Framing Narratives

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Marianne Dashwood was well able to imagine circumstances both favourable and unfavourable to her. But for all her romantic sensibility she was not able to imagine these things from anything other than her own point of view. 'She expected from other people the same opinions and feelings as her own, and she judged of their motives by the immediate effect of their actions on herself.'[1] Unlike her sister, she could not see how the ill-crafted attentions of Mrs. Jennings could derive from a good nature. And when Elinor had to explain her troubles with Edward Ferrars, she knew that Marianne would feel it as a reminder of her own relations to Willoughby, judging Edward's behaviour as equivalent to that of Willoughby himself. Without the capacity to shift her point of view, Marianne can get no ironic distance from herself; she cannot see the unrealism of her later determination 'to live solely for my family'.

Simplifying a good deal, we can say that imaginative abilities vary on two dimensions. Imagination gives us the capacity to engage with things and events which are not (at least not yet) actual. Imagination also gives us ways of responding to things in the world, and to things that may be offered us to imagine in this first sense, from a perspective not our own. Marianna's excess of the one and lack of the other dramatically narrow her understanding; her's is a vividly imagined and highly egocentric world. Elinor's good sense derives from a balance of the two, and no act of imagining, however vivid and affecting, is allowed to dominate just because it claims the authority of her own perspective.

This essay explores some ways in which fictional narratives exercise these imaginative abilities together.

1 Narratives and their frameworks

Makers of narratives give us connected sequences of events, sometimes of their own invention, sometimes by way of an attempt to reconstruct the real past. The agent who merely conceives a series of events, however connected, has not yet made a narrative;

[1] J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibity*, Volume II, Chapter 9.

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that requires a coherent representational vehicle—words, sounds, images—capable of making the events and their relations, or some of them, intelligible to an audience. A narrative is an artefact, wherein the maker seeks to make manifest his or her communicative intentions. When the audience grasp those intentions, they have a grip on what the events of the narrative are, and how they are related.

In communicating these events, the maker may do more; he or she may convey a *framework* which the reader is encouraged to adopt, a way of engaging imaginatively with those events. Adopting this framework helps us 'to notice and respond to the network of associations that make up the mood or emotional tone of a work.'[2] The maker represents the events of the story, and by representing them, expresses certain evaluations of and responses to those events. By the operation of mechanisms I'll discuss later, this translates into our feeling a pull, often a substantial one, in the direction of just those responses. Sometimes that way of responding is one we easily and comfortably adopt. But some narratives frame their events in ways that do not come naturally to us, and good narratives often challenge us to see events in unfamiliar ways.[3]

I should say something about the idea that narratives *represent* their stories, and are *expressive* of their frameworks, for the distinction I intend is not readable from the common (and varied) meanings these terms have. I treat representation and expression as different ways in which something can function for us as an *indicator*.[4] In my terms, a narrative counts as a representation of its story because it indicates to us what its story is in a communicative way—via uptake of utterer's intentions. Makers of narratives tell their stories by getting us to see what their story-telling intentions are. And a narrative is expressive of its framework in so far as that framework is indicated to us, not via our recognition of the maker's

[2] R. Moran, 'The Expression of Feeling in Imagination', *Philosophical Review* 103, 1994, 75–106, 86. I am indebted to Moran's account of the distinction between imagining something, and approaching something in an imaginative way.

[3] See W. Booth's *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988) for a perceptive account of our relations with 'our best narrative friends.'

[4] For an account of the relations between indication and representation see F. Dretske, *Explaining Behaviour* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), Chapter 3.

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intention but by less reasoned, more affectively driven and perhaps more automatic processes, some of which I shall describe further on.

Note, however, that the representation/expression distinction as I make it maps imperfectly onto the story/framework distinction. Narrative makers will occasionally represent some of the evaluations and responses that go to make up the framework, engaging in explicit communication about how we should engage with the work; Trollop is fond of telling us what he thinks of his characters and, taking on a tiresome narrative persona, will even relate his reactions on having met them. Still, framework goes better, more naturally with expression than with representation; narrative makers do not need to make explicit statements in order to guide our responses, and often succeed better when they don't. And explicit statement has a fragile status in determining a framework; what is merely expressed will dominate if there is a clash, with the explicit statement now labelled 'unreliable narration'. Importantly, what is expressed need not be intended. Our story-telling often gives people reason to draw conclusions about our own frameworks, conclusions that we did not intend them to draw and which we might not be aware of, just as our facial expressions and postures express our feelings. With the canonical works of literature, drama and film, we do often find a narrative constructed with the intention that it be expressive of a certain stance. With Henry James, the urge to impose a framework rises almost to the level of obsession, with the narrator acting as a busy sheep dog, worrying at the flock of readers who, unattended, might wander off in a comfortable, familiar and unchallenging direction.[5] But even in these cases framework is a matter of expression; whatever is intended, the effect on the audience need not depend on their recognition of that intention.

Being both representational and expressive, narratives give us two things: a series of connected events (the story, sometimes called a *fabula*), and a framework of preferred emotional and evaluative responses to those events. The framework will usually be vague and incomplete; it rarely does more than guide our responses in a general way. But the narrative's story is vague and incomplete as well: no story manages (or seeks) to determine the world of its happenings with precision and completeness.

[5] For an analysis of the kind of expression at issue here along with illuminating literary examples see J. Robinson, 'Style and Expression in the Literary Work', *Philosophical Review* 94, 1985, 227–247.

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Story and framework are distinct things, and they correspond to the answers we give to two distinct questions: 'what happens according to the story?' and 'how are we supposed to respond to those happenings?'. But we generally cannot identify the one without identifying the other. The dependence of our knowledge of framework on our knowledge of story is obvious; we can't see what the act of representing story events expresses unless we also know what that act is—what it succeeds in representing. And dependence runs the other way: the framework itself partly determines how we are to take things that are said about the story's events. Is the preferred response to the narrator a skeptical one? Knowing the answer may depend on a sense of the mood or tone of the piece. If we take her to be unreliable, we will have to radically rethink our assumptions about what happens in the story.

