various professions, such as blacksmithery, commanding an army, and doctoring. Yet the author or orator is not a practitioner of such skills. According to the Socrates of the Ion, creative writers lack knowledge of the very subjects they describe. Poetry, to paraphrase Socrates, does not derive from knowledge, "the home of true art" (a term he reserves for artisans alone), but rather from inspiration. He places the two in opposition: While reason motivates art as craft or skill, poetry manifests itself by way of divine influences, or other-directed states of madness. Poetry and drama have the potential to affect the emotions and, perhaps, cause an

audience to weep, laugh, cry, and feel suspense, which in turn may endanger the faculty of reason. What grants one the ability either to write or interpret poetry is not expertise or knowledge, but finding oneself caught up in a kind of divine possession. Socrates characterizes the poet as a "light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has been inspired and is beside himself, and reason is no longer with him."⁶

On the surface of the dialogue, Socrates is challenging Ion's credentials for speaking as an expert on Homer, but underneath he is challenging an author's credentials for writing about subjects for which he personally lacks expertise. While being a brain surgeon is one thing, it is quite another to either write or recite a scene in which a brain surgeon appears. Who would disagree? Socrates is correct; there is an important difference. But does it follow that creative writers, such as Homer, have no business introducing blacksmiths, generals, or doctors into their stories? Certainly creative writers need to be concerned with their subject matter: Melville spent much of his early life at sea, and his works, such as Moby Dick and "Billy Budd," reflect a knowledge of his subjects. But it does not stand to reason that Melville should have been a captain of a war vessel in order to create a character who is one. We do not write, recite, or listen to poetry and

fiction for instruction on how to treat illnesses or become great captains. Homer was not writing "how-to" manuals, and Ion was not reciting them. If we need information on medicine, we should do as Socrates would recommend: Consult an expert, a physician; but do not read the Iliad. This is not to suggest that the Iliad is somehow deficient. One does not read Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance for instruction to repair motorcycles.

In spite of these concessions, I claim that one of the consequences of Socrates' position is that we neither can nor should attempt to learn from literature. Socrates suggests that responding to a story with feelings of suspense, joy, or sadness, also shows a lack of reason:

Ion: I will tell you frankly that whenever I recite a tale of pity, my eyes fill with tears, and when it is one of horror or dismay, my hair stands on end with fear, and my heart goes leaping.

Socrates: Well now, Ion, what are we to say of a man like that? There he is, at a sacrifice or festival, got up in holiday attire, adorned with golden chaplets, and he weeps, though he has lost nothing of his finery. Or he recoils in fear, standing in the presence of more than twenty thousand friendly people, though nobody is stripping him or doing him damage. Shall we say that the man is in his senses?⁷

Socrates is suggesting that there is something odd, if not a bit deranged, in taking "a tale of pity" seriously. By responding fearfully or sadly, one reacts as if there is a reason to. Conversely, a man who is "in his senses" does not weep or recoil with fear in a safe, public place. But

Socrates disregards the fact that Ion is reacting to the "tale." If a story is sad, one may feel sorrowful; if it is scary, one may become frightened, or even feel empathy for the character's plight. Likewise, it is not unusual to feel sympathetic towards the owner of a dead cat or dog on the side of the road. We do not need to have lost something of our own to identify with someone who has.

Of course, Socrates might say that no one has lost anything, not even in the story, because the story is not true. Unless one is being menaced or directly affected in some way, why get emotional? Is it not just a story?⁸ Part of the problem in raising the question -- "What are we to say of a man like that?" -- is that Socrates fails to account for the context in which the response occurs. We understand that Ion is reacting to a story. What is missing from Socrates' analysis is an appreciation for context, though it is precisely the context that annoys him. Indeed, Socrates views such reactions as aberrations, or character defects. If Ion were to weep on account that he had really lost something "of his finery," then presumably Socrates would have no quarrel with him. But weeping in reaction to a fictional story? It appears that Socrates faults fiction on the grounds that it is untruthful, in the sense of being false or falsely representing states of affairs. Why else should Socrates be so opposed to "weeping" or "recoiling in

fear" on account of a story?

While Socrates insinuates a negative view regarding Ion's response to telling a story (that he is not "in his senses"), later critics propose "suspension of disbelief" or "pretending" as a reasonable explanation for this behavior. The reason why Ion weeps "though he has lost nothing of his finery" is that he pretends that the story is true, though he knows otherwise. In Section 3, we explore what is involved in suspending disbelief. But before we proceed, we first need to analyze what subsequent thinkers understand the problem of fiction to be, prior to beginning an investigation of their solutions to it.

In this limited discussion, I have tried to give some historical perspective to the problem of truth and fiction. Socrates challenges not only the credibility of fiction as a source of truth and knowledge, but the credibility and appropriateness of emotional responses such as "recoiling in fear" or crying. If what is being presented is not true, why react as if it were? Even author Ursula Le Guin (as cited by Walton in a later section) claims that when we engage in fiction we are "insane-bonkers." For Socrates (though not for Le Guin), that is precisely the problem: Treating fiction as if it were true is not to be in one's "senses."

In the Ion, reason and fiction become implicitly opposed, since the latter is possible only by leaving the

former behind. Truth in fiction then becomes problematic: Reason, for Socrates, is the path to truth and knowledge; to remove that faculty is to obscure the path. Thus, in my own and in Nussbaum's sense as well, fiction would seem to make a poor "candidate for truth" or source of knowledge and insight.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, I briefly discussed Bertrand Russell's position on fiction. While Plato was one of the first to contrast fiction with nonfiction, finding the former problematic, Russell was one of the first analytic philosophers to address the distinction directly. In the next section I explore other ways in which to address Socrates' question ("What are we to think of a man like that?") in order to better frame arguments concerning the notion of "pretending" and "make-believe" that occupy the last two sections of this chapter.

2. False References

In this section, Russell's account of the problem of truth and fiction will be examined; specifically, that of "fictitious" or "non-existing entities." Russell claims that when we say a sentence is true, we assume that the speaker who asserts it "will be speaking truly." In contrast, he suggests, actors pronounce sentences "without intending to assert":

When we say that a sentence is true, we mean that a person asserting it will be speaking truly. A person may pronounce a sentence without intending to assert it: when an actor says 'It is I, Hamlet the Dane,' no one believes him, but no one accuses him of lying.⁹

When an actor on stage proclaims "It is I, Hamlet the Dane," explains Russell, the audience neither believes him nor do they "accuse him of lying." The actor does not intend to assert the truth of that proclamation, of which the audience must be cognizant.

Russell further suggests that the author of Hamlet neither intended that the sentences and statements in his plays should function as assertions at all, nor that they be taken by the audience as true. Likewise, says Russell, Shakespeare only pretends that "the word 'Hamlet'" was the name of somebody who in fact never existed, and, as such, the word denotes nothing at all.

If we apply Russell's critique to Ion's case, the legitimacy of his recitations becomes apparent under the provision that he is not asserting their truth. While the emotional impact that storytelling may have on an audience is not explored through Russell's account, nevertheless it would explain why the audience does not run on stage exclaiming to the orator or actor, "Not true, not true, you're lying!" Furthermore, it provides grounds for claiming that being moved (as Ion is) does not entail being fooled or, for that matter, being out of one's "senses," as

Socrates claims.

Although Russell shares some of Socrates' concerns regarding fiction, he does not share the latter's glib skepticism. Indeed, the Socrates of the Ion expresses discontent with both the nature of the material as well as the reader's response to it. In the first case, literature is not a source of knowledge: The subjects an author writes about are not informed by his expertise in those areas but by divine forces operating mysteriously outside the realm of reason, which cannot be counted on to provide reliable or accurate information. Second, literature ought not evoke the kind of response that Socrates presents us in the example of Ion, who cries when he has lost nothing, or recoils in fear when there is nothing to fear. There is nothing in fact that makes such reactions appropriate.

While Plato's Socrates exhibits disapproval with fiction (for reasons already cited), Russell, in contrast, attempts to put fiction in a more sympathetic light. According to Russell, it is not the intention of the creative writer to be truthful in the first place. Russell claims that a sentence or statement is true if and only if it succeeds in indicating a fact, and false if it fails to. But the actor playing Hamlet never intends to indicate a fact or make an assertion when proclaiming "It is I, Hamlet the Dane." We understand that the statement is made in the

context of a play, and that the actor himself does not believe he is Hamlet, nor is he trying to fool the audience into thinking that he is. Russell's assessment could also apply to Ion. Although he may cry when telling a sad story, he is neither fooling himself nor his audience into believing that the story is true.

Russell further states that the author of Hamlet (and, by extension, the author of the Iliad) is not making assertions; he is "pretending." Explains Russell, "Hamlet is a word which Shakespeare pretends to be the name of a Prince of Denmark." Unlike Plato's Socrates, Russell takes into consideration the context in which a statement is made or a sentence spoken and responded to. There are, of course, problems with this position that contain its own impetus for dispute. But clearly it is an improvement over the view put forth in the Ion.

Russell is in sympathy with Plato's Socrates insofar as he questions the capacity for fiction to express truth and knowledge. But Russell is specifically responding to Meinong's theory, which claims that such statements as "It is I, Hamlet the Dane" denote an entity, even an unreal one. As I understand Meinong's position, both these statements -- "Hamlet was Prince of Denmark" and "George Washington was the first President of the United States" -- have equivalent, logical status, even though the former fails to

indicate a fact, while the latter succeeds. While Russell considers the former statement to belong in a null class (containing no members), Meinong claims that unreal entities actually form a class of which they themselves are members: the class of unreal entities. But Russell argues that the "class" that non-entities denote is empty. Since non-entities do not exist, tautologically, they cannot be members of a class which has no members. Russell states,

The whole realm of non-entities, such as 'the round square,' 'the even prime other than 2,' 'Apollo,' 'Hamlet,' etc., can now be satisfactorily dealt with. All these are denoting phrases which do not denote anything.¹⁰

One may be tempted to conclude that both Meinong's and Russell's evaluations amount to the same thing. After all, an empty clubhouse seems synonymous with a clubhouse full of members who do not exist. But there is an important difference. Russell does not want to say that "Hamlet" is a name that denotes an unreal entity; instead, "Hamlet" denotes nothing at all. Since the word "Hamlet" fails to denote a real entity, then it is not really a name; whereas according to Meinong, it is a name -- a name of an unreal entity. Russell continues,

Every name is a description involving some 'this,' and is only a name in virtue of the truth of some proposition. (The proposition may be only 'This is a name,' which is false if this is 'Hamlet.')

Accordingly, for a word to be a name, it must denote or refer to a real entity, not an unreal one. Therefore, the

denoting phrase that "Hamlet was a Prince of Denmark who was the hero of one of Shakespeare's tragedies" is false because "Hamlet" was never a Prince of Denmark, even though he was a hero in one of Shakespeare's plays. Of course, in some cases, names and events in fictive works are real, such as the name Henry V, who was not only a hero in one of Shakespeare's plays, but was actually King of England. Had he not been, the statement "Henry V was a King of England who was the hero of one of Shakespeare's plays" would be false.

There is an important distinction we have so far not observed between the question of what constitutes a real name, and the question regarding the existence of the thing named. In works of literature, such as Kafka's The Castle or Dostoevsky's "The Double," the very existence of the thing or person named is itself in question: Is the castle real? Throughout the story, the character K. is continually confounded by the castle's illusiveness in his attempts to gain entry. He does not even know if it actually exists. This presents a curious challenge for Russell: Not only would the castle have no reference in the real world vis-a-vis being fictional, it may not even exist in the novel!

The question then arises: If "Hamlet" is not in fact a name, what are we to think of whatever the character may proclaim? Furthermore, how on Russell's account can we

attribute qualities and behavior to someone who never existed, unless we are prepared to say that such attributes are likewise false or only pretended? John Reichert argues:

Stephen Dedalus disavows eating real, not make-believe, muscatel grapes, and he cites the real, not a fictional Thomas Aquinas as the source of his aesthetic. Pip, the narrator of Dickens' Great Expectations, tells us that he lived in 'the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea.' The river he is talking about is the real Thames, and when he later tells us of his move to London, it's the real London he refers to.¹²

Russell might take issue with Reichert. How can a character such as Hamlet refer to or speak about the real Denmark when he has no reference himself, and for that reason, no reality? Even the statement "It is I, Hamlet the Dane" cannot be a true assertion regarding the ethnicity of the character in question, since he never existed. Yet if Reichert is right, Denmark is sincerely being referred to. Of course, Russell might respond by saying that while some things are really referred to in fictional literature, others are not, such as Hamlet.

While Stephen Dedalus may sincerely refer to muscatel grapes (because such grapes really exist), the status of any reference to Kafka's castle will be ambiguous, since we do not know whether it exists -- even fictionally. But real or not, readers and critics refer to the castle in meaningful ways. I claim that the reference has meaning, at least for those who care and talk about the novel. But as Russell has

said, the truth value of a given proposition or denoting phrase that involves a name must refer to an existent object or it does not "denote anything." Yet the names of characters and places in fictional literature do have meaning for us. While it is true that the name of a fictional character may not refer to some particular existing or once-existing person, it does refer to that character. It would be odd to think that the name "Hamlet" is not in fact a name merely because it has no existing referent.

If words and names designate people and things in the world, and if that is in part what gives them their meaning, then what gives fictional names meaning? Does the meaning of a word rely only on the successful indication of a fact? Must the name "Fido" stand for a dog? If I thumb through the pages of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and come across the name "Darcy," it would have no reference or meaning for me unless I had read enough of the novel to know who he is. This is not to suggest that the name is meaningless unless I know what it means, because I can surely find out. But if Russell is correct, "Darcy" cannot be a real name, since it denotes nothing real. Gilbert Ryle claims that this is a peculiar demarcation:

The notion of having meaning is at least partly different from the notion of standing for.... The phrase 'The third man to stand on top of Mt. Everest' cannot, at present, be used to refer to anybody. There

exists as yet no one whom it fits and perhaps there never will. Yet it is certainly a significant phrase, and could be translated into French or German. We know, we have to know, what it means when we say that it fits no living mountaineer. It means something but does not designate somebody.¹³

The denoting phrase "The third man to stand on the top of Mt. Everest" has meaning, even though there is no such man. That the phrase has meaning is evident in the knowledge that the statement is not true. It does not designate "somebody." According to Ryle, it is not necessary for a name or phrase to refer to or "stand for" somebody in order to have meaning. And I would further argue that while some names and phrases do not designate anyone who has yet existed, such as Ryle's "third man," other names do, such as Hamlet. "The third man" is not a designating phrase because there is no such person to whom the phrase "fits." Nevertheless, the name "Hamlet" does fit; it designates that character. When Hamlet declares "It is I, Hamlet the Dane," he is referring to himself. Our understanding of "The third man to stand on top of Mt. Everest" is not the same understanding we have of the statement "Hamlet was Prince of Denmark." In the former case, as Ryle puts it, "We know what it means to say that it fits no living mountaineer." But in the latter case, there is a "fit."

If we were asked from an historical perspective whether or not Hamlet was a prince of Denmark, then we should have to reply that he was not. That is a different concern than

we have for "the third man," who is neither a fictional character nor an existing person. We know that the phrase "The third man to stand on top of Mt. Everest" is false if we know that there have only been two mountaineers to reach the top of Mt. Everest.

If asked to judge the veracity of the statement "Hamlet was Prince of Denmark," we would not be led to conclude that it is false because the statement is not historically accurate. The statement may very well be true. Indeed, if I am asked the name of the character in Shakespeare's play who was Prince of Denmark, I would be correct in responding "Hamlet." Of course, Russell understands that Hamlet is a character. That is presumably why he says that when an actor on stage proclaims "It is I, Hamlet the Dane," nobody accuses him of lying. But Russell does not stop there. He adds that nobody believes the actor either. But if the audience does not think that the actor is lying, yet at the same time knows he is not telling the truth, then what is he doing? Or, for that matter, what is the audience doing? Russell has characterized this phenomenon as "pretending." And while Russell never says that the audience itself is "pretending" to believe that the actor who plays Hamlet is Hamlet, we may infer this conclusion from his characterization.

If this is a fair assessment of Russell's position,

then Socrates' problem, at least to some extent, is resolvable. The reason why Ion cries or recoils in fear is because he is "pretending" that the story is true, even though he knows that it is not. Russell has provided some grounds for justifying such responses. We can listen to the actor deliver his lines knowing full well that he does not intend to tell the truth. That is why we do not "accuse him of lying." Unlike Socrates, Russell qualifies both how words and statements in fiction are being used by the author (or actor) and how they are received by the audience. However, his qualifications may prove to raise more questions than they appear to answer. While Russell's approach to fiction is perhaps more sensitive to context than Socrates' approach in the Ion, both analyses reach the unsurprising (if not trivial) conclusion that fiction is not always literal.

