

Emotional Imagining and Our Responses to Fiction

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May 3, 2010

Discussions about imagining normally concentrate on the imaginative counterparts of perception and judgemental thought (or occurrent belief). Other forms of imagining — such as daydreaming, or the imaginative counterparts of bodily sensations and episodes of emotion or desire — are less often considered.¹ In this article, I aim to develop an account of emotional imagining as a specific instance of object imagining and, more specifically, experiential imagining. According to this view, emotional imagining consists in non-propositionally imagining the instantiation of the phenomenal character of an episode of emotion. I motivate this account in response to the theories of Kendall Walton and Richard Moran. Walton's view stays too unspecific about the nature of emotional imagining when it matters; and my own account may be understood as supplementing Walton's by rendering it more specific. Moran's theory, on the other hand, is in conflict with both my own view and that of Walton's; and I argue that it should be given up in favour of the latter.

Both Walton and Moran discuss the connection between imagination and emotion in the context of our responses to representational media. Both pictures and texts, and possibly also pieces of music and other artefacts, portray fictional or — in the case of didactic stories or thought experiments — hypothetical worlds. One thing that is particularly interesting about our engagement with such works is that it need not be concerned with real persons, situations or events to help us to acquire knowledge about reality. Reading about the adventures of a fictional character, being confronted with a potential dilemma or envisaging a new possibility may enable us to gain theoretical or practical insights into the actual nature of ourselves and of aspects of the world. In the aesthetic and the moral cases, these types of engagement with representations of fictional or hypothetical worlds and the resulting instances of knowledge acquisition are often accompanied or facilitated by emotional responses. Some of these responses constitute episodes of real emotion, while others amount to instances of the affective imagination. The latter are therefore relevant for both aesthetics and ethics.²

¹White (1990), O'Shaughnessy (2003), McGinn (2004) and Currie and Ravenscroft (2003) are recent examples of this kind of limited focus.

²The consideration of hypothetical scenarios is also central to science and theoretical philosophy and, to

Although the subsequent considerations are focussed exclusively on our aesthetic engagement with representations of fictional worlds, they should equally apply to our moral assessment of hypothetical situations.

The central disagreement between Walton and Moran is about whether instances of the affective imagination involve emotional elements as part of their content or as part of their manner (or mode) of representation. I side with Walton on this issue and argue that what is characteristic of emotional imagining is that it consists in the imagination of an emotional feeling. The main challenge to this view is that this does not obviously suffice for the respective imaginative episodes to count as affective (rather than, say, cognitive and dispassionate).³ While Walton remains silent on this issue, I propose a way of how it may be successfully addressed — whether as an integral part of his view, or entirely independently of it.

The article is divided into five sections. In the first, I outline the puzzle of fiction, in response to which Walton and Moran have developed their views of the affective imagination. The second section is devoted to Walton's theory of our emotional engagement with representational art, and to the already noted challenge which this theory faces. In the third and the fourth section, I critically discuss Moran's alternative view and, especially, his distinction of emotional imagining from other forms of imagining in terms of an affective manner of representation. The fifth and last section presents my own account of emotional imagining. I aim to show that it is capable of answering the challenge raised by proposing that occurrences of emotional imagining count as affective precisely because they are representations of emotions — namely non-propositional and experiential representations of the affective character of emotions.

1 The puzzle of fiction

It is an uncontroversial — and as such unproblematic — fact that, when we watch movies or read novels, we often become emotionally involved. Part of these emotional responses are centred on the works themselves. The latter captivate, excite or bore us and thereby move us to continue or, alternatively, stop our engagement with them. These reactions, which

some extent, also to theology and religion. We invent or use stories and models, say, when attempting to make sense of the structure of atoms, or the nature of the universe. In the case of faith, this is likely to involve emotional episodes as well; in the case of scientific or metaphysical investigation, on the other hand, probably less so.

³I assume here that the difference between affective and non-affective mental episodes (e.g., between episodes of felt jealousy or joy and episode of perception and belief) is subjectively salient; but not that we have any detailed grasp of the nature of this difference. It does not seem implausible to describe the phenomenal character of emotional episodes by reference to values and, in particular, the feature of having a valence (i.e., being either a positive or a negative experience). But nothing in what follows depends on this or any other specific claim about what it means for an episode to count as affective.

form part of our aesthetic experience of the works concerned, are clearly genuine instance of emotion. Moreover, they also occur in the case of non-representational artworks or aesthetic objects in nature and are therefore not concerned with the fictional story told by the movies or novels in question (though of course the story still has an influence on whether, and how, we enjoy the latter). In particular, the question whether these responses are directed at aspects of the fictional world portrayed does not arise: they are clearly focussed on the artworks themselves. Hence, they are not of interest for our current discussion.

However, our emotional involvement with representational art may also involve elements that are more directly related to the fact that the works are representational and present us with a specific fictional world. Indeed, we do not find it inadequate to describe affective experiences of this second kind in terms of the fictional content of the artworks. For instance, we say that we ‘rejoice or suffer with the characters’ or ‘hope or regret the occurrence of certain events’ within the story. The debate about the nature of our emotional responses to representational art focusses on these reactions and asks whether they indeed amount to genuine emotions directed at fictional entities. What is at issue is thus whether our descriptions of these responses are to be understood literally, or instead in a different manner — say, as statements about what it is fictionally true about ourselves and our engagement with the fictional worlds (cf. Walton (1990)). But both sides accept that our appreciation of representational art involves emotional elements that are concerned with — and cannot be understood without reference to — particular aspects that characterise the represented fictional worlds (cf. Walton (1990, 1997) and Moran (1994)). Here is a nice quote from Walton describing an example of the kind of reaction at issue (denying, in the process, that it constitutes an emotion directed at fictional entities):