Working out the events of a story is often subject to indeterminacies of interpretation: there may be nothing to choose between the assumption that something happened according to the story, and that it did not. There can be similar indeterminacy with respect to what is expressed, and so there may be irresolvable disagreements about framework. There may also be indeterminacies about what is story and what is framework. We are in that region where things 'present themselves sometimes as statements but at other times as programmes of action or announcements of a stance'.[6] With so much unclarity, it is not surprising that narrative makers confuse us, and perhaps themselves, by offering what looks like narrative content, or elements of story, but which, properly understood, amount to disguised exercises in framing. Later on I'll consider two prominent works, one literary and one filmic, which have profited by this confusion.

While frameworks do have a special interest for us in cases of great literature, the motives and mechanisms that govern the workings of narrative frameworks are visible in a much broader class of phenomena. Framing is a quite general feature of communication, and one that occurs in simple, jointly constructed narratives of early childhood—probably for good developmental reasons. Showing this will be part of the project of accounting for the comparative ease with which narratives place their audiences within the frameworks they express, an ease which derives from the use of powerful mechanisms which govern human practices of

[6] J. Heal, *Mind, Reason and Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27. Heal is discussing cases quite different from those we are considering here.

imitation and joint attention. But there are limits, as I have indicated, to the framing capacity of narratives: an issue that has been highlighted by recent work on the problem of imaginative resistance. I will argue that this problem is, at least in one of its guises, posed by the limitations on our capacity to adopt frameworks rather than by our capacity to imagine this or that element of the story's narrative content.

2 The natural history of frameworks

Frameworks are important for understanding narrative, but so they are for understanding almost any communicative act. Sharing information is not always the only or even the primary reason for communication. Sometimes communication serves primarily to bring about a sharing of framework. Here is an example where no narrative is in play; I adapt it from an example used by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson to illustrate a somewhat different point.[7]

Arriving for a holiday at Lake Como, Janet throws open the balcony doors and, in a way that is visible to John, and is clearly intended to be visible, sniffs appreciatively at the air. This is a communicative act: an action which, in Sperber and Wilson's terms, guarantees its own optimal relevance. What does Jane mean by doing this? That the air is fresh? The freshness of the air is already evident to John. Janet is arranging things so that she and John attend to the freshness of the air, in a way that is mutually manifest to both of them. But Janet is doing more: she is adjusting John's cognitive and affective take on the world: trying to get John to see the world in somewhat the way she is currently seeing it. There is a small, highly salient portion of the world visible to both of them, and Janet wants John to attend to that portion of it in the way that she is attending to it: appreciatively, gratefully, with excitement at the possibilities for the holiday that has just begun. She does not want to convey any propositions to John: she wants him to notice certain things; to engage imaginatively with certain possibilities which these things present; to see these things and possibilities as valuable in certain ways. She wants John to frame the visible world in a certain way. It would be vastly impractical—perhaps impossible—for Janet to try to *say* all this, to make explicit the way

[7]   See D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance* (Second Edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

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she wants John to frame the bit of world they are looking at. It would also be pointless: the minimal gesture does the job very well.

Frameworks have to be on or for something. Janet and John's situation provides them with a natural focus on a restricted part of the world—the view from the window—which has a significance for them they already appreciate in much the same way. Janet's gesture would convey much less—would indeed, hardly be comprehensible at all—if they did not have this part of the world as a natural and unspoken focus of attention, as well as having a shared awareness of certain salient and unusual aspects of the situation. The context enabled Janet to pick out a small part of the world and to adjust John's way of attending to it so as to bring it into line with hers. That shared background and the clarity concerning what is to be attended to—the restricted bit of the world visible in a certain direction—is what enables Janet to achieve all this with minimal activity.

Adopting a framework proffered by a narrative or by a conversational remark is an imaginative activity, often requiring us to respond in ways that call for effort, and mental flexibility, stretching ourselves conceptually and emotionally to participate in a way of seeing things which we don't spontaneously or easily enter into. In John's case as I described it, little imaginative activity is called for. He already shares the dispositions, preferences and knowledge that make Janet's response to the view a natural one; to see the scene in the way that Janet does requires very little reorientation. Still, if John were particularly unimaginative he may have trouble tuning in effectively to Janet's way of seeing. And John's task could be harder; he might be dropping Janet off at her destination, not expecting, or wanting, to share the holiday. But with imaginative flexibility, he might enter into her way of seeing things, just for the moment: sufficiently well, at least, to glimpse from the inside her sense of anticipation. If John thoroughly dislikes fresh air, lake views and Italian cooking the project will challenge his imaginative powers a good deal. Whatever the difficulties, they can't be overcome by having John simply imagining certain propositions: that fresh air and lake views are invigorating; that Italian cooking is delicious. Imagining these propositions, which he will find easy enough, won't help him to enter into Janet's way of seeing things, which is what her appreciative sniff invites him to do. What he needs to do is to enter imaginatively into a framework that includes valuing these things, even though he may not value them himself—or not so much as, or in the same way that Janet does.

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I said that Janet is arranging things so that she and John attend jointly to certain things. What I am calling a framework is a pervasive feature of situations of *joint attention*. Children engage in acts of joint attention by the age of about 18 months: they draw a care-giver's attention to some object or event, not because they want the care-giver to do anything—fetch a toy, say—but in order simply to bring it about that the child and the care-giver attend together to the object or event.[8] Joint attending is enjoyed by children for its own sake, and seems to be an important milestone in the development of normal affective relations with others. Mature humans also enjoy acts of joint attention, as with shared spectatorship. One reason this is attractive is that jointly attending to certain scenes has a tendency to bring about emotional harmony between the parties, and, since it is common knowledge between us that we are jointly attending, it may also be common knowledge that we are reacting in similar or complementary ways. That is how it is with Janet and John. Where this harmony cannot be established, as with spectators supporting different teams, tension is likely to result.

My second example of framework in conversation is one where joint attention serves to aid the construction of a narrative. This is a real rather than an imagined conversation, reported by Robyn Fivush, between mother and child:

M: What happened to your finger?

C: I pinched it

M: You pinched it. Oh boy, I bet that made you feel really sad.

C: Yeah ...it hurts

M: Yeah, it did hurt. A pinched finger is no fun ... But who came and made you feel better?

C: Daddy![9]

[8]   For an important collection of essays on joint attention, see *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology*, N. Eilan, C. Hoerl, T. McCormack, and J. Roessler (eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[9]   R. Fivush, 'Constructing narrative, emotion and gender in parent-child conversations about the past', *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy of the Life Narrative*, U. Neisser and R. Fivush (eds.) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), quoted in C. Hoerl and T. McCormack, 'Joint Reminiscing as Joint Attention to the Past' in Eilan *et al*. (op. cit. note 9).