In this section, I have tried to show some of the reasons why fiction presents certain problems for philosophers. The question raised for inquiry in this section has been the problem of non-existing entities. How should we classify them? Can non-existing entities have names? According to Russell, an author pretends to name characters or make assertions about them, and so on. "Hamlet," says Russell, "is a word that Shakespeare pretends to be a name," but at the same time the word "denotes nothing at all." I have doubted such claims, because they

contradict how we, in fact, treat and understand the names of fictional characters and references to them.

In the sections that follow, I will investigate John Searle's notion of "nonserious discourse" as a form of "pretending," and Kendall Walton's discussion of "make-believe." Such theories not only complement Russell's position, they are also widely accepted ways of thinking about writing, presenting, and responding to fiction. These explanations are problematic, however. Although they alleviate some of the difficulties expressed in the Ion, they may have landed us into others of perhaps greater breadth.

3. Pretending and Disbelief

Miss Murdoch creates a fictional character. Notice that she does not really refer to a fictional character because there was no such antecedently existing character; rather, by pretending to refer to a person she creates a fictional person.¹⁴

In the previous section, I focused my discussion on Russell's problem of reference: How should we regard nonexisting entities such as "Hamlet," since such words are said to be incapable of denoting? Russell claims that the author of Hamlet was not really naming somebody, but rather "pretending" to. Likewise, when an actor on stage proclaims that he is Hamlet, the actor is not attempting to make a true assertion about his own identity. The audience must

know this as well, and as I suggested, may also be "pretending," since they neither "believe him" nor do they "accuse him of lying," as Russell himself says.

John Searle also addresses the issue of truth in fiction, though his views are perhaps more developed than those we have been discussing. As he states in the passage above, an author does not refer to her characters, since she cannot name and describe those who did not exist before she created them. In this sense, the term "reference" entails existence, as it does for Russell. Searle says that while readers can refer to Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle could not, at least not before bringing Holmes into being as a fictional character. Searle continues:

[O]nce that fictional character has been created, we who are standing outside the fictional story can really refer to a fictional person. Notice that in the passage about Sherlock Holmes ... I really referred to a fictional character (i.e., my utterance satisfies the rules of reference). I did not pretend to refer to a real Sherlock Holmes; I really referred to the fictional Sherlock Holmes.¹⁵

Searle is in disagreement with Russell, insofar as he claims that we can make real references to characters; that is, as long as we qualify them. While Russell claims that only existing or once-existing entities can be referred to, Searle claims that as long as we understand that it is a fictional character to whom we refer and not a real person, we then have satisfied the rules of reference. Sherlock Holmes is, after all, a real fictional person. We who stand

"outside the fictional story" do not pretend to refer to a real person, but actually refer to a real character. Searle is making a critical distinction between the author "pretending to refer" and the reader who "really refers" to fictional characters.

Like Russell, he emphasizes the central role "pretending" plays in an analysis of fiction, but goes on to claim that when we speak or write in a language, we perform "speech acts," or acts of illocution. Such acts include statement making, ordering, questioning, greeting, thanking, and promising. Searle says that for anyone who holds such a view of language, the language comprising a fictional story poses a difficult problem:

We might put the problem in the form of a paradox: how can it be both the case that words and other elements in a fictional story have their ordinary meanings and yet the rules that attach to those words and other elements and determine their meanings are not complied with: how can it be the case in 'Little Red Ridding Hood' both that 'red' means red and yet that the rules correlating 'red' are not in force?¹⁶

The words and elements that comprise a fictional story are the very same words and elements used in much nonfictional communication, but "the rules that attach to those words" in the former case are not operative as they are in the latter. Searle asks how it is possible for the words used in fiction to maintain their "ordinary meanings" given this dilemma. Whether or not rules "attach" to words in the way Searle describes may be problematic. However, it is not the

business of this investigation to debate that point. Rather, taking for granted that he is correct, I am concerned with whether it can "be the case in 'Little Red Riding Hood' both that 'red' means red and yet that the rules correlating 'red' are not in force."

Searle's solution to the problem fiction poses is supplied, at least in part, with the notion of "pretending" that the rules are indeed "in force." Authors pretend to make assertions and statements about characters such as Little Red Riding Hood and Sherlock Holmes. According to Searle, fictional discourse is comprised of assertions and statements similar to those found in nonfictional writing, such as newspapers and biographies. However, while a fictional story does not report on actual states of affairs the way a news story would, it is not the purpose of the former to do so. The author of a news story on an earthquake gives an account of facts, contingent, of course, on what facts are available. But a fictional story, such as "Little Red Riding Hood," only describes its "fictional world." The people and events discussed by its author are not intended to be factual the way news stories purport to be. Thomas Pavel elaborates and endorses Searle's position:

There is little reason to believe that Dickens felt committed to the truth of most sentences contained in The Pickwick Papers or sincerely believed them; an author is rarely able to defend the truth of his assertions or to accept the consequences of his fictional utterances. In fact, Searle claims that the

author of a novel only pretends to make assertions without actually making them.¹⁷

If Pavel's interpretation of Searle is correct, it would follow that the news reporter can be held accountable for the accuracy of her news stories in a way that the fiction writer cannot. Note that the Socrates of the Ion, whom we discussed in Section 1, implies the opposite. The accuracy of the orator's recitations, as well as the mental health of the audience, is indeed called into question. The fact that many of the stories Ion tells are fictional is never taken into consideration. Socrates treats Ion's "tale of pity" as he would a newscast containing misinformation, not as a work of fiction. That is the reason, I would claim, that Socrates does not understand why Ion should shed tears upon the telling of a sad story.

Both Pavel and Searle are far removed from that position. Pavel says that an author is not "committed to the truth" of statements in the novel because it is not in the nature of novel writing to report facts. But the question may then be raised: When is an author ever called on to "defend the truth of his assertions" or accept the "consequences for them"? If it happened that Dickens had a neighbor named Samuel Pickwick, and statements made about the life of the character in Dickens' novel could be understood as a public denouncement of his neighbor's character, then Dickens might have to defend himself against

the charge of maligning his neighbor's character. Of course, he would not be called upon to defend himself as to the truth of assertions or statements about the character in his novel. He would want to make the case that he did not purposely portray the life of his character Samuel Pickwick after the life of his neighbor; Dickens would claim he had no intention to refer to the neighbor.

But a further question may also be raised: Does it make sense to assert that the author cannot say that Samuel Pickwick "threw open his chamber window" with the same conviction that a biographer might report that George Washington crossed the Delaware? In the view under consideration, once it is acknowledged that the intentions behind these statements are not equivalent -- i.e., the former is not asserting a fact believed to be true -- then the author of fiction may go on to engage in that genre without disturbing the rules and conventions that govern language in both cases. If it were the case that the illocutionary acts in fiction were in fact different than those in nonfiction, we would then require a different set of rules with which to understand them. But Searle says this is impossible:

Anyone therefore who wishes to claim that fiction contains different illocutionary acts from nonfiction is committed to the view that words do not have their normal meanings in works of fiction. That view is at least *prima facie* an impossible view since if it were true it would be impossible for anyone to understand a

work of fiction without learning a new set of meanings for all the words....¹⁸

To this extent Searle is most certainly correct. But then he wants to accomplish two things. First, he wants to show that the words in fiction have their "normal meanings"; that they have the same meanings in fiction as they do in nonfiction. If this were not so, we would not make sense of a fictional story. Second, he wants to account for the difference between fiction and nonfiction, not by examining the truth or falsehood of sentences, but by examining the speaker's attitude towards those sentences. While the same illocutionary acts occur in both cases, the intentions behind those acts are not the same. It is in this sense, Searle claims, that the author of fictional stories pretends to commit illocutionary acts "without actually making them." Hence, authors of fiction engage in what Searle calls "nonserious discourse," while the reporter or biographer practices what he refers to as "serious discourse," better known as nonfiction.

We might then call The Pickwick Papers a fictional world, as Pavel does, or a world of make-believe, as Walton does.¹⁹ It is a world in which an author pretends to say things, while readers pretend that the things she says are true. This is at least in part why Pavel claims that Dickens would not feel committed to the truth of most statements in his novel. Accordingly, the author pretends to make

assertions, while the reader derives appreciation by playing along with the fiction.²⁰

Searle's distinction between "serious" and "nonserious discourse" is supposed to give insight into the kinds of statements and assertions made by an author of "fictional worlds." But whether or not he succeeds remains to be shown. According to Searle, if an illocutionary act such as a promise to meet a friend for lunch is made in "serious discourse," then it qualifies as a "standard case" of promising. However, if a character in a novel or an actor on stage makes a promise, it is nonserious or pretended. In other words, it does not have the same force or import as it would in the "standard case." Searle's point reminds us of J.L. Austin's view that such a promise is "in a peculiar way hollow or void of meaning if said by an actor on the stage, or introduced in a poem."²¹

While Searle agrees with Austin to the extent that such a promise does not have the same value as an ordinary or nonfictional promise, he clearly avoids suggesting that novel writing is in and of itself a nonserious activity. He offers the following analogy:

[O]ne can pretend to hit someone by actually making the arm and fist movements that are characteristic of hitting someone. The hitting is pretended, but the movement of the arm and fist are real.... The same principle applies to the writing of fiction. The author pretends to perform illocutionary acts by way of actually uttering (writing) sentences.²²

Searle compares the illocutionary acts of fiction to that of "pretending" to hit someone without actually doing so. While "the arm and fist are real," the blow is not. Likewise, though the appearance of a promise or statement has been made on stage or in a novel, the illocutionary act itself is never committed. The sentences are real, just as "the arm and fist are," but the illocutions performed are pretended, just as "the hitting is pretended."

But is this correct? One can make a fist, extend the arm, and act as if one is going to execute a blow without doing so. One may be trying to frighten someone into thinking a blow is coming, as children often do, or one may be practicing without actually hitting, as in shadow-boxing. But on the pages of a novel, statements and assertions are made; whether or not the author believes them, I should think, depends upon what is being asserted, and by whom. Narrators make assertions, authors may make assertions, and characters make assertions and statements to themselves and to one another. As readers, we can also make assertions and statements about characters, with which Searle would agree. We can identify assertions made by characters, such as "It is I, Hamlet the Dane." Interpretation may even provide evidence for thinking that the author herself is making certain assertions.

Writing sentences (making utterances) and being

committed to their truth may be, as Searle suggests, two different matters. But distinguishing between fiction and nonfiction solely on the basis of what a writer does or does not believe is problematic. Within the genre of fiction itself we find varying types of narration, often independent of the author's own perspective. While the author speaks through the character of the narrative voice, it is not clear that she is voicing her own views or merely those of the narrator, whom she has created. Without delving into this issue too deeply, I would offer the following example. In the opening passage of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, the narrator says "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Is this a statement or assertion that Tolstoy is "pretending" to make? Or is it an actual statement regardless of whether Tolstoy agrees with the narrator or not? Obviously we would need more information about the novel to make such a determination, if we could. However, according to Searle, authors are not in fact making assertions or statements at all, but only "pretending" to. Yet it would be difficult, if not impossible, to discern the truth of the remark, cited above, in some objective fashion, but also to decide whether Tolstoy is speaking his own mind or that of the narrator's.²³ Works of fiction must be evaluated case by case to come to any such conclusion. But Searle doesn't

discriminate between works themselves. What he says about Conan Doyle in the following passage, he applies indiscriminately to authors in general:

There is no question of Conan Doyle being able to verify what he says about Sherlock Holmes and Watson when he writes the stories, because he does not make any statements about them, he only pretends to.²⁴

We recall that Searle distinguishes between the reader who "really refers" to characters and events in a novel, and the author who "pretends to refer" to them. Whether Searle means that authors pretend to make assertions and statements on purpose is perhaps controversial. However, Pavel certainly gives that impression: If pressed to "verify" what an author says about characters, he could not do so (although he never intended that he should). By focusing on what the author does and does not intend, Searle is bound to make the epistemological claim that one should not engage in fiction to learn about the nature of promising and other kinds of statement making:

If we want to know what it is to make a promise or to make a statement, we had better not start our investigation with promises made by actors on a stage in the course of a play or statements made in a novel by novelists about characters in the novel, because in a fairly obvious way such utterances are not standard cases of promises and statements.²⁵

If Searle is correct in thinking that fiction is no place to begin an investigation of promise and statement making, then it follows that my more general claim that fiction can be a

source of insight and knowledge is called into question. "Standard cases" would seem to better serve that purpose. When I promise to meet a friend for lunch at a particular time, I am making a "standard" promise -- contrary to Edmund, in Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, who promised Fanny daily horseback rides. According to Searle, the promise we find in the novel is not a good source "if we want to know" about promise and statement making. In this respect, Searle and the Socrates of the Ion inadvertently share something important in common: a distrust of literature. Fiction cannot be relied upon to give accurate information or an account of things such as promising.

This involves a convolution for Searle, however. Earlier he said that words in fiction must have their "normal meanings" or it would be "impossible" to comprehend the story. But if the illocutionary acts are pretended and therefore not actually committed, those that comprise fiction are not, I would claim, "normal." If fiction is not comprised of "standard cases," as he says, then Edmund did not make a "standard" promise, or at least not one that Searle would acknowledge. If Searle is right, then we should not look to Edmund's promise as an example of promising.

If Searle is emphasizing intentions on behalf of the speaker, what about those who make promises frivolously in "serious discourse" without any intention of keeping them?

We know that sometimes people ask to borrow money without ever intending to repay it. What is the value of a promise made in bad faith? Searle would tell us that a promise made in "serious discourse" is not the same as one made in "nonserious discourse"; the author does not intend that characters make "standard" promises at all. On the other hand, the person who promises to repay a loan without any intention of keeping her word is deceitful, not fictional. That is why we hold people accountable in "serious discourse" for their assertions and statements. While Searle agrees with Austin that promises in fiction simply do not carry the same weight (and, to that end, do not bear the same repercussions) as promises and statements in real life, he does not want to say they have no meaning. However, the kind of meaning they do have is problematic.

Fictional or pretended promises and statements function for Searle somewhat like play money does in the board game of Monopoly. Monopoly money has value when playing by the rules that govern the game. Likewise, fictional promises have value in the context of fiction. However, just as Monopoly money is not what we would consider standard or normal (but rather pretended), neither are the promises made in novels standard instances of promising (i.e., just as "the hitting is pretended"). Of course, Monopoly players are not counterfeiters when they buy property located on the

game board. Nor would Searle claim that authors are liars when they pretend that their characters make promises to one another. Jane Austen, for example, was not trying to pass off Edmund's promise to Fanny as an actual promise anymore than a Monopoly player would try to pass off Monopoly money for actual currency in a grocery store.

But even if this were the case, we are still left with the problem of meaning. We might wonder what value promises made in novels have if they are pretended, or as Searle says, not "standard." Why isn't Edmund's promise a "standard case"? What is missing? If Searle is right, Edmund's promise to Fanny is only pretended. Could not this fact then change the course or meaning of the novel? The significance of Edmund's having broken his promise would be lost -- along with the significance of his having made it.

Searle would be quick to explain that it is not the characters who pretend to make promises to one another, but that authors pretend the characters make promises to one another. But what we so far understood by "nonserious discourse" is that authors pretend to say things they really do not themselves believe to be true. Searle's view is based on what he takes to be the mental stance or attitude that the author has toward her work. What is implied in this characterization is the inadequacy of fictional statements as compared with our understanding of serious statements.

Searle thinks that to learn about the nature of promising or statement making, we need to begin our investigation with nonfictional models, not with what we find in Mansfield Park.

However, Searle tells us that if it were not for the possibility of making a promise in nonfictional circumstances, such as promising to meet a friend for lunch, there could be no promises made by actors on a stage or by characters in a novel. Recognizing that Edmund made a promise, pretended as it may be, is parasitic on the fact that we already know what a promise is before having read Mansfield Park. If Searle is correct, it is precisely because we know what promises are that makes "pretending" them in novels or on stage possible -- just as the use of real money makes using Monopoly money possible. We pretend to purchase property, just as Jane Austen pretended there was a young man named Edmund who promised Fanny horseback rides. Searle claims that were it not for the fact that we make "standard" nonfictional promises, pretended promises could never occur, let alone be understood.