‘Charles is watching a horror movie about a terrible green slime. He cringes in his seat as the slime oozes slowly but relentlessly over the earth, destroying everything in its path. Soon a greasy head emerges from the undulating mass, and two beady eyes fix on the camera. The slime, picking up speed, oozes on a new course straight toward the viewers. Charles emits a shriek and clutches desperately at his chair. [...] Charles’s condition is similar in certain obvious respects to that of a person frightened of a pending real-world disaster. His muscles are tensed, he clutches his chair, his pulse quickens, his adrenaline flows. Let us call this physiological -psychological state quasi-fear. [...] Afterwards, still shaken, he confesses that he was ‘terrified’ of the slime.’ (Walton (1990): 196)

Quasi-emotions like this are real affective episodes in our mental lives. They have genuine emotions (e.g., fear) as their counterparts and resemble them in various significant respects. First of all, they are similar to genuine emotions in their involvement of emotional feelings

and emotion-related physiological events. Charles's experience is, from his subjective point of view, very similar to an experience of genuine fear — notably in that it involves a similar kind of unpleasantness and makes him aware of similar bodily changes.⁴ But quasi-emotions resemble genuine emotions also in being triggered by the same mechanisms. Both types of emotional response are partly due to dispositions to react affectively and physiologically to certain mental representations — whether they are perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, or imaginings. Just as the recognition of the real danger presented by an approaching lion is crucial to the occurrence of genuine fear, the recognition of the fictional danger presented by an approaching slime is crucial to the occurrence of a fear-like quasi-emotion. This explains why it matters for our emotional responses to artworks whether they are representational and, if so, what it prompts us to imagine to be part of the represented fictional world.

However, there is a long tradition of taking emotional reactions like these to be puzzling. At the heart of the respective discussions has been the so-called 'paradox of fiction' which can be formulated in the form of a triad of jointly inconsistent claims:⁵

(a) We have real emotions towards what we take to be fictional characters or situations.

(b) At least in some cases, real emotions are constitutionally dependent on belief in the reality of the relevant entities.

(c) We do not believe in the reality of what we take to be fictional entities.

This paradox possesses considerable initial force. When watching a horror movie or reading a tragedy, we undergo emotional experiences and physiological changes which are very similar to those involved in real life cases of fear or pity. Moreover, we are inclined to say that we 'fear the monster' or 'pity the heroine'. So there seems to be good reason to take our statements

⁴Of course, his overall experience of the movie is pleasurable. Otherwise, he would stop watching the movie in order to get rid of it. But his overall pleasure is compatible with — and surely partly due to — the fact that there is something unpleasant and discomforting about seeing the slime on the screen seemingly moving towards him.

⁵See the chapters in Hjort and Laver (1997), and especially Levinson (1997). Walton allows for the possibility of emotions which do not presuppose any kind of belief, but still stresses we cannot have emotions towards something that is merely imagined (cf. Walton (1990): 245). The puzzle may also be formulated in terms of belief in certain relevant propositions, or in terms of belief in the existence of the entities in question. The first condition is more specific than the other two (i.e., it implies, but is not implied, by the latter) and is not required in all cases. Fearing something may presuppose believing it to be dangerous, but hoping for something does not presuppose any belief (in particular, we may be agnostic about whether the hoped-for state of affairs has already been realised). The second condition can allow for emotions directed at the past or the future only if 'existence' is understood as denoting reality, that is, actuality. Besides, emotions may be said to be dependent, not on what we believe to be real or existent, but what in fact is real or existent (cf. externalism about thought contents).

literally and ascribe to us emotions towards fictional characters, situations, events, and so on. However, genuine fear or pity also appear to require us to believe that the respective objects exist as part of reality. When we think that there is really no lion in the room, it seems impossible for us to genuinely fear one. However, when we watch movies or read tragedies, we usually do not take the represented characters and events to be real (unless we are concerned with some historical or biographical works). Hence, we typically lack the belief that they exist as part of reality. And it therefore becomes puzzling why we none the less seem to react with something like an emotion of fear or pity to these fictional entities.

The described problem of emotions towards fiction has been widely debated, and many different solutions to it have been proposed. The claims (a), (b) and (c) are jointly inconsistent. Similarly, (c) should be accepted as a fact about our normal psychology — if not even as a claim about our ordinary conception of what fictional entities are. Of course, there may be cases of people who believe in the reality of fictional entities and develop real emotional feelings towards them (e.g., when they fall in love with a character of a telenovela). But it is doubtful that they then conceive of the objects of their emotions as fictional. And if they do, their response becomes even more problematic. In any case, it suffices for the presence of a paradox if (c) is true of our normal engagement with fictions.

This leaves two broad strategies of how to deal with the puzzle. The first is to deny (a). This means insisting that no genuine emotion involved in our engagement with fiction can be directed at fictional characters or events; and that no response to the latter can constitute an emotion, even if it may resemble one in certain important aspects. The main reason for such a view is to stress the cognitive element present in emotion: they are concerned with how reality is like and therefore require a specific take on the latter (cf., e.g., Walton (1990)). Perhaps proponents of this answer are also prepared — or forced — to accept the additional claim that we are in some sense wrong or irrational to treat our emotion-like responses to fictional entities as if they were genuine emotions.

The second option is to reject (b). This may be done for several reasons. For instance, it may be claimed that imagining the reality or existence of objects — rather than believing in it — may already suffice for having emotions towards those objects (cf. Moran (1994)). Or it may be assumed that there are two fundamentally different kinds of emotion, one exclusively directed at real entities and the other exclusively at fictional ones; and that (b) applies only to the first, but not the second kind. Or, finally, it may be maintained that (b) does not express a constitutional dependence, but merely a rational requirement, so that it is still possible — albeit irrational — to have emotions without belief (cf. Radford (1975)). Again, the denial of (b) may (have to) be accompanied by the postulation of a systematic form of irrationality inherent to our responses to fiction, in this case concerning the fact that it is in some sense unreasonable to feel emotions towards entities which we do not take to be real.