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In this conversation a brief, factually based narrative of past events is constructed; it tells us that the child was hurt, and felt sad as a consequence, but the intervention of daddy made things better. Christoph Hoerl and Teresa McCormack treat this exchange as an example of joint attention to the past, a means by which children come to understand the causal structure of events in time, and the role of memory in argument. They also note the extent to which, in this case, the mother guides the construction of the narrative which this conversation embodies, prompting a reminiscence of how the child felt about the past event, and correcting the child's tendency to speak of the hurt in the present tense by explicitly contrasting the past pain with the later intervention by daddy, who 'made you feel better', thus bringing the narrative to a satisfactory closure. The mother guides the construction and ordering of represented events, taking care to place events in their correct chronological order, while at the same time providing a framework within which to engage with the narrative: recalling the hurt but discouraging a strong resurgence of negative emotion by emphasizing the positive turn of events after that. As Hoerl and McCormack put it, such guided narrative constructions enable mother and child to arrive at a 'shared personal and emotional evaluation of the past'.[10] I suggest that this sense of a shared personal and emotional evaluation survives and indeed flourishes in our most mature engagements with narratives, where the sharing has come to be between audience and the authorial personality manifested in the narrative itself.

But we cannot assimilate all or even most cases of attending to narrative to cases of joint attention. As that notion is commonly understood, joint attention involves a condition of mutual openness between the parties—an essential component in the situation of the mother and child described above. It is not easy to specify exactly what is involved in this, but no condition of openness can really be satisfied when one of the two parties—in this case the author—knows nothing of the other, and may not even know whether there is such another party.[11] We might seek to avoid this problem by claiming that engagement with a narrative involves the pretence of genuine joint attending with another, just as it involves a pretence

[10] Hoerl and McCormack, op. cit. note 9. Hoerl and McCormack acknowledge a debt to the work of Katherine Nelson.

[11] On the openness of joint attention see C. Peacocke, 'Joint Attention: its Nature, Reflexivity, and Relation to Common Knowledge', in Eilan *et al*. (op. cit. note 9). Peacocke opposes the idea that openness need be explicated in terms of common knowledge, proposing instead that we

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which gives rise to that fictional being 'the authorial personality' who, it is generally recognised, is not at all the same being as the flesh and blood author. While some encounters with narrative may be of this kind, many, I think, are not; at least, there is not much in many experiences of narrative engagement to support so complicated an hypothesis. Instead, I prefer to think of the typical situation of one engaged by a narrative as psychologically grounded in those capacities which make us apt to be seekers of joint attention, without itself constituting a case of joint attention in the strict sense. The experience of genuine situations of jointly attending to narrative is a formative and salient event in a person's development towards mature narrative engagement, and an influence on the later experience of engaging with the 'prepackaged' narratives of literature, film and the theatre. The enjoyment we get from the experience of attending with a narrative's authorial personality (however that notion is formally to be characterized) is of very much the same kind as the pleasure of genuinely joint attending, and derives, I believe, from the same set of mental dispositions that underlie that other pleasure.[12]

So let us think of joint attention as a refined form of a more general phenomenon wherein one experiences the influence of another's attention to some object on one's own attention to it; call this guided attention. The refinement consists in the fact that, with joint attention, all parties are symmetrically placed with respect to the openness of the experience. We find examples of many kinds within this broad class. In the observance of tradition, for example, we attend to something in the service of sharing a response with those who may be long dead, and it is the thought of their (possibly idealized) response to the situation that modulates our own response to it.

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understand openness in terms of a condition of mutual perceptual availability; such a condition would not generally be satisfied in the narrative case.

[12]   There are other ways in which we jointly attend to narratives, as when you and I watch a film together, and this sort of joint attending can have significant effects on one's understanding and experience of the work. But while this kind of joint attending deserves more attention than it has received, I am not going to explore it here.

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The cases of guided attending I have discussed all have a distinctively emotional component.[13] They involve, and may be designed to involve, valued experiences of shared emotion, directed at a scene or object. I emphasise the role of emotion here because adopting a framework for a narrative means being *tuned* to the narrative's content; being apt to respond to it in selective and focused ways that show some stability over the length of one's engagement with its characters and events. Emotions bind together the elements of the narrative, placing some in the foreground, and making connections between what we know now and what is yet to be revealed.[14] Such a mode of engagement, because of its relatively sustained character (if only for the duration of reading) and because it involves a variety of responses to a rich pattern of events, draws on something like a whole persona, though one which may not be fully the subject's own. Adoption of a framework is, to a greater or lesser degree, a matter of the imaginative exploration of this persona.[15]

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[13] For the emotional significance of joint attention see the work of Peter Hobson (e.g. 'What Puts the Jointness into Joint Attention?', Eilan, *et al*. (op. cit. note 9)). Johannes Roessler ('Joint Attention and the Problem of Other Minds', Eilan *et al*. (op. cit. note 9)) argues that the experience of having an emotional reaction to an object corrected by an adult with whom the child is jointly attending is a source of the child's sense of objectivity. Thanks here to Tom Cochrane for discussion and references.

[14] On the capacity of emotions to generate 'patterns of salience and tendencies of interpretation', see K. Jones, 'Trust as an Affective Attitude', *Ethics* 107, 1996, 4–25. See also N. Carroll, 'Art, Narrative and Moral Understanding', in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a particularly strong thesis about the relationship between emotion and narrative see D. Velleman, 'Narrative Explanation', *Philosophical Review* 112, 2003, 1–25.