For Searle, it is not a question of having made a promise in good faith or not, but rather that promises and statements cannot be made in a work of fiction at all; their fictionality precludes this possibility. He claims instead that promises made in fiction are understood in light of

nonfictional models or "standard cases" of promise making. But what reason does Searle have for assigning prior necessity to "serious" promises rather than to "nonserious" or pretended ones? It is as if Searle supposes that one would first need to have spent four dollars on lunch in order to spend four hundred dollars on Boardwalk. Why should this be the case? Children often handle play money in board games long before they ever begin using real money to make purchases. This is perhaps one of the ways they learn how currency is used. By claiming that promises made in novels or on stage are not standard, we should then not investigate the nature of such speech acts. Searle implies that we cannot learn from them:

If we want to know what it is to make a promise ... we had better not start our investigation with promises made by actors on stage in the course of a play or statements made in a novel by novelists....

Searle joins Austin in the view that statements and assertions found in fiction are not universally exemplary in their usage. We cannot hold the promise made in fiction to the same standards we might hold its "serious" or nonfictional counterpart. Accordingly, the utterance "I promise," when made by an actor on stage or in a novel by a character, does not have the same functional import it would otherwise have in nonfictional communication. Because promises made on stage or in a novel are pretended, they therefore do not serve the inquirer of promise making with

appropriate models or "standard cases" of promising.

If Searle is right, it would seem to follow that Russell's example of the actor proclaiming "It is I, Hamlet the Dane" does not serve as a good example for an assertion of identification. So while neither the actor nor author intend Hamlet's statements to be factual, they fail to satisfy the rules for statement making. At the same time, of course, it was never their intention to satisfy such rules. In this respect, Searle's view does not conflict with Russell's position, it expands it.

As I've said in this section, John Searle's treatment of fiction as "nonserious discourse" does not mean that he's saying that fiction is not intended to be taken seriously. Rather, he wants to contrast fiction with other forms of nonfictional communication or "serious discourse."

Like Russell, Searle concentrates on what a speaker or writer intends, whereas we understand that the author of fiction only pretends to make assertions and statements about characters "without actually making them." It is in this respect that utterances made on stage by actors or in novels by novelists about characters are cases of using language "nonseriously." So where "serious" or nonfictional discourse will express ordinary or "standard" language use, literature expresses nonstandard or extraordinary usage.

Russell also claims that an author cannot "really

refer" to a character that did not, in fact, exist prior to its creation. However, as Searle suggests, through "pretending" to refer, the character is brought into being as a "fictional person" to whom we, "outside the story," really can refer. So while Searle may agree with Russell to the extent that "non-existing entities" cannot "really be referred to," he goes on to suggest that after becoming a fictional character Hamlet certainly can be referred to. Once the pretended reference has been made, readers can make real references to that character.

However, I would argue that just because an author may not refer to a character she has not yet created, it does not follow that she pretends to refer in order that the character may be created. While Murdoch "really creates a fictional person," as Searle also claims, it is not the case that she pretends to refer to a character that in reality does not exist. There is a distinction between creating a fictional person and "pretending" to refer to that person, thereby making her fictional. It is the latter that I argue against.²⁶ But Searle thinks that by distinguishing between "pretends to refer" and "really referred," he has established one of the critical differences between "nonserious discourse" (fiction) and "serious discourse" (nonfiction). However, I have tried to show why the former distinction does not, after all, clarify the latter, more

general distinction.

That there are differences between fiction and nonfiction is not in question. What is at issue is whether or not formulating criteria such as "pretending" in order to distinguish between them is really insightful. In the last portion of this section, we also discussed the possibility that standard or nonfictional models exist prior to fictional or pretended ones, of which our recognition and appreciation of the latter is presumably based. I have tried to show how this notion leads to an epistemological division between fiction and nonfiction that is not only unsatisfactory, but also may ultimately undermine the claim that fiction can be a source of knowledge and insight.

This same division is addressed in the next section, when we investigate the notion of "pretending" and "suspension of disbelief" in greater detail. Kendall Walton suggests that there are ways in which to understand these terms other than those we have so far examined. Walton's game analogy of "make-believe" is akin to Searle's notion of "pretending," and like Searle, he claims that our appreciation of fiction is based on nonfictional models. However, relying on the notion of "make-believe" to make this case will not suffice. Indeed, our discussion of Walton will reveal that "pretending" or its variants can neither stand as a condition of, nor enhance, nor justify

appreciation.

4. Fictional Worlds

Sir Phillip Sidney's observation 'Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth....' is echoed and endorsed with great regularity in contemporary discussions of fiction.²⁷

In the previous section we discussed John Searle's approach to the problem of truth and fiction. By attributing a "nonserious" status to assertions and statements made within a fictional framework, he attempts to show that while they are not actually committed, nevertheless they are still a legitimate form of language use. As I have emphasized, by describing fiction as "nonserious discourse" Searle is not suggesting that it is not a serious or valuable form of communication. Rather, by concentrating on what a speaker intends when uttering (writing) certain kinds of statements and sentences, we understand that such statements are not being used in their "serious" or usual, nonfictional sense.

In this section, we look further into the ramifications of "nonserious discourse" as it agrees or contrasts with Kendall Walton's notion of fiction as a game of "make-believe." While certainly there are differences among the philosophers that we have been discussing, the notion that "pretending" is fundamentally involved in our appreciation of fiction is utilized with great frequency. Walton summarizes the problem of truth and fiction and its

traditional solution:

Astonishing though it is, the telling and hearing of stories does not very often astonish us.... And those who do notice it often deny what is most astonishing about it: that appreciators of fiction are interested in, and fascinated by, people and events they know to be non-existent. We suspend our disbelief, it is said. Appreciating fiction is supposed to involve believing, at least temporarily, that Superman or Desdemona or Willy Loman really exist.²⁸

While Walton argues against "suspension of disbelief" as such, since he thinks it entails believing in characters that are non-existent, he does maintain that we pretend to believe in characters that we "know to be non-existent." According to Walton, there is an important distinction between suspending disbelief and "pretending" belief. For Walton, the former implies a form of insanity. He cites Ursula Le Guin:

[W]hile we read a novel, we are insane-bonkers. We believe in the existence of people who aren't there, we hear their voices, we watch the battle of Borodino with them.... Sanity returns (in most cases) when the book is closed.²⁹

Unlike Le Guin, Walton does not equate fictional appreciation with madness, which in her view is to hear voices that are not there, see things, and believe in the existence of people who do not exist, however temporarily. Like Le Guin, Socrates' criticism of fiction (as discussed in Section 1) would lead us to believe that the whole enterprise is irrational, from composing to reciting and reading it.

However, taking this view of "suspension of disbelief" may be too restricted. While many subscribe to the theory, they certainly do not all depict appreciating fiction as an illness or affliction. When Searle, for instance, speaks of "suspension of disbelief," he never compares it to being "insane-bonkers." Rather, he considers it to be a form of "pretending" that Walton likewise views as necessary for the purpose of appreciating fiction. With this distinction in mind, Walton sets out to provide an analysis of fiction by embracing the notion of "make-believe":

I claim that appreciators of fiction do not believe in the existence of fictional characters. Appreciation involves playing games of make-believe, and as part of these games appreciators pretend to believe in characters....³⁰

Whether or not suspending disbelief is substantially different from "pretending" belief needs further discussion. According to Walton, part of what it means to pretend belief is that the imaginative work itself functions as a kind of "prop" that appreciators of fiction use in a game of "make-believe." He continues:

What is it for a work to have as one of its functions the job of serving as a prop in games of make-believe? What counts as fiction will depend on how its maker intended or expected it to be used....³¹

Appreciators enter into the fictional world of the author through the use of the text. According to Walton, the author intends for appreciators of fiction to use their works to that end. However else they could be used, or intended by

the author to be used, is never explored. But Walton thinks that by looking at works of fiction as props, he has at least partially distinguished between "pretending" belief and suspending disbelief. In my view, however, the reason Walton does so is to show that fictional appreciation is really a deliberate and rational activity, and not the work of "insane-bonkers," as it is for Le Guin and for Plato's Socrates in the Ion. Walton intimates that authors and audiences are indeed "in their senses," contrary to what we are told in the Ion.

Furthermore, by viewing the creative work as a prop, Walton draws a broader distinction between the "fictional worlds" of creative writers and the nonfictional world we read about in the newspaper or hear about on the six o'clock news:

Instead of establishing fictional worlds, they purport to describe the real world. We read the New York Times to find out what actually happened in Washington or Walla Walla, not what happened in the world of the Times.³²

What can be concluded from this seemingly correct observation? In his view, it shows that we know the difference between sitting down to read a novel or watch a film, and sitting down to breakfast with the morning paper or watching the news. The film, like the novel, is a vehicle or "prop" used in that particular game of "make-believe." Walton claims that appreciators know that the people on the

screen are only actors "pretending" to be characters, and as appreciators we must pretend that we do not know what we in fact do know, if "the game is to be a success." When a good guy is punched in the face, we understand that the actor really has not been struck, although we might cringe as if he had been. Hence, Walton says, we appreciators are "interested in, and fascinated by people and events they know to be non-existent," just as we are interested in those people and events on the six o'clock newscast.

If we really thought the actor himself was getting punched out, we would jump from our seats to help him or call the police. Yet we do not jump. According to Walton, we know he is an actor "pretending" to be a character. But if this is so, then why get excited when Holmes finds another clue, or feel relief when the bad guy finally gets what he deserves? We can imagine Plato's Socrates struggling with such questions. The answer, says Walton, is that we are "playing a game of make-believe" that the audience is aware of, and that this is further demonstrated in the fact that we do not jump from our seats to call the police.

But does this adequately serve as part of a criterion that would distinguish fiction as "make-believe" from nonfiction that it is not? There are numerous accounts of bystanders who witness real stabbings, beatings, rapes, and robberies, and yet do nothing. Such people do not jump from

their seats, even though they know it is not make-believe. In a notorious example, Kitty Genovese, screaming for help, was stabbed several times and left for dead on the street while witnesses did nothing but watch from their windows or listen to her pleas for help. They did not "jump from their seats." So far, jumping or not jumping cannot establish such a distinction.

Watching a stabbing in a movie is not the same as watching a stabbing outside a window of one's home or apartment. It does not call for the same reaction, although the reaction may indeed be the same (as in Kitty Genovese's case). We might say that the person who watches a brutal assault but does nothing is acting callously, irresponsibly, or dispassionately, whereas a person in a movie theater would be acting peculiarly, if not "bonkers," if she did call the police. But while a film or novel does not require a call to the police, it does not follow that what we are watching or reading is pretended or "make-believe." The reason we do not jump from our seats is that we are, in fact, watching a film; and unless it is especially frightening or boring, we generally stay put.

Even though we know the difference between seeing someone on the screen being struck and someone outside our window being struck, that knowledge does not itself contribute to a definition that would distinguish one case

from the other. In other words, an awareness of this distinction does not necessarily figure into a criterion for making the distinction between fiction and nonfiction.

Earlier, I expressed skepticism towards Walton's distinction between suspension of disbelief and "pretending" belief. For Walton, the former involves a mental disturbance because it is done unconsciously: The appreciator actually believes (temporarily) that what is being presented is real. Alternately, "pretending" belief is done consciously, with the knowledge that the people and events depicted are not in fact real. But whether appreciation involves lunacy, as Plato and Le Guin intimate, or a willful act, as Walton seems to suggest, is equally problematic. Hence it is not clear that believing temporarily in things that do not exist for the purpose of appreciating fiction is significantly different from "pretending" to believe in things that do not exist for that same purpose.

Although Walton argues that events in novels and films are not intended to describe "the real world," he also says they are "representations" of that world. In disagreement with Searle, Walton claims that authors and actors do not pretend to make propositions or perform speech acts, but instead represent speech acts by fictionalizing them:

Do literary works of fiction represent speech acts? Those with narrators do. Conrad's Lord Jim makes it fictional that Marlow utters certain words -- the words of the text -- thereby making various assertions,

asking questions, and so on.³³

While Searle and Walton seem to agree that the audience pretends to believe in the existence of fictional characters, they disagree about the nature of their speech acts. Unlike Searle, Walton denies there is a distinction between the appearance of the illocutionary act and its "force." Instead, the speech act remains intact as an appearance or representation. But whether they are pretended and thus do not have their usual force (as Searle suggests), or pretended in the sense that they only have the appearance of speech acts, we are left with the same conclusion: Such illocutions are not "standard cases" and do not have their ordinary meanings. Illocutionary acts in fiction are not merely incomplete or unaccomplished speech acts, as they are for Searle: "Fiction is not just language stripped of some of its normal functions; it is something positive, something special."³⁴

At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Walton's question about the place works of fiction have in relation to such nonfiction as Darwin's Origin of Species. His answer is that the function of nonfictional communication is to claim truth for certain propositions, such as we find in the New York Times. We read the New York Times to find out what is going on in "the real world." We read novels and see films to appreciate the fictional worlds of their makers.

Moreover, for a work "to count as fiction" depends on how its writer intended the work to be used. The author of a novel intends that appreciators should use it as a "prop" in a game, while a news reporter intends to convey certain facts. Accordingly, appreciators pretend to believe in people and events, by using the work itself as the medium through which that game of "make-believe" is played. But while "pretending" is supposed to provide insight into the nature of appreciation, does it explain why we are distressed when Little Red Riding Hood finds the wolf in Grandma's bed, or why Ion's eyes fill with tears when telling a tale of pity? What are we to think?

Although John Reichert offers an explanation along similar lines to those we have reviewed, his may be more helpful in determining how an audience is able to appreciate a work of fiction:

Many of the statements we make about characters in a play or novel, or about the speaker or narrator of a poem, are like statements we make about real people. We attribute to them existence in a time and place. We say, for example, that the narrator of Browning's 'Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister' is located in a place where, unseen, he can observe Brother Lawrence puttering about the garden, and we say, too, that he is petty, jealous, hypocritical, and lustful.... We read the words and think the deeds as if there were a Hamlet who speaks and acts, a Pip who recounts his past to us. The description of these fictional characters presupposes a nonfictional model -- an implicit reference to the sorts of people who would speak or behave in a certain way.³⁵

Reichert says that we read "as if there were a Hamlet" or a

"Brother Lawrence" who is petty, jealous, hypocritical, and lustful. This, to his thinking, requires a prior understanding of such terms and how they are applied. Reichert's position resembles those we have been addressing: If we did not know real people who were petty, jealous, hypocritical, and lustful, we would presumably be unable to recognize such traits in fictional characters. He claims there must be a nonfictional model (i.e., a real world) upon which our understanding of fiction relies. This view is akin to Searle's distinction of "serious" and "nonserious discourse" as discussed in Section 3: the success of the latter depends upon the pre-existence of the former.

However, while there may be "an implicit reference to the sorts of people who would speak and behave in a certain way" in a fictional story, there is no reason to suppose that we need to have known such people in order that we may appreciate those traits that characters possess. Indeed, we may come to learn about them through novels, plays, and films. For example, we may learn what the vice of pride is, or learn more about it from reading Tolstoy's "Father Sergious." While it may be the case that the character is based on Tolstoy's knowledge of such people, or of himself, the reader's understanding of that vice does not necessarily come from having known people with it. Likewise, the novelist may himself have reached his understanding having

created proud and arrogant characters. I am not disputing that there may be a nonfictional model which makes characters such as Father Sergious, Brother Lawrence, or Hamlet both sympathetic and believable. What I am suggesting is that knowledge and insight may come just as easily from fictional models as they do from nonfictional ones.

Reichert also supports both Searle and Walton's position when he says that we attribute existence to characters "as if there were a Hamlet who speaks and acts." But by what means do we accomplish this? Walton would claim that we must pretend to believe in the character's existence and in his speech acts. However, it is unclear why we would need to read as if there were a Hamlet who really said "To be or not to be, that is the question." It seems that only if we accept the premise that Hamlet does not exist do we need to "attribute" existence to him by acting as if there were a Hamlet. I claim that we neither attribute existence by "pretending" to believe in Hamlet, nor do we know that Hamlet does not exist, which would make "pretending" necessary in the first place. It was Shakespeare who brought Hamlet into being, as both Searle and Walton would point out.

In this section I have tried to show how problematic the application of the term "make-believe" is in explaining fictional appreciation. First, its weaknesses are similar to

those we found in the previous section with Searle's analysis of fiction as "nonserious discourse." While Walton maintains the integrity of assertions and illocutions made in fiction, to the extent that he does not disturb their essential features, at the same time he withholds from them their authenticity, ultimately undermining this integrity.

Second, using bodily reactions such as jumping from the seat in a movie theater as an indication that appreciators are in fact only "pretending" to believe in the existence of fictional characters does not prove what Walton thinks it does. As I argued earlier, reactions do not in themselves provide evidence for an epistemological division between the real world in which Kitty Genovese was murdered and no onlooker reacted, and the fictional world in which the crazed villain pursues the victim and no one jumps from their seats.