At least, to respond with fear seems to be more suitable when one perceives or believes a lion to be in the room than when one merely visualizes or imagines it to be there — just as there is something irrational about fearing real spiders which one takes to be completely harmless (cf. Goldie (2000) and Dorsch (2007)).

This is not the place to settle the debate between the two approaches. Our concern is with the nature of affective imagining, and not with the nature of our emotional responses towards representational artworks and the fictional worlds that they portray. But since both Walton and Moran — the first of whom rejects (a), and the second (b) — develop their views on affective imagining in the context of this debate, it is worthwhile to a look a bit closer on their views on how we react emotionally to representational art.

2 Walton's account of the affective imagination

Walton maintains that Charles's real and affective experience of quasi-fear alone does not suffice for genuine fear (cf. Walton (1990): 196). What is missing, according to him, are the right kind of accompanying beliefs and action tendencies.⁶ Charles does not believe in the existence or danger of the slime, and he does not run away or shout for help. Instead, he merely imagines the presence of the slime and desires to stay where he currently is. Some of his more basic, instinctive inclinations (e.g., to freeze or to grab hold of the person next to him) may still be the same as in a case of genuine fear. But on the level of intentional agency, the two experiences involve with very different motivational profiles. Walton therefore concludes that Charles is not really frightened by the fictional slime, given that his reaction lacks certain characteristic aspects of such a fear.

This does not necessarily prevent quasi-emotions from sometimes constitute real emotions, together with some respective beliefs and action tendencies. For instance, when watching a battle scene in a war movie, our quasi-fear may combine with — or even be partly brought about or intensified by — our belief that a friend of us is actually in a very similar situation right now. Our quasi-fear then becomes part of our real fear for our real friend. This is possible because quasi-emotions are relatively unspecific. The feelings and bodily events involved are compatible with many different emotions — whether of the same kind or even of different kinds — and in need of determination by the accompanying representations and motivations which specify, among other things, the objects of the responses.

More importantly, however, if quasi-emotions are triggered by, and part of, our imaginative experience of representational art, they may — and typically do — lead to affective imagining. According to Walton, our basic and non-emotional engagement with representa-

⁶At least in this case; Walton allows that, in other cases, something else might be missing (cf. Walton (1990): 245).

tional art involves three distinct elements (cf. Walton (1990, 1997)).

First, we experience the material qualities of the work. For instance, we perceive the printed marks in a book, or the configurations of colours and shapes on a canvas. These marks and configurations — together with genre-related conventions — determine what the works represent and, hence, what is true within the respective fictional world. One of the central ideas of Walton's account of representational artworks is that the fictional truths related to such works are not only concerned with the represented objects and their features, but also with us and our access to those objects and features. The worlds of paintings and novels include landscapes and battles. But they also include our fictional perspectives on those landscapes and battles — for instance, our seeing or thinking about them. According to Walton, this is part of our conventional rules of engagement with representational art.

Second, and on the basis of the first experience, we intellectually imagine whatever is part of the represented fictional world. Indeed, the demand to imagine the fictional truths created by a representational artwork in accordance with the relevant conventions is an integral part of our engagement with such art. Walton is adamant that, without this element, our experience would not really amount to an experience of something as representational art. But imagining the fictional truths in question requires that we recognise the representational content of the work.⁷ We thereby exploit explicitly or implicitly known principles or conventions which link the perceived material configurations to the represented entities. This enables us to recognise words and their meanings, or the three-dimensional arrangement of objects in a scenery, by perceiving the specific nature of the marks on the respective surfaces.

And, third, we imagine, again on the basis of the preceding elements of our engagement with the work, having a certain epistemic access — or standing in a certain epistemic relation — to the imagined world of the work. For instance, we may imagine seeing the landscape depicted by the painting before us, or believing the propositions expressed by the sentences in the novel. Again, this is an essential part of our imaginative engagement with representational artworks and required by the fictional truths determined by the latter.

Since, for Walton, affective imagining works very similar to pictorial experience, it is worthwhile to dwell a bit longer on the latter (cf. Walton (1990)). First of all, it is important to note that it is distinct from sensory imagination, such as visualising or auditorily imagining it. Looking at a picture and imagining seeing what it depicts does not involve visualising the depicted scenery — at least not in the same sense in which we can visualise something with closed eyes, say. None the less, imagining seeing that scenery — which is part of

⁷It is interesting to ask whether the recognition precedes the intellectual imagining, or whether the latter is identical with — or, alternatively, part of — the former. What speaks in favour of the distinctness of the two phenomena is that imagination normally does not play a role in knowledge acquisition, while the recognition of what a painting depicts or what sentences mean is a form of knowledge.

our pictorial experience — is distinctively visual in character and cannot be reduced to intellectual imagination. Walton’s proposal is that imagining seeing the depicted scenery amounts to imagining of our actual visual perception of the picture (i.e., the first kind of experience) that it is a fictional visual perception of what is depicted. If a painting depicts trees, we imagine seeing those trees by imagining of our perception of the material qualities of the painting (which is part of the actual world) that it is a perception of trees (which is part of the fictional world depicted by the painting).