[15] Note that I draw the domain of the emotions here very widely. It is much larger than the domain we would get if we were to count emotions conservatively, including only those large-scale, recurrent, culturally salient affective states which themselves have distinctive narrative shape and a name we recognize as putting them on the list of emotions. But in addition to love, fear, jealousy, disgust and the other cases we easily recognize as emotions, there are small-scale nameless urgings that direct our attention to certain stimuli and prime us for action in ad hoc ways. When I speak hereafter about emotions I mean to include the small-scale as well as the large, the unnamed as well as the named. There are purposes for which this would not be a useful principle of grouping, but I think it meets the needs of the present case. In my very generous sense of

3 How is framework conveyed?

How does guided attending to narrative come about, and how is it kept on track through what may be a long and complex narrative with many shifts of mood and style? One kind of answer appeals to theorizing about other minds: as we read or otherwise engage with a narrative we develop a theory—perhaps not a very explicit one—about the personality expressed, and about details of this personality's take on the story, and we adjust our own take to match this personality. I don't deny a role for this in the processes by which guided attending takes place. Huge cognitive investment in self-conscious theorising about narrative can produce a few worthy souls able to adjust their affective and evaluative take on a narrative in this way. But it seems to me likely that, most of the time, framework adoption works by the activation of subpersonal mechanisms which tend to produce imitative behaviour, though we as individuals may know little about the mechanism—or indeed about the behaviour—and have limited powers to control its operations.[16] We are, it turns out, astonishingly imitative creatures, and imitation probably plays an important role in the acquisition of skills and hence in the spreading of cultural practices, as well as in achieving harmony and solidarity between group members.[17] We adopt the tone of voice of someone we are listening to, and their mood as well.[18] Certain pathologies remove the inhibition to imitation, leaving people in the grip of a drive to imitate in inappropriate circumstances.[19] Strength in imitation seems to go with high levels of empathy and with social understanding, and

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'emotion', at least a good deal of framework adoption consists in being apt to engage emotionally with the events and characters of the narrative.

[16] On the role of what he calls 'automatic processes' in causing us to adopt imagined points of view see J. Harold, 'Infected by Evil', *Philosophical Explorations* 8, No. 2, 2005, 173–187.

[17] See e.g. M. Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[18] See R. Neumann, and F. Strack, 'Mood Contagion: The Automatic Transfer of Mood between Persons', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, 2000, 211–223. See also my discussion of some views of N. Carroll on mood in 'A Claim on the Reader', *Imaginative Minds*, I. Roth (ed) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, forthcoming).

[19] See S. Hurley, 'Active Perception and Perceiving Action: the Shared Circuits Hypothesis', *Perceptual Experience*, T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne, (eds.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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children with autism—a disorder marked by rigid, unimaginative thought—tend to be poor imitators.[20] We like people better if they imitate us, and we imitate people more if we like them.[21] The best way for a waiter to increase his or her tips is simply to make sure to repeat the order back to the customer word for word.[22]

Looking back at the mother-child narrative reported earlier, it is easy to see how in that case imitation, underpinned by nothing more cognitive than the contagious expression of feeling, plays a part in bringing about the emotional adjustment in the child's way of seeing things that leads to them jointly attending to the past in an harmonious way. When mother says

> A pinched finger is no fun … But who came and made you feel better?

We can imagine the changing tone of voice that first encourages a regretful recollection of the pain followed by an upward curve of affect leading in to the child's delighted 'Daddy!'

You might have a worry about imitation like the one I noted earlier concerning joint attention: imitation can't be the driving force behind framework adoption in the case of narrative, since the author is generally not present to be imitated, and may indeed be long dead. And imitation may account for changes in behaviour, but can hardly account for the sorts of subtle cognitive and affective changes that will be involved in adoption of a framework. I am not troubled by these objections. We have plenty of evidence for the existence of strong tendencies to deferred imitation: infants at nine months will imitate up to a week after they have seen an initial behaviour performed.[23] More significantly, we—adults included—are strongly inclined to imitate people who are not

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[20]   See P. Hobson and A. Lee, 'Imitation and Identification in Autism', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 40, 1999, 649–659.

[21]   T. L. Chartrand, and J. A. Bargh, 'The Chameleon Effect: The Perception-Behavior Link and Social Interaction', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76, 1999, 893–910; E. E. Balcetis, M. Ferguson, and R. Dale 'An Exploration of Social Modulation of Syntactic Priming', draft available at http://www.people.cornell.edu/pages/eeb29/mimicry.pdf.

[22]   R. B. van Baaren, R. W. Holland, B. Steenaert, A. van Knippenberg, 'Mimicry for Money: Behavioral Consequences of Imitation', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 39, 2003, 393–398.

[23]   A. Meltzoff, 'Immediate and Deferred Imitation in Fourteen and Twenty-four Month-old Infants', *Child Development* 56, 1985, 62–72; and 'Infant Imitation and Memory: Nine-month-olds in Immediate and Deferred Tests', *Child Development* 59, 1988, 217–225.

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merely absent but who do not and never did exist. Ingenious experiments reveal how easily we can be brought to imitate people we have been asked to imagine, even where the imagining has been sketchy and of brief duration. Indeed, it is surprisingly easy to cause people to imitate the cognitive and affective style of a stereotypical group member when they are asked to imagine one, even in areas where we might think there was little capacity for variation of performance. Dijksterhuis and van Knippenberg asked subjects to imagine a 'typical professor' for five minutes, 'and to list the behaviors, lifestyle, and appearance attributes of this typical professor'. Subjects thus primed turned out to do better on Trivial Pursuits questions than other subjects did, whereas subjects who had been asked to imagine soccer hooligans did worse.[24] These subjects were not asked to imitate, and they were probably unaware that they were doing so.

We now have the ingredients for what I shall call the *standard mode of engagement* with narrative. Narratives, because they serve as expressive of the attitudes and feelings of their authors, create in our minds the image of a persona with those attitudes and feelings, thereby prompting us to imitate them. In taking on those attitudes and feelings, we thereby come to adopt the framework canonical for that work. This has two significant effects. First of all, adoption of that framework is likely to help us orient ourselves in rewarding ways to the represented events of the narrative. Secondly, we have the sense of sharing with the author a way of experiencing and responding to those events. We need not, I repeat, think of this canonical framework as always intended; often narrative makers express themselves unconsciously through their acts of narrative

[24] A. Dijksterhuis and A. van Knippenberg, 'The Relation Between Perception and Behavior or How to Win a Game of Trivial Pursuit', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, 1998, 865–877. In these experiments imitation was consequent on the activation of a stereotypical representation (elderly person) rather than a highly individualized one, as would be the case with imitation of an authorial cognitive style. But evidence that stereotypical representations have these effects certainly suggests that individuated ones would also have them. Indeed, we are likely to draw on knowledge of stereotypes in constructing a representation of a distinctive mental economy. Tamar Szabó Gendler, who kindly drew my attention to these results, makes an important distinction between cases where the imitation results from imagining an action and cases where it results from imagining a stereotypical person. See her illuminating analyses of a complex budget of cases in 'Imaginative Contagion', *Metaphilosophy* 37 (2006, forthcoming).