Third, it is not clear that Walton has justified his distinction between suspending disbelief in fictional characters and "pretending" belief in them. As I have claimed, not all critics who subscribe to the view of suspending disbelief mean what Le Guin means, i.e., that appreciators are temporarily "insane-bonkers." Certainly when Searle uses the phrase "suspension of disbelief," that is not what he has in mind.

Finally, Walton's curious usage of the term "prop" in

describing novels, plays, and films is disquieting. Jane Austen's Mansfield Park is not used as a prop the way a rifle over the fireplace mantel on stage is. Indeed, Walton does not offer reasonable grounds for thinking of works of fiction as "props" in games of "make-believe," even though he thinks he has defeated those proponents of "suspension of disbelief" who would otherwise claim that appreciators actually believe in the existence of people and events that are, in fact, non-existent, thereby making composition and appreciation a rational activity. In addition, he thinks that the "pretended" knowledge that both the author and audience possess contributes to a fuller understanding of the distinction between fiction and nonfiction more generally defined. Hence, Walton claims that nothing like suspending disbelief occurs at all. If it did, we would have to admit that an irrational component is involved in making and appreciating fiction, as Socrates argues in the Ion. So neither composing nor appreciating fiction is a mysterious activity, beyond comprehension. Rather, authors and appreciators knowingly pretend to believe in the existence of characters and events of "fictional worlds." Like Searle, Walton thinks that by focusing on the intentions of authors and appreciators, he has provided us with a crucial insight into the nature of fiction that does not rely on irrationality for either its production or comprehension.

However, because Walton insists that works of fiction "do not purport to describe the real world," fiction on this reading would again be an unlikely "candidate for truth" or source of insight and knowledge. Its make-believability undermines this potential. Though Walton successfully shows where thinkers such as Searle go wrong in their analysis of "pretence," he has not advanced the position to a point where we should accept it.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this chapter, I claimed that attempting to clearly distinguish between fiction and nonfiction would be doomed to failure. I say this not because there exists no distinction between the two, but because discerning a characteristic or set of characteristics in order to make this distinction will likely admit exception. So while the consideration that there are differences between fiction and nonfiction has itself gone unchallenged, the identification of specific criteria for these differences certainly has been challenged.

Walton's observation that we read the New York Times to find out what is going on in the world and not what is going on "in the world of the Times" indicates that we understand the difference. There is no question that newspapers,

textbooks, manuals, biographies, and even "requests to pass the salt" often fall into categories quite apart from those of novels, plays, poetry, and many films. The concern of the philosophers and critics we have discussed has been how to treat these differences, given that we intuitively understand them to exist. However, what I have tried to show in this study is that while the intuition may itself be sound, the treatment of it as a problem is misconceived.

In my view, the misconception begins with what I have referred to as a presumption that works of fiction are constitutionally not true nor about the real world. As I have also stated, this presumption conflicts with my claim that fiction can be a valuable source of insight and knowledge. I have also asserted that we need to know what exactly is meant by claiming that fiction is not true in order to see whether that conflict is irreconcilable or whether it deserves of the kinds of treatment we have given it. Whether or not the premise that fiction is not true is justifiable is one question (a question I have attempted to exhaust throughout this chapter). But that the veracity of such a claim really comes into conflict with my own position, as I have suggested, is another question that has yet to be fully discussed.

The notion that fiction is not true but involves "pretending" for its production and appreciation does indeed

undermine the capacity for thinking of fiction as "a major candidate for truth," as Nussbaum claims.³⁶ In my view, the impetus for using notions such as "pretending," "make-believe," and "suspension of disbelief" to justify fiction as a valuable form of communication is an attempt to meet the challenge of a tradition that might otherwise discredit or dismiss it as not true. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Nussbaum finds the conventional systematic approach to ethics likewise hostile towards literature because it often deals with concrete, indeterminate, and complex situations that make abstract principles difficult, if not impossible, to apply. So, too, those same principles underly an epistemology that easily dismisses literature as unworthy of philosophical attention, because literature neither "describes the real world," nor exemplifies ordinary, nonfictional language, nor embodies rational practice in its presentation and appreciation.

None of the views that we have explored throughout this chapter, with perhaps the exception of Plato's, are antagonistic towards fiction. But in trying to save fiction from the application of certain rational principles in the philosophical analysis of fiction, philosophers and critics of literature undermine their own position because they tend to accept the premise that fiction is neither true nor about the real world. In this respect they give too much away from

the very beginning.

The problem of fiction is thus twofold: It is both ontological and epistemological, and one hinges upon the other. Since the characters and events do not have historical reality (in the sense of John Kennedy or Martin Luther King), knowledge concerning those characters and events is problematic. However much we might dispute the truth or accuracy of what is said in newspapers, historical texts, scientific treatises, and works of philosophy, we do not usually dispute their authors' belief in the truth of what they assert, however theoretical. Fiction then becomes the contrasting case, since authors of fiction, so it is claimed, do not "purport to describe the real world" but only their "fictional worlds," and hence do not assert the truth of what they write.

In this chapter I have tried to show some of the ways in which the acceptance of premises such that fictional literature is not true and is not about the "real world" could hinder an investigation of literature as a source of insight and knowledge. As suggested earlier, Martha Nussbaum also makes the claim that the novel itself may be a "major candidate for truth." Although she singles out the works of Henry James as such a candidate, the claim may certainly be broadened to include other fictional works (as I'll discuss in the next chapter). In her view, knowledge, specifically

moral knowledge, is made accessible in its "most appropriate articulation" in literature.³⁷ While her project is somewhat different from my own, there are important resemblances. In The Fragility of Goodness she makes several claims about literature and philosophy, of which at least two are compatible with my position. Stephen Halliwell summarizes them as follows:

Literature is relevant to moral philosophy by virtue of its capacity to embody conceptions of human value and excellence, and to give expression to ethical truth and insight.... Literature is more than relevant to moral philosophy: it can provide access to features of concrete, complex and indeterminate experience which are characteristically omitted or undervalued by philosophy whose principles are those of a systematic ethical rationalism.³⁸

These two claims mentioned by Halliwell lead to a further claim, or conclusion, that literature can play a significant role in "enriching and reforming" our thinking about philosophical issues, especially those of an ethical nature. Not only can fictional literature give concrete expression to abstract philosophical problems and themes, it may even clarify them to the point where we are forced to reevaluate those traditional procedures that make it difficult to take seriously the proposition that fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge. While it certainly is not the intention of those philosophers and critics we have explored to omit or "undervalue" fiction as a source of insight and knowledge, it is, I argue, a consequence of their views.

Searle's position regarding promise and statement making in fiction clearly diminishes the value of those promises and statements as unworthy of investigation. Recall Searle's remark that we should not begin a philosophical investigation with promises made in fiction since they do not qualify as "standard cases" of assertion and statement making. For such reasoning, I claim, Searle inadvertently directs us away from looking to fiction as a source of "truth and insight" in the way Nussbaum or I espouse.

In the introduction to this investigation, I claimed that the insights of fiction are frequently "at odds" with the dominant, analytic, and impersonal epistemology "whose principles are those of a systematic ethical rationalism." It is my contention that those "principles" that would omit or undervalue literature's potential to express "ethical truth and insight," because it deals with "concrete, complex, and indeterminate experience," are the very same principles that underscore the problem of truth and fiction, as we have so far explored it. They contribute to a view that (i) authors are "not committed to the truth" of their assertions in literature; (ii) that actors playing characters on stage are not "speaking truly"; (iii) that in some fashion we must "attribute existence" to characters, such as Hamlet, if we are to follow and appreciate their plight; and (iv) that ethical and other notions embedded in

ordinary life are not faithfully represented by fictional writers, and so fail to serve as models for their employment. But if Nussbaum is correct in saying that knowledge may be rendered through fiction, as I am convinced she is, then the presumption that fiction is not true in the sense we have been discussing is indeed as problematic as I have suggested.

However, it is not the business of this thesis to give an alternative account of the differences between fiction and nonfiction. I agree there are distinctions, but they can be made without a theory which requires pretence and related notions in order to explain an author's composition or an audience's appreciation. But in not giving an alternative account, I have not failed to answer a question about how composition and appreciation are to be accounted for; indeed, that was never my question. I am rather concerned with how such views ultimately undermine my own view that fiction can be a source of insight and knowledge.

In this chapter I have discussed the inadequacies of various philosophical views about the nature of fictional literature. I have shown that there are no substantial grounds for systematically preempting the kind of investigation I embark upon in the chapter to come. For there I discuss and show how fiction is a source of insight and knowledge. However, before turning to specific literary

works, I first focus on Martha Nussbaum's view of novels, arguably the most innovative challenge to conventional approaches on this subject within the tradition of philosophy itself.

Notes

1. Kendall Walton, Mimesis as Make Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 70.

2. Cora Diamond, "Martha Nussbaum and the Need for Novels," Philosophical Investigations 16:2 (April 1993), 129-30.

3. I use the male pronoun to indicate the relevance of gender here. Popular forms of feminist philosophy do not subscribe to the "moral view" that Kant, Protestantism, and liberalism share in common.

4. Thomas Nagel coined the term in The View From Nowhere (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

5. In Section 1 of this chapter we discuss Plato, who also expresses concern regarding audience response to fictional presentations, as well as the author's capacity to convey knowledge through those presentations.

6. Plato, Ion, trans. Lane Cooper, in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 533d.

7. Ibid., 535d.

8. These are the kinds of questions that inspire theories such as the suspension of disbelief, explored in Sections 3 and 4 of this chapter.

9. Bertrand Russell, Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), 79.

10. Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting," Mind 14 (1905), 56.

11. Russell, Human Knowledge, 79.

12. John Reichert, Making Sense of Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 34.

13. Gilbert Ryle, "The Theory of Meaning," in British

Philosophy in the Mid-Century, ed. C.A. Mace (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 244.

14. Searle, "Fictional Discourse," 329.

15. Ibid., 330.

16. Ibid., 319.

17. Thomas Pavel, Fictional Worlds (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 19.

18. Searle, "Fictional Discourse," 332.

19. The suggested views of Kendall Walton are discussed in Section 4.

20. Film critic Pauline Kael once described Steve Martin (who studied Wittgenstein) as pretending to be a comedian, while we pretended to be his audience. His comedy was based on the premise that everyone was in on the joke.

21. J.L. Austin, How to Do Things With Words, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 21-2.

22. Searle, "Fictional Discourse," 327.

23. We recall Nussbaum's claim that the primary task of the author is to convey his moral view through the text. I will discuss this question in Chapter III.

24. Searle, "Fictional Discourse," 329.

25. John Searle, "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida," Glyph 1 (1977), 204-5.

26. It is not obvious that because a thing does not in "reality" exist, it therefore cannot be referred to by its originators. In Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (New York: Atheneum, 1962), the couple George and Martha often refer to and even fight over their non-existent son. They do not pretend to refer, but actually refer to a pretend or make-believe child that they themselves created. While it is true they pretend the son exists by referring to him as if he did, it does not follow that they make-believe the son exists by pretending to refer to him.

27. Walton, Mimesis, 78.

28. Kendall Walton, "Appreciating Fiction: Suspending Disbelief or Pretending Belief?", Dispositio 13-14 (1979), 1.

29. Ibid., 1. The quote is taken from the article itself but noted from the introduction to Ursula Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1969).

30. Ibid., 2.

31. Walton, Mimesis, 91.

32. Ibid., 70

33. Ibid., 84.

34. Ibid., 78.

35. Reichert, Making Sense of Literature, 67.

36. Martha Nussbaum, "Fully Aware and Richly Responsible: Literature and the Moral Imagination," in Literature and the Question of Philosophy, ed. A. Cascardi, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 170.

37. Ibid., 169.

38. Stephen Halliwell, "Philosophy and Literature: Settling a Quarrel," Philosophical Investigations 16:1 (January 1993), 4.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF FICTION IN PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

Introduction

In the previous chapter we discussed the origin, treatment, and ramifications of the problem of truth and fiction. I have shown why theories such as "suspension of disbelief," or fiction as "nonserious discourse," or as a form of pretense and "make-believe," are inadequate in their resolutions. But as I have stressed throughout this study, it is only when fiction is assumed to be neither true nor about "the real world" that it becomes problematic (as explored in Chapter II) and a poor "candidate for truth" (in both my own and Nussbaum's use of the phrase).

Those philosophers and critics we have studied would not necessarily agree that such an exclusion follows from their premises. I do not think, for instance, that Searle or Walton's view of fiction as nonserious discourse or pretense commits either to a position counter to my own. Indeed, none of the philosophers and critics we have discussed would likely claim that fiction does not merit serious attention, even if its author fails to propound the truth.

However, as I claimed at the end of the last chapter, if Searle and others are correct in thinking that the language used in fiction is essentially nonassertive -- that is, if its author does not intend to communicate the truth -- then it would seem absurd to look to fiction as a "candidate for truth" or source of knowledge and insight. In their view, words are thought to conform to certain rules, indicative of their meaning. As well suggested by such philosophers, the language used in fiction neither conforms nor is it the aim of the author of fiction to adhere to such rules. However, attempts by those philosophers to eliminate ambiguity in "normal" or nonfictional language use suggests that the author is not intending to communicate truth. Thus they wrongly depict the language used in fiction as being untrue.

Having dealt with the problem of truth and fiction (and much of what it involved) in the previous chapter, I now investigate specific works of fiction as sources of knowledge and insight. In this chapter, the literary works of Henry James' "The Tree of Knowledge," Voltaire's Candide, and Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" are examined. I selected these works first and foremost because they exemplify the argument that fiction can significantly contribute to philosophical discourse by showing what impact various forms of knowledge -- and, for that matter, its absence -- can

have on the moral climate and psychological lives of human beings. I shall refer to this kind of investigation as "moral epistemology." I introduce this term to discuss how moral questions and issues are often immersed in difficulties pertaining to knowledge, and to distinguish my position from Nussbaum, who speaks of "moral knowledge" as well. Nussbaum and I agree that certain literary works successfully show how moral knowledge may be attained. Explored here are those important differences that remain between us.

I do not consider it the primary task of the novelist (of the kinds of literature we will encounter) to answer Aristotle's question, "How should we live?" But Nussbaum proposes that literary texts, such as Henry James' The Golden Bowl, indeed offer a particular moral view or vision vis-a-vis the text. Cora Diamond summarizes Nussbaum's position:

[W]hat is primarily important for Martha Nussbaum, in her treatment of particular novels ... is the activity of the novelist: his moral vision, his moral achievement.... Her primary focus, though, is always on how to live, and how a novel can convey the novelist's view of that.¹

According to Nussbaum, James' main purpose in writing The Golden Bowl (and novels similar to it) is to illuminate his own moral view or perspective in answer to Aristotle's question. However, it is not clear that this is James' objective in writing such novels. Certainly authors of

fiction may explore moral questions through their works, but it is not necessary that they also subscribe to a moral view. Even if it were the case that James "conveys" his own moral view in texts such as The Golden Bowl, it is not obvious that he also sets out to answer those questions that we as readers may attempt to answer ourselves through the investigation of his novels. In other words, while a reader may use a novel such as The Golden Bowl in responding to Aristotle's question "How should we live?", it still remains unclear whether this was the intent of the author.

It is just as problematic for Nussbaum to claim that the author of fiction is projecting a particular moral view in the novel as it is for Searle and others to claim that what distinguishes fiction from nonfiction is the nonserious view that the author takes towards what is said in the novel. According to the former, it is the intention of the author to communicate truth and knowledge, as in The Golden Bowl. According to the latter, it is not the intention of the author of fiction to communicate truth and knowledge, since its author allegedly does not believe in the truth or accuracy of what is being communicated. In either case, as readers we are once again put in the curious position of speculating about the author's intention of what one does or does not believe to be true. On the contrary, rather than focus as Nussbaum and Searle do on "the activity of the

novelist," the mental processes of the story teller vis-a-vis the story, I mainly focus on the story itself: how it can deepen our understanding of certain philosophical questions and themes, regardless of whether the author intends to convey a moral view or not.