The kind of imagining at issue amounts to what Walton calls imagining ‘from the inside’, meaning that we imagine things from our first-personal perspective — rather than imagining our point of view from a third-personal perspective (e.g., when we imagine how we look like from the perspective of our friend sitting opposite of us). In the case of pictorial experience, this means that we imagine seeing the depicted scenery from the perspective of our perception of the picture: we imagine an identity between our real and our fictional point of view.⁸

The issue of whether pictorial experience really involves such a complex kind of imagining, and whether this form of imagining is indeed visual, has been subject of much debate (cf., e.g., Hopkins (1998) for a nice summary), but need not be settled here. What is important to note is that the first two elements alone do not suffice for becoming aware of a picture as a picture. Simply perceiving its material properties and, in addition, intellectually imagining that there is a landscape does not give rise to experiencing it as depicting such a landscape. Perception and imagination have to be more intimately linked to each other to constitute pictorial experience. Perhaps Walton is wrong about the details of this close connection. But he is right that, if pictorial experience is indeed partly imaginative, the imaginative element has to be integrated with the perceptual one in a single visual experience.⁹ What matters here is the twofoldness of pictorial experience. Seeing something as a picture of something else involves two instances of object awareness: our awareness of the picture and our awareness of what is depicted. And although they are distinct, they are also inseparable from each other. We can, at least to some extent, shift our attention from one object to the other. But we cannot stop being aware of one of them without ceasing to have a pictorial experience. Moreover, we are aware of both objects as part of a single and unified experience.¹⁰

According to Walton, our affective imaginative engagement with fictions is similar to pictorial experience in that it involves the same kind of elements as the latter.

First, we experience some quasi-emotion concerned with some aspects of what the respective work represents. This real emotional reaction is thereby triggered by our more basic

⁸It is in this sense that we — or, more precisely, our subjective perspectives — ‘enter’ the fictional world. This fits well with Walton’s characterisation of imagining from the inside as one (but not the only) form of imagining *de se*.

⁹See Hopkins (1998) and Dorsch (2005). This also explains why O’Shaughnessy (2003) talks about ‘imaginative perception’ when describing pictorial experience and its relationship to the imagination.

¹⁰See Hopkins (1998), following the writings by Richard Wollheim.

non-emotional and imaginative engagement with the work — for instance, our recognition of the portrayal of an approaching slime or lion, and our imagination of the danger posed by the latter. For Walton, the occurrence of quasi-emotions brought about in this way — in conjunction with the conventions of our engagement with representational art — makes it fictional that we feel the respective genuine emotion towards the fictional entities concerned. The quasi-fear triggered by imagining a dangerous lion approaching does not amount to real fear of the fictional lion. But it determines that it is fictionally the case that we are frightened of that lion.

Second, in response to the general demand to imagine what is part of the fictional world related to some representational artwork, we intellectually imagine that we have a certain genuine emotion — namely that corresponding to the quasi-emotion — towards the fictional entities in question. In our example, we imagine that we fear the approaching lion.

And, third, we imagine some corresponding form of access to the fictional world, this time an affective kind of access. More precisely, we imagine feeling the genuine emotion towards the fictional entities at issue. We do so by imagining of our quasi-emotion that it is a real emotional response towards what is represented by the work. That is, we imagine being frightened by the lion by imaginatively identifying our quasi-fear with an instance of genuine fear of the lion. Again, the kind of imagining in question is imagining from the inside: the imaginative identification in question involves an identification of two subjective emotional perspectives, one real and the other fictional.

Our emotional responses towards fictional entities are not twofold: we are not emotionally aware of two different objects. In particular, the quasi-emotions concerned are not directed at the respective artworks. Indeed, they do not have any (clear) object. They are triggered by the imagination of some fictional entities or situations, but are not about them (at least according to Walton). Hence, the problem of guaranteeing that our imaginative response forms a unified experience is less pressing than in the case of pictorial experience. Feeling the quasi-emotion and imagining it to be a genuine emotion towards fictional entities need not form a single and unified experience. Instead, the main reason for assuming the third element over and above the other two seems to be that the intellectual imagination does not involve any affective elements. Imagining that one is feeling an emotion does not suffice for having an affective reaction towards it. But just as our awareness of what is depicted possesses a visual character, our response to fictional entities possesses an emotional character. Assuming that we also imagine feeling an emotion promises to introduce the required affective element into the experience.

However, it is not clear how this supposed to work — how imagining feeling an emotion can really possess an affective character. As Moran notes, the problem arises because the

emotion is assumed to be merely part of what is imagined.¹¹ In the case of intellectual imagining, this is precisely what prevents the episode of imagining from being affective. So why should the situation be different in the case of the kind of imagining Walton proposes? He maintains that imagining, from the inside, having an emotion is more affective in character than intellectual imagining and, hence, not an instance of the latter (cf. Walton (1990): 247). But he does not say much to help us to better understand imagining feeling an emotion, apart from the fact that it is imagining experiencing an emotion from the first-person perspective. What still needs to be explained is why — or in which sense — this kind of imagining should count as affective.

3 Moran on the various types of imagining

Moran tries to provide an answer to this question of how we can have responses towards fictional entities that count as genuinely emotional. His theory consists mainly of two claims (cf. Moran (1994)). The first is that the affective character of our responses is due to their manner or attitude, and not their content. Just representing having an emotion does not lead to an affective experience, since we can represent having an emotion in a dispassionate way — for instance, when we suppose, for the sake of an argument, that we are angry. Therefore, affective representations have to amount to representing something in an affective manner — just as visual representations amount to representing something in a visual manner. The second claim which is central to Moran's view is that the quasi-emotions triggered by our engagement with representational art are in fact constituents of our emotional responses to fictions — that is, for Moran, of our experiences of imagining something in an emotional manner.