making, though exponents of narrative art may consciously manipulate the expressive aspects of their work. Consciously or unconsciously, they may fashion personas which their narratives express and which are not their own real personalities.[25]

I have called this the standard mode of engagement; it is not the only one. As we shall see directly, readers sometimes resist frameworks, wholly or in part. There are readings of narrative 'against the grain', but as this description suggests, they require effort. In other cases, the framework that goes with the work seems to be intended to be resisted, though it is not always easy to distinguish these from cases of two other kinds: those where the framework is one we simply find no merit in, finding it difficult to see how this could genuinely be someone's framework; and cases where the apparent framework is undermined by subtle irony expressive of some other, less obvious framework. There are also emotional and other effects that narratives have which do not come by way of the expression-imitation nexus I have described. The ghost stories of M. R. James are chilling, but the fear we experience is not had by way of imitation of any fear expressed by the work's authorial persona; that persona seems ironically detached from the horrifying spectral creatures he describes.[26] This sense of detachment affects our own responses in various ways, but it does not generally lead to a feeling of detachment.[27] The standard model deserves its name because it works easily and naturally in so many cases, and relies very little on conscious efforts to communicate on the part of the author, or on conscious efforts to comprehend on the part of the reader.

[25] This is not a talent confined to literary geniuses; producers of formulaic romances are presumably adept at expressing the kind of personality their readers find most satisfaction in. Nor should we think of frameworks as always highly constraining. Some narratives express attitudes and feelings that embrace or at least acknowledge a range of specific responses and with which one can feel in tune while having an ambiguous, puzzled or even paradoxical response, admiring and deploring the very same traits and actions. Other narratives do seem to impose more rigidity: Dickens and Trollope as contrasted with Austen and Henry James, for example.

[26] James' technique is the opposite of that employed so often by Poe, who takes care to have his narrators express their own extreme emotional reactions to the events they recount.

[27] One hypothesis that occurs to me here is that the detachment of James' authorial persona serves to increase anxiety in the reader because it denies us exactly the comforts of a joint-attention-like experience.

4 Resisting a framework

I have presented guided attention in a positive way, emphasising the pleasures of the experience of attending with the authorial personality. But there are occasions on which the sort of sharing induced by guided attention is uncomfortable or downright objectionable; at this point we make contact with what is now called *the problem of imaginative resistance*.[28] Imaginative resistance, as perceptive commentators note, arises in different ways and for different reasons, and there's a useful distinction to be made between cases where we deny the author's right to stipulate such and such as part of the fiction, and hence deny that we have an obligation to imagine such and such, and cases where we recognise that something is part of the fiction but nonetheless resist the invitation to engage with it imaginatively.[29] The cases I'll consider are of this second kind, and I am interested in a subclass of these: those where resistance arises, not so much because we are resistant to imagining some component of the story P, but because we find it difficult, unrewarding or unattractive to occupy the framework of which the work is expressive partly in virtue of its having P as content.

Here are some examples; they illustrate the diverse ways in which this kind of resistance can be generated. Oscar Wilde said that one must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing. But few of us, I suspect, do laugh, however cheap we

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[28] The problem was noted by Hume ('Of Tragedy') and the issue was revived by Kendall Walton ('Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality', *Aristotelian Society* Supplement 68, 1994, 27–50) and by Richard Moran ('The Expression of Feeling in Imagination', *Philosophical Review* 103, 1994, 75–106). For a detailed clarification of the issues and a proposed solution see T. S. Gendler, 'The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance'. *Journal of Philosophy* 97, 2000, 55–81, to which I will refer again later.

[29] See especially B. Wetherson 'Morality, Fiction, and Possibility', *Philosophers' Imprint* 4, No. 3, available at http://www.umich.edu/%7Ephilos/Imprint/frameset.html?004003+27+images. See also Gendler on what she calls the 'That's what you think' response ('The puzzle of imaginative resistance'). Recent papers by Gendler ('Imaginative Resistance Revisited', *The Architecture of the Imagination*, S. Nichols (ed) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Walton ('On the (So-called) Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance', ibid) emphasise the need to distinguish different issues, and the inadequacy of the general label 'puzzle of imaginative resistance'.

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think the pathos of Dickens' narrative.[30] We feel a strong pull in the direction of reacting as Dickens so obviously wants us to, though we may resent its effects on us, and our resentment may lead us to abandon the work altogether.[31] Dickens does not tell us how to react; instead he sets a tone in his writing which is strongly expressive of the reactions he seeks to wring from us. Or we may be disconserted by the author's having placed us in a position where the preferred (and tempting) reaction to tragic events is amusement, as is notoriously the case with Evelyn Waugh. Even an author whose point of view we generally admire may sometimes ask of us more than we can comfortably give, as with *Mansfield Park*, for a reader unwilling to grant so central a role to the virtue of constancy.[32] These are cases of one kind of imaginative resistance, though as I have indicated, our willingness to resist in such cases can be seriously challenged by a talented author. We may on occasions be pleased that the author's efforts to move us away from ways of responding that we find natural and convivial have succeeded. In V. S. Pritchard's novel *Mr Beluncle*, the central character is made to some degree sympathetic despite a constant emphasis on his small-minded religious zealotry, selfishness, bullying, weakness of will, self-delusion and a host of other faults. Pritchard puts the brakes on our natural tendency to enjoy roundly condemning Beluncle's character, behaviour and way of life, and by so restraining us Pritchard helps us both to understand the forces behind such an existence and to exercise our capacity for generosity.

In all these cases, engagement with the work is compromised by the difficulty we have in bringing to bear a range of affective and evaluative responses which are both mandated by the work's expressive qualities and necessary in order to make reading a worthwhile experience. We are like people asked to enjoy an exercise routine for which our muscles and joints are unprepared—

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[30] 'Cheap pathos' is Henry James' phrase, but from a review of *Our Mutual Friend*.

[31] Carlyle—surely a good candidate for being a highly resistant reader—was reportedly overcome by grief.

[32] See A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), Chapter 16.