I am not denying that James may in fact hold a particular moral view. Indeed, much of Nussbaum's discussion is derived from James' analyses of his own work, as a kind of moral achievement. Both Voltaire and Tolstoy (whom we examine later) have produced works of philosophy, in addition to their great works of literature. But even if it were the case that such authors hold particular moral views on "how to live," we should not then conclude that these authors also set out to "convey" them through fiction. While we know that Tolstoy eventually came to adopt Christianity, it does not follow that he intended to communicate his religious views through works of literature, though indeed his characters grapple with serious religious questions. However, it is now vital to investigate what Nussbaum has in mind when using the term "moral view." By so doing, we may gain a better understanding of her objections to the philosophical tradition as represented by R.M. Hare, whom she and others have characterized as hostile and dismissive towards literature.²

In Section 1, I explore Nussbaum's notion of "moral

view." This analysis should serve as the basis for all forthcoming discussions regarding the works of literature that I have chosen to occupy the last three sections of this thesis. In Section 2, I focus on Henry James' "The Tree of Knowledge" in order to highlight insight into the ethical repercussions of withholding the truth from others and into how self-deception can block moral knowledge. In Section 3, I turn to Voltaire's Candide, where I claim that Candide's behavior and metaphysical view "this is the best of all possible worlds" are forms of self-deception that can undermine his sense of personal responsibility and thus his capacity for moral change. In Section 4, a discussion of Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" reveals a precise, moral vision: one that evaluates the relationships between the sexes as so problematic and deplorable that celibacy can be the only solution. However, this is the view of the main character. Whether Tolstoy himself would have advocated celibacy is difficult to say -- he had fourteen children of his own. But in regarding all these three works, we are compelled to consider whether by taking responsibility through sincere and repeated efforts of self-scrutiny, one can overcome self-deception and achieve moral change.

In conclusion, I return to the questions of whether novels express the moral views of their authors, and whether they answer Aristotle's question, "How should we live?" In

the end, however, I suggest that perhaps these two questions are quite different from one another and should therefore be treated separately. To identify a moral view or vision is not necessarily the same as receiving from the author an answer to the question "How should we live?" (although there certainly may be some overlap). My opposition to Nussbaum is not really over whether novelists convey their own moral views, but whether the proposition that they do should be given primacy over two more interesting claims. The first is that moral knowledge is acquired only through (what she refers to as) "responsible attentiveness" to the particular context in which moral questions arise. The second is that certain novels are best equipped to show how this is to be accomplished.

1. Nussbaum's "Moral View" of Novels

In her discussions of various novels, Nussbaum makes two claims pertinent to this inquiry. First, that authors, such as Henry James, convey their moral views through works of literature. Second, that acquiring moral knowledge involves more than merely responding to abstract rules and principles that distinguish right from wrong. Such acquisition involves taking responsibility for understanding what necessitates a given situation to which one must respond. For this reason Nussbaum looks to literature in

emphasizing the complexity and indeterminacy of concrete situations that she says do not come "with duty labels on them."

This is in part why her interest in novels as expressions of moral insight and growth has, in my view, successfully established a case against Kantian philosophers (such as R.M. Hare) who say: "What are novels anyway, but universal prescriptions?" The very question itself is antithetical to a serious approach to fiction. Hare's question suggests that novels only show characters operating under the light of certain moral imperatives, and not how individuals respond, as Nussbaum sees them, to their particular circumstances. According to Hare, novels can only describe different character types, never individuals, since readers have limited access to information about them. However, in her article "Nussbaum and the Need for Novels," Cora Diamond indicates that where we may have limited information about characters in novels, so too have we limited information about many individuals we know: our acquaintances, colleagues, and so forth.³ I would add that the knowledge available to us about characters is, in fact, all there is to know. We should neither say that novels are incomplete just because we can glean only so much about the characters, nor that life is incomplete because we can, for the most part, grasp only so much about friends, loved ones,

associates, and the world around us. Indeed, Diamond's observation repeatedly shows how problematic it is to distinguish in such a manner between fiction and nonfiction.

Like Nussbaum, I also claim that in novels we encounter concrete individuals; but not, as Hare claims, only types of characters whose actions are predictable and uncomplicated. Behind Hare's question "What are novels anyway, but universal prescriptions?" is not only the assumption that novels cannot be about individuals, but also the suggestion that an author's ethical view consists in ultimately appealing to imperatives. But this, I would argue, may say more about Hare's own thinking about moral imperatives than it does about fiction writers. Such a view of novels is reductionistic: It turns novels into impoverished oversimplifications about which characters are not individuals. On the contrary, if novels are about individuals, as Nussbaum argues, then the treatment of them as embodiments of failures or successes in following prescriptions is undermined. According to Nussbaum, a novel such as The Golden Bowl emphasizes the role of "improvisation" in how characters respond to morally challenging situations. Such a response is very different from merely following a set of rules that dictate what actions should be taken. In this respect, Nussbaum both acknowledges and appreciates indeterminate situations as

eminent parts of life that can be found in novels whose characters do not merely adhere to imperatives -- i.e., as if reading from an "external script."⁴

In arguing against the moral imperatives we find in both rule utilitarianism and Kantianism, J.J. Smart comments that adherence to imperatives is nothing more than a form of "rule worshipping." Whether this accurately describes such ethical theories is perhaps debatable. But without delving into a discussion of Smart's own position, let it suffice to consider his comment at least in light of Hare's view of novels as universal prescriptions. Just as various forms of absolutism tend to ignore the fastidiousness of the case in which a moral agent may find herself, likewise Hare's statement about novels shows a lack of attention for the discrepancies among characters and their situations that Nussbaum says are, in fact, marked by their unique features. Just as Russell and Searle attempt to eliminate ambiguities in language by referring to certain rules thought to govern it, so philosophers like Hare seek to eliminate ambiguities in other areas, such as moral conduct, that he finds especially visible in actions of fictional characters. Nussbaum offers the following analogy that sets her position apart from someone such as Hare's:

Consider the analogous contrast between the symphony player and the jazz musician. For the former, all commitments and continuities are external; they come from the score and from the conductor. The player reads

them off like anyone else. The jazz musician, actively forgoing continuity, must choose in full awareness of and responsibility to the historical traditions of the form, and must actively honor at every moment his commitments to his fellow musicians, whom he had better know as well as possible as unique individuals....⁵

According to Nussbaum, the symphony player, like Hare's characters, operates under the governance of certain imperatives and is doomed to comply with a preexisting or preestablished set of directions that, if not followed, could disrupt the entire performance. But unlike the symphony player, the jazz musician must choose what to do by attending to the specific context in which she herself is a part, rather than "read them off like anyone else." Her choices are informed by the particularity of her situation, coupled with those individuals who also comprise it. She continues:

These two cases indicate to us that a perceiver who improvises is doubly responsible: responsible to the history of commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context; and especially responsible to these, in that her commitments are internalized, assimilated, perceived, rather than read off from an external script.⁶

Nussbaum suggests that what is important about novels (of the kind we shall consider) is how their characters improvise their way through moral entanglements while fastened by the constituent parts of their context; and not, as Hare suggests, how characters inevitably behave with respect to certain rules and moral imperatives that are read

"from an external script." Indeed, Nussbaum treats novels as morally complex situations requiring more than obedience to abstract principles for their resolve.

Just as the jazz musician has internalized her commitments through improvisation, so the characters in novels respond to their situations in other ways than mere compliance to those rules that are external to them for guidance. However, Nussbaum is not suggesting that abstract principles play no role in moral conduct. Rather, she claims that "all by themselves" they cannot adequately address concrete situations that we find in certain novels.

The objection may be raised that by viewing novels as answers to Aristotle's question, Nussbaum may fall prey to the same kind of criticism she herself has dealt. Indeed, like Hare, Nussbaum has confined how novels may be related to questions of ethics to only one question: "How should we live?" But there are many more questions of ethical interest. Is Melville's "Billy Budd" concerned with "How we should we live?" Why does Nussbaum pounce upon Aristotle's question and no other? Why does Hare pounce upon imperatives and nothing else? Perhaps both views are in some respects reductionistic. If the situations we find in novels are as unique as Nussbaum suggests they are, then has she not undermined her position by relegating the treatment of novels as answers to Aristotle's question?

However, even if it were true that James does convey his moral view through the novel as a response to Aristotle's question, it certainly does not follow that the content of that view is necessarily a prescription which represents that view. In both Kantianism and strict forms of rule utilitarianism, specific criteria are evoked in terms of which there is formed the universal rule as to how one must will oneself to act. Consequently, one is able to forecast the appropriate course of action, regardless of the particular situation. But Nussbaum's use of the term "moral view" does not suggest (as I think Hare's does) that the character's allegiance to abstract principles is the only spring of action involved in moral agency, or so regarded by an author. As I have already shown, Nussbaum takes great pains in pointing out the uniqueness of those situations we find in novels that demand more than what abstract principles could alone provide.

So perhaps not all moral views are prescriptive, as I had initially assumed. But if we are going to say that they are not necessarily prescriptive, further clarification on what it means to hold a particular moral view or vision is needed. It may be the case that a moral view or vision involves not so much a methodology for deliberation as it does an appreciation for such moral relationships that are found in the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Such works are

inundated with them.

In her article "Literature and the Moral Imagination," the example Nussbaum uses in discussing the moral views of authors is Henry James' The Golden Bowl. There she argues that James' own moral understanding and appreciation is apparent, especially his appreciation for the virtue of integrity that we see exercised in the relationship between father and daughter. In reflecting on The Golden Bowl, Nussbaum tells how Adam (the father) must let go of the daughter he adores (and to whom he is equally dear) so that she can make a life for herself with another man, a husband. She cannot let go, however, if he is unable to let go first. Indeed, if she is to ever have her own life, it is critical that he does so. How Adam handles this situation is influenced by those features or details that make the situation unique:

Situations are all highly concrete, and they do not present themselves with duty labels on them.... [A] person armed only with the standing terms -- armed only with general principles and rules -- would, even if she managed to apply them to the concrete case, be insufficiently equipped by them to act rightly in it. It is not just that the standing terms be rendered more precise in their application to a concrete context. It is that, all by themselves, they may get it all wrong.... And I do not mean wrong as judged by some fortuitous and unforeseeable consequences for which we could not hold Adam responsible. I mean wrong in itself, wrong of him. He is responsible for getting the detail of his context for the context it is....⁷

Adam must make a sacrifice; he must "let go," but in a way

that maintains the integrity and quality of their relationship. To neglect the specifics of their particular relationship would be irresponsible of Adam, and could ultimately betray that integrity. She continues:

Obtuseness is a moral failing; its opposite can be cultivated. By themselves, trusted for and in themselves, the standing terms are a recipe for obtuseness. To respond 'at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way, is what is appropriate and best, and this is characteristic of excellence.'⁸

If Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle as applied to James' novel is correct, then Adam's task must be to separate the two of them in good faith. That Adam should respond in this or that way is neither prescriptive in Hare's sense, nor is it left totally up to Adam's discretion, independent of his particular context. But notice that while we are presented with a moral view, it is Aristotle's view as applied to the novel. And while James might agree with Nussbaum's analysis that the moral view expressed in The Golden Bowl is indeed Aristotelian, I consider it too great a leap of interpretation to then conclude that James himself had intended it to be so -- or that we should regard the author's capacity to relate his moral view as the main accomplishment of the story.

Like Nussbaum, I am interested not only in how literature can contribute to philosophical discourse, but also in how it may challenge certain kinds of thinking

promoted by the discipline, as we see developed in Nussbaum's discussion of James. That tradition, she thinks, exaggerates the importance of the "standing terms" or "principles" for resolving moral conflict, while ignoring the relationship between context and responsibility, as expressed in the passages cited above. It is in this respect that works such as James' The Golden Bowl, as well as "The Tree of Knowledge" (the latter is taken under investigation in the next section), are indeed candidates for truth, though I do not think them candidates because they answer Aristotle's question, "How should we live?"

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will continue to address the question of whether authors of fiction convey their moral views. Of course, the works of literature to be considered, such as Candide and "The Kreutzer Sonata," have characters that most certainly express particular moral views, though to what extent their authors share those views, or how important that question is to a philosophical inquiry of fiction, is itself questionable. I have so far only spoken vaguely about moral views, without the much-needed discussion of those situations we find in novels where such views may be expressed. Through the character of Adam in The Golden Bowl we may come to appreciate certain virtues that James himself appreciates. We may likewise come to identify certain vices

through Candide's behavior that Voltaire abhors. The fact that James and Voltaire are able to present the moral climate in which their characters exist and make decisions would indeed seem to be a product of their acute perception and understanding. We are rightly awed at the genius of Dostoevsky in The Brothers Karamazov, or that of Beethoven in his fifth symphony. My intention is not to disassociate the author from the work, but only to clarify what problems exist in making certain claims regarding that relationship.

It is worth considering whether Nussbaum's use of the phrase "moral vision" is more descriptively applied to such works rather than the term "moral view," which may connote a sense of finality, and even suggest that an author is "reading from an external script." Even though Nussbaum's usage of "view" and "vision" are supposed to indicate one and the same, I want to explore this language to see whether there may not be an important distinction between them. Rather than claiming that James' main "achievement" lay in successfully conveying his own moral view or agenda in stories like The Golden Bowl, I think it more accurate to say that his realization lay in his ability to relate or convey his moral sensibility and wisdom through such stories. While the claim that novels convey the moral views of their authors is problematic, nevertheless Nussbaum's treatment of novels as expressions of moral insight and

growth is of immense value to philosophy.

My discussions in the next section are not extraordinary -- indeed, it is their very conventionality I wish to draw the reader's attention to. This is how we speak and write about fiction, fictional characters, and fictional events. It is this commonplace ability that, on occasion, both philosophers and literary critics attack (for reasons already discussed). While the works chosen are not fully representative of what literature has to offer philosophy, they do succeed in showing how literature incites, enriches, and prompts controversies in philosophy.

2. The Tree of Knowledge

It was one of the secret opinions, such as we all have, of Peter Brence that his main success in life would have consisted in his never having committed himself about the work, as it was called, of his friend Morgan Mallow.⁹

In this section I undertake an investigation of Henry James' "The Tree of Knowledge," focusing on those aspects of self-deception that can block moral knowledge and change. In the previous section, we discussed Nussbaum's use of the phrase "moral knowledge" as well. We found that her use of the phrase has two distinct definitions (I agreed only with the second). She argues first and foremost that the author "conveys" his own moral view through works of literature, using as an example the literary works of Henry James.

Second, she defends the claim that certain works of literature are candidates for truth. While we essentially agree about the role of fiction in philosophical discourse as a source of truth and insight, my use of the phrase "moral knowledge" is not meant to designate an author's relation to a particular moral view. It is only used in reference to her second and I think more powerful claim that literature is such a source.

It could be argued that the insights expressed in stories like The Golden Bowl and "The Tree of Knowledge" are indeed expressions of James' overall moral vision, and that his treatment of characters and their situations reveals that vision to us. But even if that were the case, we cannot then assume that such authors intend to express moral views in general. Such a proposition is really a leap of interpretation lacking sufficient grounds to establish its truth -- or, for that matter, its falsehood. As I have argued throughout this thesis, making epistemological claims regarding an author's intentions, beliefs, and disbeliefs, in addition to claims about possible moral views she or he might be said to hold, is deeply problematic.¹⁰

Rather than equate moral knowledge with an author's having successfully related a particular moral view, as Nussbaum does, I am concerned with those works of fiction (of which Nussbaum herself speaks) through which moral

knowledge, understanding, and insight find their "most appropriate articulation." As I also have claimed in this chapter, a work of literature such as "The Tree of Knowledge" may give us insight into those moral questions that James himself has considered and transformed by his moral imagination.

Despite certain concessions, Nussbaum does succeed in showing the relevance of literature in the consideration of some important moral questions. These questions, she suggests, have so far received little serious attention by the traditional, analytic philosophers. To approach fiction as Hare does, for instance, is to imply that a work such as "The Tree of Knowledge" contributes nothing new to philosophy. Nussbaum is clearly opposed to such thinking. Hence, I focus this discussion on the second, more defensible claim that a work of fiction can be a source of knowledge and insight. It is important to show how philosophical investigations of such stories as "The Tree of Knowledge" both support this claim and, at the same time, cast doubt upon the soundness of Hare's statement.