He combines these two claims with a third, namely that the resulting emotional experiences towards fictional entities should count as genuine emotions. Accordingly, he chooses the second strategy in dealing with the paradox of fiction. That is, he rejects (b) by insisting that imagining something is already enough to give rise to full-blown emotions. Two elements have motivated his choice: the observation that our engagement with fictions involves real affective elements; and the hypothesis that, partly for this reason, our emotional responses to fictional entities are very similar to, and as unproblematic as, our more ordinary affective reactions to certain real objects, situations or events — such as those which are in

¹¹See Moran (1994). Note, however, that Moran seems to misunderstand Walton's position by ascribing to him the view that what is central to affective imagining is intellectually imagining that one has the emotion concerned. The reason for this misunderstanding appears to be the failure to see what is responsible, according for Walton, for the fictional truth that we are feeling an emotion towards the fictional entities in question. Moran seems to assume that this is due to intellectually imagining that proposition — hence the view which he ascribe to Walton; while the latter insists that the occurrence of a relevant quasi-emotion is the effective factor (cf. the discussion in Walton (1997)).

the past or the future, or which constitute unrealised, but ‘real’ possibilities (e.g., missed opportunities or alternative courses of action).

As discussed in the previous section, Walton rejects all three claims. He thinks that emotional feelings are part of what we imagine, not of how we imagine it. He also maintains that our imaginative emotional engagement with fictional worlds is only prompted by, and about, the relevant quasi-emotions, but does not include them as one of its constituents. And finally, neither the quasi-emotions, nor our imagining feeling an emotion are, for him, instances of emotion — which is reflected by his acceptance of (b). Again, the aim here is not to settle the debate about the third claim — that is, about how best to reply to the seeming paradox of fiction. But the first two claims are relevant for the nature of affective imagining. We have already considered Walton’s position. It is now time to look into the details of Moran’s view.

In the course of his paper, Moran distinguishes emotional imagining from three other imaginative phenomena: propositional (or intellectual) imagining, dramatic imagining, and imaginativeness. While propositional, emotional and dramatic imagining have in common that they occur in the form of mental episodes or activities, imaginativeness constitutes a mental ability or disposition. He does not explicitly talk about a fifth form of imagining, namely sensory imagining. But there is no reason to assume that he would not acknowledge its existence, which is why I have added it to the list.

Propositional or hypothetical imagining amounts to the simple imaginative entertaining of a proposition — for instance, when we imagine or suppose that it rains, or that the Earth is flat (perhaps as part of some daydream, thought experiment or hypothetical reasoning; cf. Moran (1994): 104). Propositional imaginings are thus instances of conceptual or intellectual thought and as such differ from sensory forms of representation, such as visual perceptions or memories, or bodily sensations. Moran leaves it open whether all non-endorsing or non-judgemental entertainings of a proposition are imaginative, or whether instead there is a difference, say, between merely having the thought that it rains and imagining or supposing the same proposition. But he is clear about the fact that mere propositional imagining is dispassionate, that is, does not involve any real emotional feelings or affective elements — though of course it is possible to propositionally and dispassionately imagine that one has certain emotional feelings (cf. Moran (1994): 89f.).

In contrast to propositional imagining, *sensory imagining* does not have a propositional content and is therefore not an instance of thought. Instead, what we sensorily imagine are objects or events and their perceivable features. While thoughts merely describe or name objects or events, sensory episodes (including perceptions or episodic memories) show them (cf. Dorsch (2010a)). Examples of instances of the sensory imagination are visual, tactile or auditory imaginings. Like propositional imagining, sensory imagining is dispassionate and

does not possess an affective character. But again, it is possible to sensorily and dispassionately imagine someone having — or perhaps rather expressing — specific emotions (e.g., when we visualise someone crying).

Emotional imagining — or imagining ‘with respect to emotional attitudes’ — consists in imagining something with feeling or emotion, in contrast to imagining it dispassionately (cf. Moran (1994): 90 and 105). Moran concentrates on propositions as candidates for what we can imagine with feeling. But just as with the existence of sensory imaginings, it is fair to suppose that he would also allow for the emotional imagining of objects or events. Moran’s examples for emotional imagining are imagining something with loathing, anticipation, apprehension or regret (cf. Moran (1994): 86, 90 and 93). The affective aspect of the imaginative episode consists thereby in a real — and not merely in an imagined — feeling. Accordingly, imagining something with regret involves really having a feeling of regret. As a consequence, emotional imagining cannot — or not exclusively — be a matter of propositional imagining. In particular, imagining something with, say, sadness cannot be reduced to imagining that one feels sad. While the former involves a real feeling of sadness, the latter does not. Now, given that the affective aspect of emotional imagining is real, and not merely imagined, it should — as Moran maintains — be located in the manner (or mode), and not in the content, of the imagining (cf. Moran (1994): 90 and 93). The statement that something is imagined with feeling or emotion thus qualifies how it is imagined, and not what is imagined. It is therefore likened by Moran to the statement, say, that something is imagined visually or auditorily (cf. Moran (1994): 93).

Both propositional and emotional imagining occur in the form of single mental episodes. By contrast, *dramatic* or *empathetic imagining* is typically more complex by involving several distinct episodes (cf. Moran (1994): 104). More specifically, dramatic imagining consists in the imaginative adoption of, and identification with, a certain point of view different from one’s own. The adopted perspectives in question are typically characterized partly by a set of evaluative attitudes and the related emotional or conative dispositions. Thus, imaginatively adopting such a point of view usually involves imagining having the respective evaluative and affective responses to given situations, in addition to more neutral propositional and sensory imaginings about those situations. Moran’s description of dramatic imagination renders it very similar to — if not identical with — the phenomenon of empathy, or the closely related phenomenon of imagining being in the place or shoes of someone else (cf. Goldie (2000) for an extensive discussion of imaginative projects of this kind).