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perhaps even constitutionally unsuited—and which may seem anything from interestingly challenging, through irritatingly pointless, to calculatedly cruel.[33]

But we do not find it merely difficult or unrewarding to adjust our frameworks to fit what seems to be required for certain narratives: we sometimes think that it would be wrong to try. Tamar Gendler argues that we feel this way especially when we sense a desire on the author's part to 'export' that part of the story: to suggest that what is true of the fictional world is in this respect true of the actual world. More specifically 'cases that evoke genuine imaginative resistance will be cases where the reader feels that she is being asked to export a way of looking at the actual world which she does not wish to add to her conceptual repertoire'.[34] I agree that in many cases our resistance is dependent on our sense that something suspicious is up for export, though this may not explain what is going on in the case of Little Nell: few would object to the exportation of the idea that a child's death is tragic. And anyway, why don't readers—even sensitive ones—cheerfully refuse the invitation to endorse the *truth* of the story's content, while at the same time indulging the harmless pleasure of responding *imaginatively* to the story content in the way they are encouraged to do?[35] Here are two ways we might expand on Gendler's suggestion

[33] In 'Desire in Imagination' I argued that we should recognize a category of states I called desire-like imaginings. I suggested that imaginative resistance is not resistance to imagining that such and such but rather to having certain kinds of desire-like imaginings. While I still think that we need the idea of desire-like imagining, it is not necessary to insist that they are the source of imaginative resistance. Instead I can go downstream (causally speaking) to a less controversial set of entities: emotions evoked by fictions. People who disagree with me about whether there are desire-like imaginings might yet agree with me that we do have the difficulties outlined above in responding emotionally to narrative events in the ways the narrative's framework suggests we should. We need not argue about whether these emotions—were we to have them—would be generated partly by our having states of desire-like imagining.

[34] 'The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance', op. cit. note 29. See also Gendler's 'Imaginative Resistance Revisited', where she distinguishes between the problem of imaginative barriers and the problem of imaginative impropriety (p. 154).

[35] Gendler also puts her point in this way: 'We are *unwilling* to follow the author's lead because, in trying to make that world fictional, she is providing us with a way of looking at *this* world which we prefer not to embrace' ('Puzzle', op. cit. note 29, 79, emphasis in the original). But why

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so as to answer this question.[36] I suspect they often apply together; they would apply in cases where we do not sense a desire to export, though they might appear more vivid in cases where there is export than in cases where there is not.

The first reason is this. How we feel about fictional things and events is how we *really* feel about them; fictions put us into distinctive and highly salient mental states which, even if they are not genuinely emotional states, may be phenomenologically indistinguishable from such states as warm-hearted approval, anger and loathing.[37] And I don't want to feel (that is, really feel) certain ways about imaginary situations, for that would bring me closer to those who effortlessly and naturally feel that way about them, because that is the way they feel, or would feel, about comparable situations in real life. I would be manifesting a response which I see in another as the expression of something deplorable, inauthentic or otherwise concerning. On this account, resistance to engaging as Dickens wants us to with the death of Little Nell is a matter of not wanting to share with others—and in particular with the authorial personality—an expression of sentimental and indulgent feelings.[38]

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should we not choose to confine our use of this 'way of looking' to the fictional world? Most recently ('Imaginative resistance revisited') Gendler argues that in a range of cases, moral and non-moral, we refuse to imagine what the author would have us imagine, because we sense that the relevant proposition (or some related proposition) is one we are being asked to believe (Gendler calls these 'pop-out passages'). But in at least the three non-moral examples Gendler gives (Walton's knock-knock joke, Yablo's maple leaf and Wetherson's rational-belief-without-evidence case) I get no sense that the stories involve pop-out; they strike me instead simply as bizarre exercises in fiction-making.

[36]   And Gendler's answer has the merit of moving us away from questions about why we might want, or not want, to imagine this or that proposition, and towards what seems to me the key to understanding the kind of imaginative resistance I am currently considering: that the question is not what we imagine, but how we imagine it.

[37]   Kendall Walton argues that our responses to fictions are best described as 'quasi-emotional' rather than as genuine emotions ('Fearing Fictions', *Journal of Philosophy* 75, 1978, 5–27).

[38]   Analogous reasoning explains why we are resistant to imitating behaviour (e.g. an insulting gesture) we find deplorable even when the imitation would not have the consequences that makes us deplore the behaviour imitated. When motivated in this way, imaginative resistance exemplifies a more general phenomenon: resistance to sharing salient, but often evaluatively neutral, properties with people who we wish to

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The second reason is this: we worry that, in coming to feel that way about imaginary situations, we may put ourselves in danger of coming to feel that way about real situations. Whether or not the feelings evoked by fictions are genuine emotions, we may worry that they are capable of affecting our emotions, and our behaviour, in response to real situations. In view of the rather good evidence for the effects of fictionalised violence on aggressive behaviour and attitudes, I think we are right to worry about this.[39]

Should we say that imaginative resistance arises from our unwillingness to do something, or from our inability to do it? There is no uniform answer to this question. Whether we call any particular case in this region one of inability or of disinclination depends on our assessment of the counterfactual robustness of the conditions that lead to the resistance, together with a choice of a standard of robustness which is highly context-dependent. Given Albert's beliefs about what is morally right, his desires concerning what to do in the face of moral wrongness, together with rather basic facts about the ways he responds emotionally and viscerally to things which strike him as starkly and unmotivatedly wrong, it seems reasonable to say that he simply *can't* engage imaginatively with literature celebratory of sadism in the ways its canonical frameworks suggests he should, though he certainly and in addition thinks that it would be wrong to do so if he could, and he is unwilling to test the boundaries of his imaginative capacity by trying. If he had different beliefs, desires and emotional responses it might be a different story, but the requisite changes would have to be dramatic. It's the relative robustness of the states and dispositions which prevent him from engaging with this narrative which makes 'can't' seem the right description in this case. In other cases the change required would be less dramatic, as with *Mr Beluncle*. Here one might be more inclined to say that someone who fails to take up the challenge of the work's framework is someone who *won't* adopt it rather than someone who *can't*. If we simply say that Albert can't engage imaginatively with *Mr Beluncle* or with a narrative of sadism, that's true in something like the sense in which

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dissociate ourselves from on broadly evaluative grounds. Compare wearing a Hitler-style moustache, or (certainly *less* troubling) a Burberry-patterned cap; while resistance might be partly aesthetic in both cases, it also exemplifies resistance to sharing.

[39] See S. Hurley, 'Imitation, Media Violence and Freedom of Speech', *Philosophical Studies* 117, 2004, 165–218.