"The Tree of Knowledge" is about a family held together through a network of secrecy and self-deception: Morgan Mallow, a sculptor, lives in the "fond illusion" that he is a gifted sculptor; Mrs. Mallow supports her husband in this belief; Lance, the Mallows' only child, aspires to be an

artist like his father (though he is similarly lacking in talent); and Peter Brence, "without breathing it" to anyone, for years has been secretly in love with Mrs. Mallow while acting as family friend and godfather to Lance. Peter's peculiar function, as he envisions it, is to "keep up the game" in order to prevent the family (especially Mrs. Mallow) from ever learning that the "Master" (as Morgan is often referred to) is no genius at all. Whether Peter is being deceptive in not telling Morgan Mallow the truth remains to be shown. This is the first issue for consideration. What is transparent, however, is that his loyalties are primarily to Mrs. Mallow; and that all subsequent secrets, including the reason behind his attempts to keep their son from going away to art school, originate from this devotion:

He couldn't tell Mrs. Mallow -- or at least he supposed, excellent man, he couldn't -- that she was the one beautiful reason he had never married; anymore than he could tell her husband that the sight of the multiplied marbles in that gentleman's studio was an affliction of which even time had never blunted the edge.¹¹

Thus we are presented a world in which "scale had so strayed and lost itself" as to "form like the Mallows themselves" a flight from reality. But this flight confines itself to the immediate family, outside of which the truth lies in wait. The fact that the truth had never made its way into Carrara Lodge is viewed by Peter as a great "success." To impart the

truth, or to have its knowledge awakened, would risk the fragile situation with which he himself is covertly connected. Peter tries to dissuade Lance from going to Paris because of what would be revealed: namely, that the Master is really a "muff" of an artist. This knowledge, Peter assumes, would devastate Mrs. Mallow. However, Lance's departure, without his godparent's blessing, raises Mrs. Mallow's suspicions. She confronts Peter about his reservations: "Don't you believe in it?" Peter's response is that Lance would make a better "stockbroker" than artist. In Lance's defense, or perhaps in her own, Mrs. Mallow insists that "Passion is passion -- though of course indeed you, dear Peter, know nothing of that."¹² But Mrs. Mallow's enthusiasm for her son's artistic future is tantamount to her belief in his passion, the natural "heredity" he shares with the Master. Clearly the Mallows' conception of art is that it should be valued for its own sake; and that they had better be convinced of it, since the Master's work is no profitable enterprise:

They strained a point at times charmingly, strained it to admit that the public was here and there not too bad to buy; but they would have been nowhere without their attitude that the Master was always too good to sell.¹³

Thus, through self-deception, the Mallows have weathered the storms of "elections never won." We are then told that "twice a year regularly the Master believed in his fortune in addition to believing all year round in his genius." All

the while they lived in the opulence of what Mrs. Mallow herself brought to such a marriage: never having to "beg one's bread," to have lived a charmed life without the consequences that often inspire misfortune. They could afford the belief "that the Master was always too good to sell," even while facing an apathetic public. Thus they all indulge in what Mrs. Mallow refers to as their "quiet joy," even in the absence of success:

'...the comfort we have always (whatever has happened or has not happened) been able to trust ourselves to enjoy. The comfort,' the Master explained, leaning back in the pleasant lamplight and firelight, holding up his glass and looking round at his marble family, quartered more or less, a monstrous brood, in every room -- 'the comfort of art in itself!'¹⁴

The question of what it means to be a success, in the Mallows' sense of "success," is the very issue that Peter draws to their attention. He wants Lance to be successful: "I don't care what you call it when a fellow doesn't, but he must learn to sell." Indeed, while Lance is away at art school discovering first-hand his shortcomings as an artist, Mrs. Mallow insists that Peter is simply incapable of appreciating their "joy." Even when Peter inquires how he understands the term, Lance replies: "Well, to please oneself, I suppose."

Although Peter is in love with Mrs. Mallow, his life pales in comparison to her husband's. Instead, Peter's life is branded by a self-indictment that cannot but snuff out

passion:

A man who had reached fifty, who had escaped marriage, who had lived within his means, who had been in love with Mrs. Mallow for years without breathing it, and who, last but not least, had judged himself once and for all. He had so judged himself in fact that he felt an extreme and general humility to be his proper portion....¹⁵

Peter had long since resigned himself under the harsh light of self-scrutiny to a life of old books, old furniture, and old servants; in a word, to a life of complacency. Indeed, he can only take so much adventure; and it is perhaps on this score that the Mallows provide him "just the amount of going abroad he could bear." We hear that Peter used to write, though he had "never spoken in particular of that," maintaining what he considered the "right relation of fame to feebleness."¹⁶ Thus, Peter's self-judgment keeps him in what he perceives as his "proper" place. And as sometimes happens to such people, Peter takes on the role of critic: He professes to be "omniscient" with respect to the entire situation in which he himself is engaged.

Just as Morgan revels in "a vanity" that he is too good to sell, Peter also contents himself with his sense of omniscience, though one might question whether the knowledge he possesses is itself justification for his self-complacency. That he should be able to discriminate bad art from good, he thinks, serves him with just that "extra boost of impunity" he needs. But what Peter does not see is that

Mrs. Mallow loves the Master for his passion. She cares nothing for the recognition that comes with market success. Though Morgan lacks "fame," he has not judged himself so complacently. (This is why, in my view, Mrs. Mallow accuses Peter of being incapable of knowing their "joy.") Even though Morgan is a "muff" of an artist, his passion (to Mrs. Mallow's way of thinking) overrides "whatever has happened or has not happened." And it is the Mallows' "joy" (or what I consider to be their innocence) that Lance himself will never know because he has learned too much:

'I know now,' Lance said to him the next year, 'why you were so much against it.... Something rather awful has happened to me. It isn't so very good to know.'¹⁷

Upon this confession that Lance is not going to make it as an artist, or at least not the kind that will "sell," Peter's determination to keep Mrs. Mallow in the dark about her husband dovetails with his responsibility to his godson. How Peter handles the situation is truly, I think, a good example of what Nussbaum refers to as "improvisation." As the situation evolves from a state of innocence or ignorance (Kierkegaard claims they are the same), so must Peter also reevaluate his role with respect to these changes without appeal to some set of rules outside his present situation. Peter has a responsibility to Lance, but at the same time he wants to maintain the secret. His earlier efforts to keep Lance from going to art school were not only to keep him

from knowledge but to avoid having Lance meet the same fate his father has met. However, Lance does acquire self-knowledge:

And on this Lance had to explain -- how the upshot of his studies in Paris had inexorably proved a mere deep doubt of his means. These studies had so waked him up that a new light was in his eyes; but what the new light did was really to show him too much. 'Do you know what's the matter with me? I'm too horribly intelligent. Paris was really the last place for me. I've learnt what I can't do.'¹⁸

There is nothing about how Peter should respond, since there is no "external script" (as Hare might claim) to which he may refer, or to which James himself should have him refer. Peter is relieved by the advent of this "new light," but he is mortified at the thought of what consequences may emerge from this "hard truth." Hoping to avoid them, he compels Lance to make him promise that he would "sacrifice" anything than tell. According to Peter, the secret that they share must be kept at all costs, including his having to humbug before a self-deluded father. But in keeping that secret, Lance feels himself deeply compromised: "I'm a hopeless muff -- that I had to have rubbed in. But I'm not such a muff as the Master."¹⁹ What then is the nature of Lance's "sacrifice"? What are the boundaries between love for one's father and one's own integrity? How much does he "have to take" in order to protect his father from the truth? The "sacrifice" asked of Lance is to pretend to believe in his father's genius, and to act as if he does not know what in

fact he does know:

Lance had tears in his eyes when it came thus to letting his old friend know how great the strain might be on the 'sacrifice' asked of him. It wasn't so easy to continue humbugging -- as from son to parent -- after feeling oneself despised for not groveling in mediocrity. Yet a noble duplicity was what, as they intimately faced the situation, Peter went on requiring.²⁰

Peter's requirement of Lance is referred to as "noble duplicity," suggesting that to deceive someone with admirable intent is virtuous. But does this not seem to involve a contradiction? What is noble about deceiving others, even with their best interest in mind? Certainly philosophers like Kant and Aristotle speak of nobleness of character as a requisite for behaving virtuously. But how can "duplicity" be considered virtuous or noble? Lance, by contributing to the "fond illusion," must give up on truth. He pretends still to believe in the "peculiar line" that education had forced him to reconsider. The difficulty is in compromising his integrity (what he knows to be true) while enduring the Master's taunts:

But what did the Master, all aloft in his senseless fluency, know of impotence, and what vision -- to be called such -- had he in all his blind life ever had? Lance, heated and indignant, frankly appealed to his godparent on this score.²¹

The speech is delivered from a false wisdom regarding what his son should and should not do; "An infliction," says Lance, "heavier at last than, without striking back, or in

some way letting the 'Master' have the truth, flesh and bone could bear."²²

The phrase "noble duplicity" is of course an oxymoron. While philosophers speak of the "noble" as a necessary condition to achieving "the right ends," they spend more time addressing other virtues, such as temperance or prudence, for the cultivation of character; nobleness of character, in my view, generally has been taken for granted. Aristotle often acknowledges the "noble" as an essential quality of character, without which humans could not act towards "the right ends." And it is "the best of all ends to do what is noble." What I am arguing is that while philosophers presume nobleness of character, James' "The Tree of Knowledge" investigates its characters' actions and deliberations in light of nobleness. The reader is now compelled to reconsider the nature of the phrase "nobleness of character" and how it is used in the story. John Stuart Mill speaks of nobleness as intrinsically valuable, as an end in itself:

To suppose that life has no higher or better end than pleasure -- no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit -- they designate as utterly mean and groveling.²³

Certainly Lance feels that his father is groveling in mediocrity, something Lance wishes to avoid. Heavy thoughts these are, from a child about his parent, until Lance comes to learn that his mother has "always, always known," that

she let out to him, demanding no more of him than she herself was capable of. Lance, in turn, discovers that to appreciate pleasure in work is inherent in the process of "the work" itself. On this premise, the Mallows live their lives with the "quiet joy" they receive. Thus the noble is that which is inherently pleasurable and fits their conception of art and the way they live (to which, I think, both Aristotle and Mill would agree).

Nietzsche also considers nobleness of character (though he is critical of how the ancient Greeks use the expression) as a decisive element to self-actualization:

The noble man also helps the unfortunate but not -- or scarcely -- out of pity, but rather from an impulse generated by a superabundance of power.... He knows how to speak and how to keep silence.²⁴

Nietzsche's description captures an important aspect of Peter's character. He perceives that he is "omniscient" and, as such, has power. It is not power in the sense of abuse, but the power of one who has the ability to help the unfortunate, and who does so. Such is the case with Peter, who knows when to speak and when to keep silent in keeping the knowledge or truth from the Master. He has internalized the knowledge for the sake of their situation, "their fate," that he wants to see continue as before.

How "The Tree of Knowledge" manifests the rightness of Hare's comment about the nature of novels as "universal prescriptions" is certainly not evident. What general

principles has James invoked in his characters' response to one another, or in how the situation develops? When Nussbaum talks about the situations we find in novels, her emphasis is always on how characters relate to their predicament in ways not reducible to the mimicking of prescriptions -- situations, we recall, that she says do not come ready "with duty labels on them." Like Nussbaum, I argue that only by "responsible attentiveness" to this situation can we know whether Peter and Lance are right in "keeping up the game." How much harm comes about from keeping such secrets is not clear: If Peter is deceptive, then it would seem he has done something wrong. But it does not follow merely from the fact that one avoids telling the truth that one has also been deceitful. Certainly Peter's aim in concealing the truth is a noble one. He sees in the Mallows something of the noble, what he calls "the merit and the grace":

They were at all events deliciously formed, Peter often said to himself, for their fate; the Master had a vanity, his wife had a loyalty, of which success, depriving these things of innocence, would have diminished the merit and the grace. Anyone could be charming under a charm, and as he looked about him at a world of prosperity more void of proportion even than the Master's museum he wondered if he knew a pair that so completely escaped vulgarity.²⁵

While Morgan himself is not what we should regard as noble in character, insofar as he had deceived himself, the Mallows, in a strange way, are fortunate not to have market "success." Even though Peter could have wished it for Lance,

the Mallows themselves are unspoiled by such "base popularity." They still live in "a world of prosperity" -- a world that, had the Master sold, would be deprived of its innocence and grace. In this respect, Peter's aim is noble: In deceiving for a greater good (maintaining the Mallows' happiness), one sacrifices the truth for something better -- in this case, the family.

In the "Tree of Knowledge" we find several moral concepts: nobleness, loyalty, charm, duplicity, sacrifice, self-deception, and so on. James' accomplishment, though he may not have intended it, does embody a vision in putting these notions to the test vis-a-vis the Mallows' life. While philosophers take for granted these terms as either pejorative or commendatory, James shows through literature how complicated our understanding of them can become. Since to deceive is to undermine, I claim that Peter, Lance, or Mrs. Mallow have not deceived for deception's sake, or for any base motive.

"The Tree of Knowledge" offers a kind of counterexample or alternative that widens our traditional understanding of such concepts as the "noble," through his use of "noble duplicity." In this respect, Nussbaum is correct when she says that such notions or concepts receive their "most appropriate articulation" in literature. The story is then not a description of virtues or vices, but a vivid

presentation of them in use. James has thus added to an ongoing reflection about such subjects. Consequently, he has made what Nussbaum refers to as a "moral achievement" in having produced such a work.

So far this investigation should serve to illuminate some of the depth and variety of epistemological concerns and questions beyond what philosophy has to offer. As in "The Tree of Knowledge," these questions are entangled in their concreteness vis-a-vis the Mallow family. They are not made as explicitly as perhaps found in psychological or philosophical writings, but this should be viewed as an advantage and not as a liability. The story reveals insights relevant to a reader's own life that may (though not necessarily) have been inaccessible through, for instance, Aristotle. As Nussbaum says, "situations are always highly concrete" -- though of course Aristotle would agree.

I am not suggesting that a reader could not be brought to these same insights if she did not read "The Tree of Knowledge" but instead read Aristotle. As I emphasized early in this thesis, philosophy and literature are not in competition with one another, vying for insight and knowledge. Rather, I claim that "The Tree of Knowledge" is really a complement to Aristotle. More than that, it takes moral concepts, such as the "noble," to another level of discourse, as I think is evident in our exploration of

"noble duplicity." "The Tree of Knowledge" successfully illustrates the underlying seriousness that concealing knowledge has on others as well as on ourselves, and how it may then be or not be related to deceit.

However, James' story is not merely about the nature and consequence of different kinds of deception. It can be construed as an analysis of mediocrity, that sense of "one's impotence in the presence of a larger vision." Both Lance and Peter achieve self-awareness, and hence moral change. But Morgan Mallow is incapable of such an achievement, at least on his own. In the end, it is the unconditional love that the other characters have for him and each other that allows Morgan the pleasure of his "fond illusion."

In the next section, we investigate Voltaire's Candide in an ongoing consideration of the notion of self-deception as it relates to moral change, and how Candide's character contrasts with those we have so far observed.

3. Candide

'I still hold to my original views,' replied Pangloss, 'for I am still a philosopher. It would not be proper of me to recant, as Leibniz cannot be wrong; and besides, the pre-established harmony, together with the plenum and the materia subtilis, is the most beautiful thing in the world.'²⁶

Of the works under investigation in this thesis, Candide is perhaps the best example of what Nussbaum means

by a novelist conveying a "moral view." In this case, the moral view being presented is not that of Voltaire (which she allows for), but the "best of all possible worlds" of Leibniz. Voltaire undermines this view by conveying its defectiveness through satire.

In the previous section, we examined "The Tree of Knowledge" considering certain moral-epistemological questions, such as whether or not withholding the truth is always a form of deception, when the intentions behind it are "noble" (as argued earlier with respect to Peter and Lance). We then weighed carefully the questions regarding the nature of sacrifice and self-deception: While the latter is not necessarily harmful, it may lead to consequences involving certain sacrifices. This, as I argued, was the case with Morgan Mallow's belief in his genius, which forces his son to comply with the wishes of his godparent, which in turn causes Lance to compromise his integrity. I concluded that given Peter and Lance's situation, no deception occurred on their part. Even though they pretend not to know the truth (as Mrs. Mallow had known all along), no one attempts to undermine the Master. All the characters sacrifice truth for the benefits in which they all share by keeping the truth from the Master.

While there are any number of issues that Candide raises, I focus this discussion on questions concerning the

relationship between personal responsibility and moral knowledge, and how self-deception ultimately breaks that relationship. Although Candide is presented with several opportunities to have his theory discredited, he never takes any of them seriously; this, I claim, is due to zealousness. Even the deaths of a hundred men before his very eyes fails to prompt a moral change in him. In Candide's case (as with Morgan Mallow), the self-deception consists in the blind acceptance that he is in the possession of the truth, even when confronted with evidence to the contrary. However, in Morgan's case, vanity veils him from seeing the evidence, while Candide's veil is his own zealousness. Another important distinction exists between these cases. While Morgan Mallow believes in his genius in the face of an unappreciative public, he does not hurt anyone the way Candide most certainly does. Indeed, Morgan's family, including Peter Brence, even coddles that belief. The case is different with Candide, who has Martin and other traveling companions to challenge him, yet is left unscathed by their analysis.