Moran does not always clearly distinguish between emotional imagining and dramatic imagining. In fact, he notes certain close links between the two. Empathetic identification with a certain point of view different from one’s own often involves the ‘dramatic rehearsal of emotions’; while emotional imagining ‘may require such things as dramatic rehearsal’, it

‘involves something ... like a point of view, a total perspective on the situation’ (Moran (1994): 105). However, the two are none the less quite different phenomena. Not only is dramatic imagining typically more complex than emotional imagining (i.e., results in extensive mental projects rather than in single mental episodes), but the two phenomena are also independent from each other. On the one hand, we can empathize with or enter the mind of another person without actually having any real feelings, but instead only imagining them (cf. the proposal put forward in the last section). And, on the other hand, we can respond with fear to imagining the scenario of being pursued by a lion without thereby imaginatively adopting a particular point of view different from one’s own.¹²

Besides, Moran introduces the notion of *imaginativeness* which denotes for him a complex ability covering, in particular: the ability to recognize and link to each other the features of artworks which are responsible for their emotional tone (i.e., their ‘expressive features’; the ability to emotionally and otherwise respond to these features and their links; and the ability to empathize with or put oneself in the place of someone else (cf. Moran (1994): 86f.). It thus includes or combines both the capacity to imagine emotionally and the capacity to imagine dramatically. But it also involves certain non-imaginative, cognitive abilities, such as recognitional capacities or sensitivities.

4 Moran’s account of the affective imagination

According to Moran’s picture, what is central to the affective imagination and, in particular, our emotional responses to fictional entities, is what he has labelled emotional imagining. By contrast, dramatic imagining is linked to the affective imagination only in so far as it may include what he calls emotional imagining; and imaginativeness is linked to the affective imagination only in so far as it includes the capacity to engage in emotional imagining (as well as in dramatic imagining that includes emotional imagining).

What he calls emotional imagining fits Moran’s two claims about the nature of affective imagining. It involves both the imagining of certain aspects of the fictional world in question (e.g., that a character suffers unjust treatment) and a really felt response towards these or related aspects (e.g., real feelings of sympathy towards the character and of anger towards the unjust perpetrators). In accordance with Moran’s second claim, the latter is taken to consist in a quasi-emotion triggered by the former. That is, imagining something with feeling or emotion consists in imagining something with some quasi-emotion directed at it. The resulting episode is, for Moran, an instance of genuine emotion. In accordance with

¹²This is true even if, say, what is involved is imagining having certain sensory and affective experiences. For our act of imagining need not further specify the perspectivalness of the imagined experiences, or assume by default that it is our own (cf. Martin (2003) and Dorsch (2010a)).

this, what is responsible for the affective character of the resulting imaginative experience is not the imagined content, but instead the really felt quasi-emotion — as Moran’s first claim maintains.

His main reason for taking emotional imagining to be central to affective imagining — notably in the context of our experience of representational art — is his claim that imagining having an emotion is no exception to the rule that it is always possible to imagine something in a dispassionate way (just as it is always possible to imagine it with feeling).¹³ We can imagine that we feel sad or visualise ourselves as expressing our sadness through crying, say, without thereby being in any affective state. That is, both propositional and sensory imagining can occur in a dispassionate manner, even if they have a felt emotion as their object of imagining. As already indicated in the last section, Moran’s explanation of this fact is that having an emotion as part of its content does not suffice for a representation to be emotional. That is, real affectivity cannot simply derive from imagining of an emotion. But if what we imagine has no impact on the affective dimension of imagining, the thought continues, it has to be due to how we imagine it. Hence, Moran concludes that affective imagining consists in, or involves, emotional imagining.

This line of reasoning has three weaknesses, though. The first is that Moran has not done enough to establish the claim that what is imagined is always neutral on emotionality of the imaginative episode concerned. This may be true of intellectual and sensory imagining. But there are perhaps other ways of imagining feeling an emotion which are, by their very nature, always affective in character. I return to this possibility in the next — and last — section.

A second problematic aspect is that the passivity of the occurrence of quasi-emotions casts serious doubts on the imaginativeness of any episodes involving them as one of their constituents. The various forms of imagining may perhaps allow for passive instances — such as spontaneously arising images and thoughts in the case of sensory and intellectual imagining, or aimlessly floating daydreams in the case of more complex imaginative projects.¹⁴ But they all have still in common that they also allow for voluntary instances and, moreover, permit us to take deliberate control of their passive instances. We can actively sustain the fleeting spontaneous images and thoughts, and we can decide to give our freely wandering

¹³Moran presents another motivation for assuming that our responses to fiction and the involved affective imaginings are really — and not merely imaginatively — emotional: namely that we are often held responsible for having — or failing to have — them. He notes that we may be praised or blamed (morally or otherwise) in relation to whether we react to fictional situations, say, with laughter or lust; and that how we react often reveals something important about our personality (cf. Moran (1994): 93f. and 105). Laughing at a racist joke, for instance, may reveal racist tendencies or beliefs. However, as Walton has correctly pointed out (cf. Walton (1997), what manifests our convictions and is subject to assessment can equally well be our dispositions to imaginatively engage with fictions in certain ways rather than others.

¹⁴See, for instance, the discussion of imaginings in O’Shaughnessy (2003). For the opposing view that all imagining is voluntary, see, for example, Scruton (1974) and McGinn (2004). I discuss the different positions and considerations and side with the latter in Dorsch (2005).

daydreams direction (cf. Dorsch (2005) and Dorsch (2010b)). But what Moran takes to be emotional imagining can never be subject to our direct voluntary control, given that the occurrence of quasi-emotions is not up to us. Of course, we may be able to bring about quasi-emotions by exploiting our knowledge about our emotional dispositions that representations of a certain kind give rise to those quasi-emotions (e.g., we can induce quasi-fear in us by imagining something that we know to scare us). But this does not render quasi-emotions subject to our will — at least not in the same direct way as imagining is (cf. Dorsch (2009)). Hence, the emotional reactions that Moran focusses on and, in particular, the choice of representing whatever is imagined in an emotional manner (rather than, say, in a visual manner) is never voluntary. So the challenge is to explain why we should count them as instances of imagining in the first place — assuming that imagining is at least in principle always subject to the will.¹⁵