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I can't speak both Finnish and Martian. It's true that I can't currently understand a word of either, but my not speaking Martian is much more counterfactually robust than my not speaking Finnish is.[40]

Does my approach generate a new puzzle of imaginative resistance? Consider again Albert: he has no difficulty imagining *that* Nell's death is tragic; his problem is that, in imagining this, he is not able to adopt any framework of response that would make this an emotionally satisfying thing to imagine. And the new puzzle is this: why is our capacity to vary our framework of imagining so much more limited than our capacity to imagine this or that content?

Cost and benefit give us the key to this puzzle. Flexibility of response to circumstance comes at a cost, so there must be benefits that justify those costs.[41] Take first the case of imagining such-and-such. Suppose it evolved for planning purposes. In order to plan effectively I need to imagine how things might go under various counterfactual assumptions; I need to imagine this or that being the case, or doing this or that. But what I need to know about these scenarios is how they will affect me—and that means, in almost all cases, how they will affect me, constituted as I am with my own basic values, tastes and other character-defining dispositions. Not much need here for flexibility in the adoption of frameworks.

Planning may not have been the only reason why imaginative capacities were selected in our lineage: capacity to read the minds of our fellows was probably an important factor in determining the fitness of our Pleistocene ancestors. But here again there need not have been much pressure to gain flexibility in point of view for purposes of mind-reading. Social groups were, by our standards, very small, and the people one came into contact with were mostly those with very similar experiences and aspirations who faced similar problems; there were not then the differences of access to wealth and culture that so greatly exaggerate the differences between people. If our minds had evolved in an environment as mentally diverse as the *Star Wars* bar things might have been different.

[40]   See D. Lewis, 'The Paradoxes of Time Travel', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13, 1976, 145–152.
[41]   On mental complexity as response to circumstance see Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Complexity and the Function of Mind in Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

A problem with this account is that it looks as if we have vastly *more* flexibility in imagining this-or-that than we need either for planning or for mind-reading. We take in our stride the wildly false scenarios of science fiction, though they would have had no relevance to either planning or mind-reading in the Pleistocene. The solution here is to see that, for this kind of imagining, maximum flexibility is the lowest-cost option. According to simulation theory, the capacity to imagine operates by using the same inferential system that operates for belief; that is cheaper than building two parallel systems. Such a dual purpose system has then to be insensitive to the doxastic status of the input; the system will run the same way whether the proposition is believed or not. In that case, the system will run on anything that is a potential belief. So at the very least, anything we could possibly believe becomes something we could imagine. Now there are things we can imagine but cannot believe: that I am now dead, that the world has ended, that I believe P but P is false, for example. The last of these examples is significant, since acknowledging the possibility that your own beliefs might be false is very useful; a system of imagining should therefore exceed the compass of belief. And so, very probably, it would. A rule for inputs which said 'allow just those things which might be believed' would require a gateway capable of distinguishing believable from unbelievable propositions—no easy thing to create and maintain. Once the creature concerned acquires an articulated language, the simplest rule for imaginative inputs is *allow anything that makes sense*. So imagining this or that is under quite different evolutionary constraints from those that apply to the adoption of frameworks for imagining. That sort of flexibility comes only at considerable cost, and the benefits of great flexibility with respect to frameworks were few in the relevant environment.[42]

[42]   A useful model for thinking about this contrast exists in the distinction between imagining that something is the case, and imagining performing certain bodily actions. We have strong evidence that the request to imagine tapping your fingers in a certain order involves the operation of systems designed to plan and initiate actual movement. While we can easily imagine *that* we tap our fingers at arbitrarily high speeds, when it comes to imagining tapping, things are different; people generally report a maximum imagined speed at which they can carry out the tapping routine which is close to the highest speed at which they could actually tap it. And damage to certain brain areas that affects your actual performance can comparably affect the rate at which you can imagine performing. (For a review of some empirical results in this area as well as an account of the

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5 Confusing framework and content

I've treated framework and story content as distinct; a more subtle analysis than I have space for here would show, at least, that they are not independent. Certainly, it is not always clear where the distinction between them lies, or even that the boundary between them is everywhere sharp. Cases arise where our wariness of the narrative is the product of a complex and perhaps confused relation between framework and story content. Here are two cases of this kind; they exemplify what we might call *resistance to metaphysics*.[43] They illustrate the ways in which a narrative may confuse us—and may be contrived to confuse us—about what is content and what is framework, promising a more balanced and harmonious relation-ship between these two things than they in fact deliver.

1. *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950) is a film in which the same events are described by different characters, whose accounts are translated into images by means of flashbacks: we see what happens, according to each account. These accounts are different in crucial ways, particularly to do with the assignment of responsibility for the events. *Rashomon* is commonly said to illustrate the relativity of truth, and I think there is grounds for saying that this is how it is meant to be taken.[44] But I hope I am not alone in experiencing resistance to this intention; this sort of philosophy is too banal to add anything interesting to the story, and indeed it detracts from

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contents of bodily imaginings, see G. Currie and I. Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Chapter 4.) An evolutionary argument like the one I produced just now seems to apply here: there was little advantage to be gained for my ancestors in having a highly flexible system for the imagining of bodily movement; indeed, it would be an advantage to have your imaginings in this regard constrained by facts about your own performance in ways which don't depend on you knowing what those facts are, since mental rehearsal for action ought, by and large, to reflect the constraints of actual performance. But when it comes to imagining this or that proposition to the effect that I can tap at a certain speed, there is no advantage to be gained by making one imagining more difficult than another, and no cost in not doing so.

[43] Weatherson notes the possibility of imaginative resistance to metaphysics; but his '*Wiggins World*' case is an example of failure to make something part of the fiction's content.

[44] But note the well worked out non-relativistic reading in D. Richie, *Focus on Rashomon* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

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it. So I prefer not to adopt the framework here suggested by the narrative itself: a framework which requires me to see a certain kind of significance in the events of the story. I choose not to see those events as significant in that way.

2. At various points in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Marcel experiences episodes of memory, most notably the incident of the madeleine. Along with descriptions of these events, Proust gives us, through the voice of Marcel, a very lengthy philosophical account of the nature of time, which is supposed to be illustrated by and in some way explain these experiences. This philosophy of time has many aspects; part of it seems to involve the idea that each person has an essence that stands outside time and which experiences the fusion of temporal moments from this external perspective.[45] This idea strikes me as very implausible, as making dubious sense, and certainly not as supported by the narrative's account of the experiences Marcel undergoes. The story looks better without that idea and once again I feel entitled to put it to one side.