In Candide, the title character experiences a series of adventures or misadventures under the influence of his philosophical mentor, Pangloss. Candide views all events, good and bad, as a reflection of a deterministic universe: Everything that happens must happen for the best. Even when

met by great atrocity, Candide concludes that things could not be otherwise -- including things such as the Baron's murder, for which he himself is personally responsible. But the notion of responsibility plays no role in Candide's thinking.

Candide rarely feels guilt or remorse, and when he does it is quickly defused by invoking Pangloss' Philosophy of Optimism. As Pangloss himself says, "It's the passion for maintaining that all is right when all goes wrong with us."²⁷ Although he has endured much ill in life, Candide never stops to reflect upon what he is doing or what he has done. Even at the end of the novel, when Pangloss recounts the past -- how one thing led to another, finally leading Candide to his present state -- Candide can only say, "That's true enough, but we must go and work in the garden."²⁸ His garden retreat in Eldorado, as well as the one in which we find him at the end of the novel, should have given him an opportunity to gain some insight and clarity into his life. Yet he clings to Pangloss' philosophical credo despite his disastrous experiences. Candide quite literally considers himself swept up by circumstances beyond his control, circumstances he claims could not have been otherwise.

It is in this respect that Candide's apprenticeship with the myopic Pangloss ultimately leaves him learning very

little about himself and life. In spite of that, some readers may claim that Candide has undergone a profound moral change. His travels, they say, have taught him something definite -- namely, retirement from the affairs of the world, and instead devotion to his garden. However, I stand against the claim that Candide has undergone some kind of change, other than losing his taste for adventure. We should not confuse travel-weariness with moral change.

What does traveling ever teach Candide? He discovers that Eldorado offers sanctuary, since his experiences of the world in general reveal only treachery and physical pain. "How much better off I should have been to stay in Eldorado, which seemed like Paradise," he says, "instead of this confounded Europe!" What he found in Eldorado was that the inhabitants treat each other well and believe in a benevolent God. There is no evil or violence, no consciousness of what lies in wait outside its mountain walls. Thus Eldorado is a safe world; better, thinks Candide, than his Europe:

Candide was delighted with all he had heard, and said to himself: 'this is quite different from Westphalia and the baron's mansion. If our friend Pangloss had seen Eldorado, he would not have kept saying that Castle Thunder-ten-tronckh was the loveliest house on earth; it shows that people ought to travel.'²⁹

The novel presents us with two kinds of worlds. There is the insufferable, hazardous world abroad, where people are tortured, raped, maimed, and mutilated; and there is

Eldorado, so insufferably boring that Candide is inspired to leave to make his fortune upon his return to Europe. But if Eldorado is indeed the "earthly paradise" that Candide claims it to be, then why does he leave -- only to retire at the story's end to his less-appealing garden? The world of that garden is inhabited by friends who have become grotesques, lacking eyes, noses, buttocks, and good looks. Cunégonde, his lady love, is especially disappointing; when at last they are reunited, she is ugly and crabby.

Eldorado folk, on the contrary, have neither suffered nor committed acts of violence of any kind; they are unaware and blissful, much like Morgan Mallow in "The Tree of Knowledge." As an Eldorado landlord admits, "I am an ignorant fellow and quite content to be so."³⁰ Candide also becomes a landlord as well. But for all his experiences, he is as ignorant as the inexperienced Eldorado landlord.

I am here concerned with whether Candide has really learned anything. At best, Candide is perpetually disappointed: in Eldorado, for its absence of mischief and challenge; and later, in his long-anticipated reunion with Cunégonde, for the loss of her beauty. His garden landlordship, as a metaphor, is really a fall into apathy. Candide is a far more odious character than the self-consciously ignorant Eldorado landlord.

I focus here on what I take to be an important aspect

of the story: Candide's inability to think for himself. Candide embraces a theory that this is a deterministic universe, in which human beings neither have control nor bear responsibility for the bad things that happen -- even those things they cause to happen. Consequently, Candide accepts the premise that since bad things always turn out to be for the best, they should not really be viewed as bad.

The story raises various questions, although not explicitly. Does such a view lead to amorality, as it seems to lead Candide? Candide thoroughly lacks all sense of responsibility for his actions. He fits every episode into the matrix of causality. He maps Pangloss' theory onto every event and, in so doing, views all that happens from afar, distancing himself from those things that happen to him. This, I claim, is a form of self-deception.

While some kinds of duplicity only affect the self-deceiver, Candide's self-deception harms others -- those he murders, for instance. In "The Tree of Knowledge," I have said that Morgan does not necessarily hurt anyone, despite Lance's fleeting befuddlement. But Candide can murder someone without hesitation or remorse. He also can pontificate about his love for Cunégonde, which amounts to mere fantasy and an idealization of a few nights in bed with her. He shows no capacity for self-reflection -- due, I claim, to the completeness of his self-deceit. For example,

soon after he thinks he has killed Cunégonde's brother, the Jesuit, Candide steals his clothing and runs off. Later, he talks to his traveling companion:

'How can you ask me to eat ham,' said Candide, 'when I have killed the Baron's son, and see myself condemned never to set eyes again on my lovely Cunégonde for the rest of my life? What is the use of prolonging my miserable existence, if I must drag out my days in remorse and despair at being banished from her presence? And what will the Jesuit periodicals say?' While giving vent to these melancholy reflections he was making a hearty meal.³¹

Then he recounts the people he has murdered:

He and Cacambo sat down to supper, and after they had cursed the Inquisitor of Portugal, the Governor of Buenos Aires, and the Baron, they both fell asleep on a mossy bank.³²

When the two wake up, they find themselves tied to a tree by savages who are about to boil them for breakfast. Candide tries to appeal to their humanity by insisting that Christians would never do such a thing to their "fellow-man." After convincing them that he is not really a Jesuit, whom they despise, and that he, in fact, just murdered a Jesuit, he and Cacambo are set free. Candide is beside himself with joy:

'What grand people they are!' he said. 'What fine fellows! And what a culture! If I had not been lucky enough to spit Lady Cunégonde's brother, I should infallibly have been eaten. When all is said and done, there is a sterling goodness in unsophisticated Nature; for instead of eating me, these people behaved most politely as soon as they learnt that I was not a Jesuit.'³³

Had he not killed the Jesuit, stolen his clothes, and assumed a Jesuitical identity, he would have avoided the likelihood of being eaten by his "fellow men." But he transforms the killing of the Jesuit into a strike of good fortune. Candide's blind embrace of the proposition "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" is among of the most frightening kinds of self-deception -- it not only affects those who are susceptible to its authority, but those who get hurt as a consequence of its being taken as authority.

The "Negro" whom Candide later encounters on his way to Surinam tells Candide of his master, Mr. Vanderdendur, who is responsible for his losing an arm and a leg. The man describes to Candide the details of his misfortune, having been sold by his own mother to the Dutch captain. Horrified with all that he heard and "with tears in his eyes," Candide suggests that perhaps this is not the best of all possible worlds after all. But Candide later hires this same Dutch captain without giving the "Negro" another thought. Had he indeed felt for this man's plight, he could have, without any inconvenience to himself, given him one small diamond from the vast fortune he had taken from Eldorado. Had he a conscience, he should never have employed the captain in the first place. It is this general disregard and insensitivity towards others that we see repeated again and again -- while

his crocodile tears freely flow -- demonstrating Candide to be utterly without conscience, and therefore irresponsible and incapable of real compassion.

In the scene that follows we learn that the Dutch captain weighs anchor without Candide, stealing his remaining red sheep and what was left of his fortune. After securing passage on another ship, Candide and his traveling companion, Martin, carry on a persistent discussion on the nature of moral and physical evil. But they are interrupted by the sound of two vessels engaged in battle. After hearing the death cries of "a hundred men" swallowed up by the sea, one of Candide's sheep is discovered swimming towards their ship. Candide learns that the captain of the sunken ship was the man who had robbed him:

'You observe,' said Candide to Martin, 'that crime is sometimes punished. That rogue of a Dutch captain has had the fate he deserved.'

'Yes,' said Martin, 'But why should the passengers have perished too? God has punished a scoundrel, but the devil has drowned the rest.'³⁴

Candide's failure is not comprehending what took place. As Nussbaum would say (as she did of Adam in Henry James' The Golden Bowl), "He is responsible for getting the detail of his context for the context it is." It is not as if Candide is never given the opportunity to reevaluate his views, such as when he decides to leave Eldorado, or when he is confronted with Martin's contrasting views. In spite of the fact that Martin is pessimistic about the world, he is not a

determinist. But Candide is so captivated by Pangloss' theory that it inhibits his capacity for independent reflection and understanding. His incapacity is not due to stubbornness -- as is the case with his mentor, Pangloss, who cannot recant his theory, because he knows as a philosopher that "Leibniz cannot be wrong." This is not self-deception but pigheadedness. Pangloss consciously chooses to maintain this theory simply for the fact that it is his theory. Pangloss' pride becomes his vice; not so with Candide, whose incapacity for independent thought is due to naiveté, or as I have also indicated, zealously.

Naiveté is understandable in youth, as well as in those who have been sheltered or isolated. But as Candide ages with the many ordeals he undergoes, he gains no wisdom from his experiences. How can this be? How can one sustain a theory when there is a preponderance of evidence to the contrary? The fact that he will not see the banality of that theory despite his experiences is the reason I stand by my claim that Candide's denseness, his incredible view of the world, is a form of self-deception.

Despite those differences we have discussed, Morgan Mallow comes closest to Candide: They are both blind to reality. Morgan believes in his genius, while Candide believes in Pangloss. But while Morgan may be self-deceived, it is not obvious that he hurts anyone. He sculpts and stays

put.

Of the characters we have so far discussed, Peter is the only one who acknowledges self-deceit. Perhaps his insistence on keeping the truth from Morgan was really a ploy to keep from himself the realization that Mrs. Mallow could never have loved him. So now we come to the question: What is involved in arriving at the realization that one has deceived oneself? We know that Peter comes to this realization in light of other pieces of knowledge. But for all of Candide's experience, he never questions the soundness of Pangloss' theory. What, then, is involved in acquiring self-knowledge? In the last section of this thesis, Leo Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata" may provide the necessary insight into this question.

4. The Kreutzer Sonata

[T]hey asked me at the trial with what and how I killed her. Fools! they thought I killed her with a knife on the fifth of October. It was not then I killed her, but much earlier, just as they are all now killing her, all, all...³⁵

In this section, I discuss Tolstoy's "The Kreutzer Sonata," in which the central character, Pozdnyshev, tells a group of passengers on an overnight train ride the story of how he came to murder his wife in a jealous rage. It is the story of his sexuality as a youth, as a married man, and then from the point of view of a murderer. He recounts his

past from the position of someone who has undergone a profound moral change, a change that only begins when he watches his wife die. With painful clarity he excavates past events, beginning with the loss of his virginity and ending with the murder. These two events, he thinks, are causally connected: When he lost his innocence, he simultaneously failed to see women as persons.

In Section 3, I described Candide as having dwelled in self-deception. But unlike Pozdnyshev, Candide never undergoes a moral change, even by the end of the novel. I then left our investigation with the question of how self-knowledge can be acquired. One important difference between Candide and Pozdnyshev is that while both commit murder, the former is never held accountable, while the latter goes to jail, where he has time to reflect:

When people say they don't remember what they do in a fit of fury, it is rubbish, falsehood. I remembered everything. There, during the eleven months I remained awaiting trial, I examined myself and my past, and understood it...³⁶

Pozdnyshev uses the time in jail to analyze his life, and what brought him to his present state. Candide, on the other hand, appears unable to make those kind of connections, despite the fact that Martin, and even Pangloss, try to make connections for him, however distorted and self-justifying they may be. The most he can say is, "That's true enough, but we must go and work in the garden."³⁷ What then is

involved in coming to a moral change? It cannot be the case that Candide lacks opportunities; as I have stressed, he had many. My contention is that insofar as Pozdnyshev assumes responsibility for what he has done, he has the capacity to have "understood it." It would appear that one cannot acquire self-knowledge without realizing one's own responsibility in the events that precipitate such knowledge. The series of events that followed what he thought was the murder of a Jesuit priest could have led Candide upon a path of reflection, terminating in self-knowledge.

The relationship between responsibility and the memory of one's actions figures significantly with respect to self-knowledge. At one point Pozdnyshev says, "Had I then known what I know now, everything would have been different. Nothing would have induced me to marry her.... I should not have married at all."³⁸ It is hard to imagine Candide coming to a conclusion of genuine regret; he certainly has reason to regret, but he does not do so. But Pozdnyshev realizes that his life has been one of self-deception:

Thus we lived in a perpetual fog, not seeing the condition we were in. And, if what did happen had not happened, I should have gone on living so to old age and should have thought, when dying, that I had led a good life. I should not have realized the abyss of misery and the horrible falsehood in which I wallowed.³⁹

As Pozdnyshev recounts the events leading to his wife's

murder, he brings to those events a scrutiny that can only come from a sincere effort of self-reflection. It is disputable whether Pozdnyshev's evaluation of marriage is correct. He nonetheless must be credited for his effort to examine his life thoroughly, and to arrive at conclusions from this examination. While it is true that the murder compels his moral deliberation, it is also important to recognize that his moral change depends upon the willingness to account for himself. By taking responsibility for what he has done, he makes such a change possible. Even when acquitted by the court, which said he was a wronged husband who responded in an understandable, even justifiable way, Pozdnyshev claims that this interpretation is inaccurate because it blames the woman for what he alone is responsible. He sees that he related to and treated his wife as if she were merely an object for his pleasure, and that the consequence of such treatment led to the violence he perpetrated. In his view, the murder is the inevitable consequence of a vile and immoral character, which was reflected not only in his relationship with his wife but in his relationships with women in general -- although prior to the murder he considered himself to be a decent sort of man:

I was a charming fellow and quite a moral man. I was not a seducer, had no unnatural tastes, did not make that the chief purpose of my life as many of my associates did. But I practiced debauchery in a steady, decent way for health's sake. I avoided women who might tie my hands by having a child or by attachment for me.

However, there may have been children and attachments, but I acted as if there were not. And this I not only considered moral, but I was even proud of it.⁴⁰

Before the murder, he says, he considered himself a "moral man"; to be sure, a good man. But after the murder, he comes to the conclusion that the relationship of men to women is fundamentally depraved and immoral. "Real debauchery," says Pozdnyshev, "lies precisely in freeing oneself from moral relations with a woman with whom you have physical intimacy."⁴¹ Only when sex is made into a commodity (like prostitution) is one relieved of any sense of moral obligation (which perhaps explains its long, historic popularity).

While Pozdnyshev carried on with such affairs, he was always on the lookout for a proper wife -- a virgin. In his view, entering into marriage as a partnership is impossible because the two people involved are not on a level playing field. This is why he concludes that the only way for women to be persons is for them to be abstinent. The institution of marriage itself is based on the premise that women should be owned through marriage. Men relate to women not as two subjects, but as subject to object. These reflections, of course, are not new. However, at the time Tolstoy wrote "The Kreutzer Sonata," the sentiments expressed by his character were at the very least against the norm. Pozdnyshev claims that marriages are fraudulent, since love, all love, really

amounts to profane love. He argues with the passengers:

'Spiritual affinity? Identity of ideals!...' 'But in that case why go to bed together? (Excuse my coarseness!) Or do people go to bed together because of the identity of their ideals?' ... 'First you say that marriage is based on love, and when I express a doubt as to the existence of a love other than sensual, you prove the existence of love by the fact that marriages exist. But marriages in our days are mere deceptions!' ⁴²

"The Kreutzer Sonata" is a poignant condemnation of marriage as a form of deception for both parties. The narrative analysis provides both descriptions and arguments to support claims made about the nature of jealousy, marriage, their inherent contradictions, and how these constitute an oppression against women in the society in which he lived. According to Pozdnyshev, the institution of marriage is thought to assume a lofty, spiritual dimension apart from physical love -- a dimension that he claims does not exist. There is only physical love. It is no wonder that his rejection of marriage is, at the same time, a denial of what he refers to as "poetic love." When a person is reduced to an object, respect disappears, as it did when Pozdnyshev lost his virginity. While an object may be praised or worshipped, it cannot be respected as an equal. For this reason, marriages either self-destruct, as his did, or a couple lives onto death in "dissoluteness."