The third weakness in Moran's proposal is that it is not clear how to make sense of his idea of emotional imagining. His talk of 'imagining with feeling' invites a certain ambiguity. If this form of imagining is meant to consist just in the complex of an episode of propositional or sensory imagining and an additional episode of quasi-emotion triggered by the first, then it is doubtful that it constitutes an instance of affective imagining at all. Nothing ensures that the two episodes are more closely linked to each other than by a causal connection, given that the very same quasi-emotion can also occur in response to perceiving or believing something. Hence, the overall complex is imaginative only in so far its dispassionate component is imaginative; while it is affective only in so far its non-imaginative element is emotional. The emotional and imaginative elements in affective imagining should be expected to be more unified. This suggests taking Moran's comparison of emotional imagining with visual imagining more seriously. There is good reason to assume that the content and the manner of representation are inseparable. Hence, if emotional imagining literally involves an affective way of representing something — just as visualising involves a visual way of representing something — then the unity of the affective and the imaginative elements can be guaranteed. According to this interpretation, emotional imagining is more than the mere conjunction of some imaginative episode and some subsequent emotional response. Like in the case of visualizing, the content and the manner of emotional imagining are understood as aspects of a single and unified experience.

However, the postulation of an imaginative episode with an emotional manner is problematic for its own reasons. First of all, how something is represented puts a characteristic

¹⁵See Scruton (1974), McGinn (2004) and Dorsch (2005). A similar argument may be formulated against the idea that our awareness of what a picture represents is imaginative, given that it is usually not up to us what we experience a picture as depicting (with the exception, perhaps, of ambiguous pictures), or whether we experience it as depicting something in the first place. None the less, Walton (1990) is not the only one who defends an account of pictorial experience in terms of imagining (cf., e.g., Scruton (1974) and O'Shaughnessy (2003)).

restriction on what can be represented. At least, this is the case with all the widely accepted ways of representing something. Visual representations are limited to visible entities: we can see or visualize only objects and features which are visible. Something similar is true of other sensory modes, such as representing something in an auditory or tactile manner. Intellectual representations come with conceptual restrictions: we can believe in or suppose the truth of only those propositions, which we possess the required concepts for (and, perhaps, also only those propositions that are not logically inconsistent); and we can desire the realisation of only those states of affairs that we can conceive of. Finally, representation in a conative or motivational manner is limited to possible courses of action: all our intentions, strivings and impulses are concerned with something to do.¹⁶ By contrast, there are no distinctive restrictions on what we can imagine with emotion, or with specific emotional feelings. If at all, such imagining inherits its limitations from the underlying dispassionate imagining, such as visualising or propositional imagining.

Moreover, the traditionally assumed manners of representation exclude each other. Thus, we cannot represent something, in a single instance of representation, visual-auditorily, or tactile-propositionally. Of course, our episodes can involve two distinct representational elements which involve different manners of representation — for instance, when we see and hear a theatre production, or have thoughts about what we feel. But each of the representational elements is still confined to a single manner of representation. However, as Moran acknowledges, it is possible to visualize or, indeed, propositionally imagine something with feeling. Again, this provides a good reason to doubt that there is an emotional mode of imagining, in addition to — and of the same kind as — sensory and intellectual modes.

Moran therefore faces a dilemma in relation to his insistence on the existence of emotional imagining. If he conceives of the emotional element as something in addition to sensory or intellectual imagining, he cannot ensure that the two components are unified in a single instance of affective imagining. But if he understands the emotional element as a substitute for the sensory or intellectual component in other instances of imagining, he cannot accommodate the fact that the affective element behaves in a different way and, indeed, combines well with sensory or intellectual elements. The conclusion should be that what Moran calls emotional imagining — that is, imagining something with emotion — does not constitute a distinctive form of imagining. At best, it captures the fact that some of our imaginative representations give rise to quasi-emotions.

¹⁶Not all desires are conative. We may perhaps desire the occurrence of peace, or that it will rain (in contrast to desiring to actively bring about peace or rain). But such desires are not motivational states. Whether they are like emotions or preferences, and whether they involve a distinctive manner of representation, are interesting questions which, however, need not concern us here.

5 Affective imagining as experiential imagining

The discussion of Moran's proposal has shown that locating the emotionality of affective imagining in the manner of representation is not a plausible option. If there is such a thing as emotional imagining, its affectivity should be due to what is imagined, and not how it is imagined. However, the challenge for Walton has been precisely to say more about how it can be possible that instances of imagining are affective episodes just in virtue of their content — that is, more specifically, just in virtue of being representations of having an emotion. Moreover, the affective element of emotional imagining cannot derive from any underlying quasi-emotions — as, again, the considerations about Moran's view have illustrated. And there are no obvious candidates for some other real emotional feelings that might be involved in instances of the affective imagination, such as our emotional responses towards representational art. Therefore, the challenge for Walton can be formulated in a more refined way: how can emotional imagining possess an affective character in virtue of representing an emotion, without actually including any real emotional feeling?

Moran has proposed two types of imagining concerned with emotion: propositional imagining about emotions; and imagining something with emotion. The first is characterized by the fact that the emotions form part of the propositional content of the imagining — for instance, when we imagine that we have or feel fear directed at an imagined lion in the room. By contrast, Moran takes the latter to be an episode of imagining something in an emotional manner. Propositional imagining is dispassionate and therefore no good candidate for affective imagining; while imagining something in an emotional manner can be ruled out since there are good reasons to doubt the existence of such a mode of representation. But independently of what one thinks about the plausibility of imagining something emotionally, there is at least a third alternative in which emotions may enter imagination: they may be the direct objects of non-propositional imagining.