Could my concern in these metaphysical cases be, at bottom, a moral one? Perhaps these claims about truth and about time are ones I associate with self-indulgent philosophising, and indulging one's self philosophically may be a bad thing to do; if the metaphysics in question was one I firmly rejected but for which I could see respectable arguments, I might not be so resistant.[46] But this cannot be the whole explanation. Ghost stories traffic in all sorts of entities and events I regard as epistemically unrespectable, but, given the right kind of story, I am happy to imagine them existing and happening. The ghost stories of M. R. James are fine things: not at all dubious *qua* narratives, even though ghosts and the like are epistemically very dubious indeed.[47] Appeal to the idea of indulgent metaphysical thinking won't take us far in explaining my

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[45] For discussion see my *Arts and Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter 5. For a more detailed and scholarly analysis with similar conclusions see J. Dancy, 'New Truths in Proust?', *Modern Language Review* 90, 1995, 18–28.

[46] I could be badly wrong about all this: about the works concerned, and about the merits of the philosophical ideas I've mentioned. That doesn't matter. The point is that, feeling this way makes me resist the imaginative invitations of the work. No doubt you can illustrate the same phenomenon from your own experience.

[47] *See The Collected Ghost Stories of M. R. James* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1942).

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reactions to these works. For similar reasons, the difficulty with the indulgent metaphysics can't be that I worry that by imagining these things I will end up believing them. The same consideration would create a barrier between me and the ghost story, and no such barrier exists.

My objection to the metaphysical ideas of *Rashomon* and of Proust is not so much to their epistemic weakness or metaphysical indulgence, but to their lack of impact on the content of these narratives. M. R. James always manages to embed his ghost-metaphysics firmly in story-content. I don't mean by that that the stories always forbid a naturalistic reading; in some of them the supernatural might conceivably be explained away. But the supernatural is always a live explanatory option, and bears on particular events, their causes and their effects. And while James is a master of the genre, success in this is not so very rare; ghosts are the sorts of things that are apt to fit nicely into story-content, and one does not have to be a literary genius to make a ghost story work tolerably well. A metaphysics of the supernatural has, of course, advantages of vividness and emotional pull. But even some general and abstract metaphysical ideas occasionally make a significant impact on story content; David Lewis claims that there are time travel stories within which a consistently developed non-standard metaphysics of time governs the development of plot.[48] By contrast, the psychological and objective events of *Rashomon* and of Proust's novel seem unaffected by the metaphysical ideas in question; if it were not for Marcel's endless theorising, sober readers would never infer Proustian notions of time from the plot. *Rashomon* and Proust's novel announce (in different ways) their metaphysical themes, without going to the trouble of showing how the metaphysics is integrated into the story—something, I suggest, that would be just about impossible. Their resort is therefore to metaphysics as framework: they suggest to us ways of seeing the material as more profound than it would otherwise seem; they suggest to us certain attitudes and emotions we might have in response to this deeper message.[49] We are encouraged to see episodes of memory as portentous in vague ways, to adopt a rather knowing and superior attitude towards testimony, with hand-wringing about scepticism thrown in. This is metaphysics as anxiety—but without meeting the cost of making plausible or even

[48]   See Lewis, 'The Paradoxes of Time Travel', op. cit. note 40.
[49]   Barnett Newman's much-derided titles suggest a framework that the work often does not live up to.

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visible anything to be anxious about. Oscar Wilde said that a sentimentalist is one who wants to enjoy an emotion without paying the cost of it. There is a sort of metaphysical parallel to sentimentality in such works as *Rashomon* and in Proust's novel as well: they invite us to admire certain exciting prospects, but they take care to show only a far distant and very blurred view, thus avoiding the hard work of making coherent sense of the idea they want us to be excited by. Their performance is like that of an artist who, lacking fine drawing skills, suggests we look at their work from a distance at which fine drawing will not be evident.

This does not mean the end for these narratives. Proust's novel cycle is full of literary and psychological value which survives the rejection of his metaphysics of time; Kurasawa's film has its virtues. Indeed, I have suggested that these works are experienced as more engaging, interesting and valuable without the framework designed to push emotional buttons when time, memory and truth are mentioned. This suggests an asymmetry in narrative between story-content and framework; frameworks seem to be to some extent optional, detachable things, or things about which we as readers and viewers are in some—perhaps limited—position of authority. We don't have comparable authority in story-content. Suppose I find certain speeches of Miss Bates in *Emma* to be too crudely characterised. So I fashion a new character for her, and make corresponding changes to the text. Surely I have ceased to engage with the original story, taking it instead as the basis for the construction of a new work of my own. That does not seem to be so obviously what I am doing in the cases of *Rashomon* and of Proust. With story-content, the author simply stipulates what is to be the case; while we are under no obligation to engage imaginatively with any work at all, once we do chose to engage with it, we accept the author's say-so.[50] Not accepting that say-so is then a sign of disengagement. With framework, it seems as if something is presented on which there might be a certain amount of negotiation.

Why should this be? Perhaps the answer is this. While story-content can be characterized in objective, observer independent terms, framework is essentially a matter of response. In

[50] Except, perhaps, in those cases where the author specifies a set of circumstances, but then goes on to claim something we might call *constitutively inconsistent* with these circumstances. Thus we would baulk at the author who, having told us that in the world of the story grass looks green to normally sighted people in normal circumstances, goes on to insist that, in that world, grass is red. On this see Wetherson, 'Morality, Fiction, and Possibility', op. cit. note 29.

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presenting a framework, the author suggests a way of responding to content. In matters of response, we do not easily accept the absolute authority of another. It is reasonable to think that the author is well-placed to make suggestions about how to respond to the story, but not reasonable to think him or her in a position absolutely to dictate terms.[51]

So my worries about *Rashomon* and the Proust cycle are these. There is, first of all, a failed expectation that the proffered metaphysics will be built into narrative content; what we actually get is little more than a suggestion about how to see and respond to the events of the story by projecting onto them a general, vague emotional colouring. Yet even this exercise provides few if any opportunities for making interesting connections between events of the story and depends for its emotional force on our being persuaded that there is more depth in the metaphysical thoughts than in fact there is.

[51]   Again, I have found Wetherson's 'Morality, Fiction, and Possibility' (ibid.) useful here, though I am not sure he would agree with the point made. See also S. Yablo, 'Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda', *Conceivability and Possibility*, T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorn (eds) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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