We were like two convicts, hating each other and chained together, poisoning one another's lives and trying not to see it. I did not then know that

ninety-nine percent of married people live in a similar hell to the one I was in, and that it cannot be otherwise. I did not then know this either about others, or about myself.⁴³

Pozdnyshev tries to make sense of the murder by examining the social contradictions that contributed to it. Men are given license to participate in all kinds of debauchery, while the women they seek to marry must exemplify purity. According to Pozdnyshev, these fundamental inequalities define marriage as an oppressive institution in which men are not generally held to the same standard of "moral perfection"⁴⁴ as women. In this sense, Pozdnyshev is a determinist who recognizes that "it cannot be otherwise." But while most readers can identify with Pozdnyshev's jealousy (having grown up with many of the double standards addressed in his analysis), we are not all driven to kill our wives. What then is unique about the nature of jealousy that would motivate murder? There is nothing peculiar about it, according to Pozdnyshev -- except that, in his case, it became particularly overwhelming: "Fury, too, has its own laws."⁴⁵

The jealousy initially began when his wife followed the doctor's advice not to breast-feed their first child. The idea that she could so easily turn away from this natural obligation to her baby brings Pozdnyshev to the thought that she could just as easily turn from her obligation to him. Equating her adherence to the doctor's orders as an

adulterous intent, the "fury" then begins. After they stop having children, his wife (we are never told her name) takes to playing the piano to the accompaniment of a young violinist, with whom she habitually practices. Pozdnyshev, who is mean and ill-tempered by this point, becomes increasingly impatient over their friendship. He describes his state as kindred to "a bottle held upside down from which water does not flow because it is too full."⁴⁶

While it is never clear that she has any sexual relation with the violinist, or even interest (other than for the companionship absent in her marriage), the possibility that she could have wanted to have such a relation is itself perceived by Pozdnyshev as adultery. Even in the absence of evidence to the contrary, Pozdnyshev begins to treat her as though she has committed the act. When he travels out of town, his mistrust becomes fully realized. He recalls a party at which the two played together:

Only then did I remember their faces that evening when, after the Kreutzer Sonata, they played some impassioned little piece ... impassioned to the point of obscenity. 'How dared I go away?' I asked myself, remembering their faces. Was it not clear that everything had happened between them that evening? Was it not evident already then that there was not only no barrier between them, but that they both, and she chiefly, felt a certain measure of shame after what had happened?⁴⁷

The adultery, as he envisions it, expresses itself through the music. He also conjectures that she felt a "certain

measure of shame after what had happened." Though his wife may never have done so, it was enough for Pozdnyshev that she could have conceived to do so. The fact that she could desire someone other than her husband, not that she actually did, showed itself as the decisive evidence of her failure and unwillingness to meet Pozdnyshev's expectation of moral perfection. In this respect, he considers her defiant. Pozdnyshev's interpretation of events is the primary impetus not only for his intense hostility, but for the violence that follows. Whether she had an affair is irrelevant, as Pozdnyshev himself admits; that she could play music like that with another man is tantamount to an affair. It means she could have a self-identity outside their marriage, even a professional as well as emotionally gratifying friendship. This friendship is for Pozdnyshev an assertion of her independence -- comparable to a slave demanding emancipation, which as a slave-owner he found intolerable.

After he reflects upon that fateful evening, conceiving it as a real act of infidelity, he then briskly returns home a day early and finds them eating dinner together. He thinks, "No, she is not a human being. She is a bitch, an abominable bitch!"⁴⁸ He then stabs her to death. Of all the emotional states, jealousy is shown as one of most complex:

Real jealousy is tormenting but it has, and promises a result; but I am speaking of unconscious jealousy which inevitably accompanies every immoral marriage, and which, having no definite cause, has also no end.⁴⁹

If Pozdnyshev is right about the immorality of marriage, then to understand the murder one must also understand the driving forces that brought about his jealousy. As he has perceived, Pozdnyshev's unconscious jealousy knew no boundaries, and is as much a product of "every immoral marriage" as the "spiritual ideals" are. What is unusual about Pozdnyshev is that he is able to trace and discover the sociopolitical parentage of his jealousy: a jealousy founded in property ethics that regards women as objects, "That abyss of error in which we live regarding women and our relations to them..."⁵⁰ He continues:

The enslavement of women lies simply in the fact that people desire, and think it good, to avail themselves of her as a tool of enjoyment.⁵¹

In Pozdnyshev's examination of society, he discovers the magnitude of violence that exists towards women -- how its own institutions subtly structure this abuse, and how men in turn become criminals, as he so became. However, Pozdnyshev does undergo, as he himself refers to it, a radical "moral change."⁵² "I am a ruin, a cripple. Still I have one thing in me I know! Yes, that is true, I know what others are far from knowing."⁵³ As an inference from this fact, he converts to a life of celibacy -- the only solution, he says, to the problem between the sexes.

Candide, on the other hand, never considers himself a criminal, in spite of the fact that he murders. Rather, he

lives a banal, wasteful, and unthinking life. We certainly never could expect someone such as Candide to reflect upon his experiences in any meaningful sense, and to take responsibility for his actions. Candide displays a kind of moral amnesia, such as when he weeps for the "Negro" but promptly forgets him, even to the detriment of his own fortune. Pozdnyshev, on the other hand, exhibits the opposite: "My eyes have been opened and I have seen everything in quite a different light."⁵⁴

This discussion perhaps raises more questions than it answers. I have concentrated only on certain aspects of the story as it relates to those we have already examined. The primary question explored here is this: What is involved in Pozdnyshev's moral change, and what does it reveal about that kind of change? Why is it that Pozdnyshev is able to see the "light," but not Candide? The reason, as I have argued, lies precisely in the recognition of one's own agency. Sartre asserts that even if we kill someone in a jealous rage, we are responsible for our passion. Contrary to Pozdnyshev, Candide's thinking is obscured by his apparent inability to seriously consider alternatives to his initial teachings. What prevents Candide from seeing the "light" (that both Lance and Pozdnyshev speak of) is his fanatical commitment to Pangloss' philosophy. When people become overzealous they stop listening, as in the case of

some political or religious extremists.

When Nussbaum speaks of "responsible attentiveness" to a situation, we may think not of *Candide* but certainly of *Pozdnyshev*. We should credit Tolstoy for having understood how such "responsible attentiveness" can be a factor in bringing a person to insight about herself, and hence to a change in her moral nature. To that end, I think Nussbaum is correct in calling such works of literature a "moral achievement" by the author. However, I stand by my original reservation: Referring to such works as moral achievements in general attributes intentions to their authors without sufficient grounds for doing so. But certainly Nussbaum is right in opposing Hare. There is no reason to suggest that *Pozdnyshev* (nor Tolstoy for that matter) has invoked rules or prescriptions, or that the story itself is a universal prescription. "*The Kreutzer Sonata*" is an investigation of the intricacies, inequities, and disparities in relationships between men and women. Although I have only focused on the issue of moral change and responsibility, the story raises other social and political issues worthy of much attention.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated certain problems

and aspects of the relationship between knowledge and morality, in what I have termed "moral epistemology." We have reviewed three works of literature that have dealt with a number of issues: How does one come by self-knowledge? What prevents or blocks understanding? Are there different kinds of deception, as in the case of Peter's "noble duplicity"? And what is the role of responsibility in acquiring insight?

From the literature we have discussed, we have seen how the moral lives of several characters erode with varying kinds of self-deception. There are those cases that have minimal repercussions or consequences. In "The Tree of Knowledge," I claimed that while Morgan's self-deception certainly had an effect on the family, he did them no real harm. On the other hand, I claimed that in Candide the main character's thesis of Optimism directly interferes with his capacity to self-reflect, and thus induces and advances the atrocities detailed throughout the novel. I also claimed that, like Morgan Mallow, Candide undergoes no moral change. He fails to critically think about the moral relationship between himself and the world to which he indiscriminately applies his universal prescription. However, in "The Tree of Knowledge," both Lance and Peter gain insight into themselves as well as others; in turn, that knowledge deepens their understanding and appreciation for their

family. Likewise, Pozdnyshev, in "The Kreutzer Sonata," is morally changed by the knowledge acquired about himself and the society in which he dwells. And even though sexism did not at that time exist in name, it existed nonetheless in fact. Then, too, Pozdnyshev's unrelenting examination of his past reflects an integrity that is a form of humility, a quality of character lacking in *Candide* and *Morgan Mallow*. In the end, though, it is only Pozdnyshev, Peter, and Lance who are morally redeemed.

I have argued that fiction provides philosophers with more than mere examples and counter-examples of varying philosophical positions and perspectives, vices and virtues (though it may certainly serve that purpose as well). More importantly, I have argued that literature can provide fictional alternatives for reflecting upon both moral and epistemological questions, which are uniquely expressed through the medium of fiction. As Nussbaum claims, in fiction we find the "most appropriate articulation" of ethical inquiry, progress, and achievement that in turn renders "ethical truth and insight."

In Section 1, I discussed Martha Nussbaum's moral view of literature, in which I challenged her claim that an author such as Henry James conveys through literary works his response to Aristotle's question, "How we should live?" I gave varying arguments against this claim, though

suggesting that perhaps the term "moral vision" would better suit that purpose. As I have maintained throughout this investigation, making inferences about what authors hold to be true or not true is slippery. I was likewise critical of Nussbaum having confined herself to Aristotle's question and no other. I claimed that in so doing she narrows her understanding of literature, much the way Hare does when he refers to novels as "universal prescriptions." In the end, however, I have attempted to support Nussbaum in the claim that fiction can, in significant ways, contribute to philosophical discourse. It offers insight into moral concepts (as in the cases we have reflected upon) by concentrating on the nuances of concrete individual situations.

Notes

1. Diamond, "Martha Nussbaum," 131.
2. In addition to Nussbaum's discussions of Hare's view of literature, Iris Murdoch and Cora Diamond also have found problems with his position.
3. From Diamond's discussion in "Martha Nussbaum."
4. In "Literature and the Moral Imagination," Nussbaum distinguishes between moral agents who follow rules or imperatives, and those who are instead engaged within a creative process she calls "improvisation" in dealing with moral behavior.
5. Nussbaum, "Literature and the Moral Imagination," 178-9.
6. Ibid., 179.
7. Ibid., 179-80.
8. Ibid., 180.
9. Henry James, "The Tree of Knowledge," in The Turn of the Screw and Other Short Stories, ed. John Felstiner (New York: Scholastic Book Service, 1966), 222.
10. In reference to earlier discussions we have had about "Suspension of Disbelief": Searle, Walton, etc.
11. James, "The Tree of Knowledge," 223.
12. Ibid., 227.
13. Ibid., 232.
14. Ibid., 233.
15. Ibid., 222.
16. Ibid., 224.
17. Ibid., 235.
18. Ibid., 236.

19. Ibid., 237.
20. Ibid., 241.
21. Ibid., 240.
22. Ibid., 241.
23. John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," in Twenty Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy, 2nd ed., ed. G. Lee Bowie, Meredith W. Michaels, and Robert C. Solomon (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 597.
24. Fredrich Nietzsche, "The Natural History of Morals," in Twenty Questions, 603-4.
25. James, "The Tree of Knowledge," 232-3.
26. Voltaire, Candide, in Candide on Optimism, ed. John Butt (New York: Penguin Books, 1947), 136.
27. Ibid., 86.
28. Ibid., 144.
29. Ibid., 80.
30. Ibid., 77.
31. Ibid., 68-9.
32. Ibid., 70.
33. Ibid., 72.
34. Ibid., 93-4.
35. Leo Tolstoy, "The Kreutzer Sonata," trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude, in The Great Short Works of Leo Tolstoy (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 382.
36. Ibid., 428.
37. Voltaire, Candide, 144.
38. Tolstoy, "The Kreutzer Sonata," 428.
39. Ibid., 393.

40. Ibid., 364.
41. Ibid., 365.
42. Ibid., 362.
43. Ibid., 394.
44. Ibid., 369.
45. Ibid., 423.
46. Ibid., 406.
47. Ibid., 414.
48. Ibid., 420.
49. Ibid., 438.
50. Ibid., 365.
51. Ibid., 385.
52. Ibid., 424 ("in prison when the moral change had taken place").
53. Ibid., 388.
54. Ibid., 365.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have offered several discussions on insight, "suspension of disbelief," truth, and intention; and within each, several sub-discussions. In addition, all the issues raised investigate the relationship between truth and fiction as their common denominator.

In the second chapter, I discussed both the reader's and author's part concerning "suspension of disbelief" and "pretending." I claimed that no understanding of "pretending" is congruous with what authors do when they write, nor with what readers do when they read. I also claimed that notions such as the "suspension of disbelief" and various linguistic concerns about fiction ultimately take us away from where our attention ought to be directed: to the literature itself. The ontological and epistemological problems that Plato, Russell, Searle, Walton, et al., have with respect to literature may be trivial in the final analysis. But I claimed that it was necessary to address them so that I could proceed with an investigation of literature unhindered by such concerns.

Questions arise concerning the beliefs of authors. Was

she "pretending" to make statements and assertions, or really making them? Would she be committed to the truth of things said in her novels? Or was she merely playing a game of make-believe that we, as readers, either consciously (as Walton suggests) or unconsciously (as Searle maintains) take part in? Such questions are firmly epistemological, in that they ultimately raise issues regarding the validity of literature: what knowledge a reader can or cannot acquire. The philosophers and critics that we have discussed often draw distinctions about what authors really know when writing fiction and pretend to think when writing, along with what readers really know and pretend to think when reading. These are judgments that indicate a sharp yet artificial distinction between truth and fiction. But I have tried to show that none of these questions are applicable to writing or reading fiction.

In the third chapter, I provided readings of various works and attempted to show how literature can give us knowledge and insight into certain philosophical issues, i.e., by being attentive to the lives of people dealing with these issues. I also asked whether we can learn from fiction, how can it help us in addressing problems and issues in philosophy. Some of the consequences raised in these discussions concern the nature of deception in its varying forms, involving, for example, self-knowledge,

responsibility, and knowledge kept from others and from oneself. I used the term "moral epistemology" in order to distinguish my view from Nussbaum's, who also speaks of moral knowledge. But she focuses directly upon the activity of the novelist, upon what she claims to be an author's "moral achievement" as the expression of the author's moral view. I concentrated on the activities and deliberations of the characters themselves, and whether or not they achieved moral change.

In "The Tree of Knowledge," I asked whether it was wrong for Peter to have kept the knowledge about Lance's father to himself. Was it deceptive? I claimed that it was not, on account of what was referred to as Peter's (and Lance's) "noble duplicity." That Peter and Lance should grow closer to one another, having learned the truth about themselves and each other, shows that knowledge and self-understanding have the potential to produce a moral change. Lance and Peter change with respect to what they have learned. Lance will not follow in his father's footsteps and live a life of self-deception, and Peter comes to understand better the nature of his own motivations for keeping the truth to himself.

Pozdnyshev, in "The Kreutzer Sonata," changes as well. Upon his exhaustive self-examination, after the murder of his wife, he gives the reader an odd, although profound,

appreciation of the nature of jealousy, its causes, and its repercussions in the relationships between the sexes.

Pozdnyshev snaps out of a long-lived life of self-deception by realizing the role of responsible reflection in moral change.

Regarding Voltaire's Candide, because of the title character's inability for self-reflection, I claimed that he never matures the way Pozdnyshev does. As a consequence, he never takes responsibility for what he does in any meaningful way. But in all our cases we are appraising the moral nature of these characters. Such literature in turn helps to ground our thinking about such things as deception, self-deception, and knowledge, by providing specific situations in which these issues arise or could likewise arise for us.

But how does such an inquiry serve the student of philosophy? One of the differences (though of course there are others) between philosophy and literature is that in the former we try to determine what, for example, Aristotle and Kant intend to say in their writings. In literature we are directed, especially in certain kinds of works (such as Candide), to philosophical questions and issues which may reveal the adequacy or inadequacy of a particular moral view. Or as I have been most anxious to suggest, in both "The Tree of Knowledge" and "The Kreutzer Sonata" we are

directed to an appreciation of virtues such as nobleness of character and to a recognition of how assuming responsibility for one's actions can be connected to moral knowledge and moral change.

I have tried to reflect in these pages the spirit of conversations I have had in common with friends and colleagues about truth and fiction. Some have claimed that mine is a skeptical thesis. Indeed, I am very skeptical about postulates that suggest that we can know what authors of fiction are themselves intending to assert in their literary works. But while I am skeptical about what is concluded from attempting to interpret the intentions of a given author, I am confident in the reader's capacity to learn from literature and to relate what she learns to questions in philosophy -- perhaps then gaining a deeper comprehension and understanding for those problems and themes found in both.

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