Consider the case of imagining a pain (or a similarly subjective bodily phenomenon). This imaginative episode differs subjectively from real instances of pain. Most notably, we do not come to find the former unbearable in the same way as the latter — for instance, we do not cry or faint as a consequence of experiencing it. In this respect, imagined and remembered pains are much closer to each other than to really felt ones. Moreover, this difference between imagined (or remembered) and really felt pains is not simply a matter of degree in determinacy or intensity. We sometimes have real pains which are not very intense or determinate, but which we still experience as real pains, and not merely as imagined ones. And we also can imagine having rather strong and specific pains, without thereby beginning to really feel pain. None the less, imagined (and remembered) pains still involve the quality of pain. This is reflected by the fact that we describe their subjective character in terms of pain (e.g., that they feel similar to genuine pain) and group them, from our first-personal

perspective, together with real feelings of pain, rather than with thoughts about pain. In short, imagining a pain is an experience, but not a real pain experience. That is, it involves the quality of painfulness, but does not instantiate it.

The best explanation of this situation is to assume that imagining (and perhaps also remembering) a pain is an instance of non-propositional object awareness (or acquaintance) which takes the feeling of pain — rather than the felt pain — as its direct object.¹⁷ The idea is that, while a feeling of pain involves painfulness by instantiating it, the imaginative (or mnemonic) awareness of such a feeling involves painfulness by representing it as instantiated. As a result, feeling pain and imagining it are subjectively similar in that both their phenomenal characters involve the quality of painfulness. But they differ from our first-person perspective in that they involve this qualitative aspect in different ways: the former is really an experience of pain, while the latter is an episode of representing pain. The involvement of painfulness in the case of imagining pain is thereby not a matter of the non-propositional manner of representation. Rather, it is a matter of what is imagined, namely a feeling of pain which instantiates the quality of painfulness.

The proposed treatment of imagining pain therefore satisfies all the conditions on affective imagining: it is non-propositional; it does not involve an emotional manner of imagining, but instead is a representation of emotion, and its affectivity does not amount to the real thing, that is, to a genuine instance of emotion. Emotional imagining may — and should — thus be understood as an instance of experiential imagining, namely as imagining an episode with an affective phenomenal character (i.e., an episode of emotion). This guarantees that the affectivity of emotional imagining arises from what is imagined, and not from how it is imagined. But it also ensures that there is an affective element involved in emotional imagining, but no real emotional feeling, only a represented one.

The proposed imaginative and non-propositional manner of representation does not face the same problems as Moran's emotional manner. First of all, it puts a restriction on what can be imagined, namely particulars and their experienceable features — in this case, mental episodes and aspects of their phenomenal characters. And then, it excludes other manners of representation. This is true independently of how the precise nature and role of the non-propositional manner involved in emotional imagining is specified. There are basically three options. First, it may be held that all instances of object awareness involve the same basic non-propositional way of representing something. Perception and imagination then differ in whether the represented objects are external objects or mental episodes (i.e., representations of external objects). Second, it may be thought that, while perception does not involve representation at all (but instead some relational form of awareness, such as acquaint-

¹⁷See the comparable claims about itchiness and perspectivalness in Martin (2003), which I also defend in Dorsch (2010a).

tance), imaginative object awareness always consists in the non-propositional representation of some episode with a sensory, affective or similar character. This means taking visualising, say, to be the imaginative representation of a visual perception. And third, it may simply be claimed that the non-propositional manner of representation is distinctive to the (imaginative, mnemonic or otherwise) representation of mental episodes and their phenomenal characters — we may call it an experiential manner of representation (cf. Dorsch (2010a)). This option leaves it open whether visualising is directed at external objects or perceptions of them, as well as whether perception is representational or relational. But in all cases, the various manners of representation — including that taken to be involved in emotional imagining — remain mutually exclusive.

In addition to meeting the conditions on affective imagining which have emerged during the discussion of Walton's and Moran's views, the account in terms of the non-propositional representation of emotions fits well with Walton's approach to our engagement with representational art. The demand imposed on us by the occurrence of quasi-emotions may very well be understood as involving the demand to imagine oneself as feeling the emotion concerned (cf. the third element). For this imagining is not only non-propositional, it also happens from the first-person perspective: we imagine the instantiation of the phenomenal character of an emotion, and this character is identical with what the emotion is subjectively like (cf. Dorsch (2010a)). This also clarifies the relation to the underlying quasi-emotions: they are not constituents of affective imagining, but indirectly give rise to the latter in so far as they establish the fictional truth that we feel an emotion towards the fictional entities in question and, hence, require us to engage in affective imagining as part our engagement with the representational artwork in question.

This proposal may then be used to explain why the resulting affective states do not motivate us in the same way as the real emotions, namely to interact with the respective entities at which they are directed. The idea is that the emotional aspect loses its motivational power, once it is experienced, not in an immediate way, but instead only mediated by a non-propositional representation of it. Thus, while the experience of fear felt towards a real lion has the power to move us to run away, the imaginative representation of such an experience of fear directed at a fictional lion does not possess this power anymore. Similarly, the intensity and determinacy of the feeling usually decreases when we move from a real experience to a represented one. Thus our imaginations (and memories) of fear are typically — though not necessarily always — less vivid than the comparable experiences of fear in real life situations. The claim that our emotional responses towards fictional entities amount to the non-propositional imagination of having emotions towards those entities may thus help to explain some important characteristics of our engagement with representational art.

Finally, the provided account of emotional imagining is compatible with the idea that

it is distinctive of imagining that it allows for voluntary control. The occurrence of quasi-emotions and the subsequent establishment of a fictional truth to be imagined by us may be beyond the direct influence of our will. But whether we follow this demand and imagine feeling the respective emotion is at least in principle up to us.¹⁸

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