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Von den Lesewelten zur Lebenswelt. Überlegungen zu der Frage, warum uns fiktionale Literatur berührt

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The following article argues that fictional texts can be distinguished from non-fictional texts in a prototypical way, even if the concept of the fictional cannot be defined in classical terms. In order to be able to characterize fictional texts, semantic, pragmatic, and reader-conditioned factors have to be taken into account. With reference to Frege, Searle, and Gabriel, the article recalls some proposals for how we might define fictional speech. Underscored in particular is the role of reception for the classification of a text as fictional. I make the case, from a philosophical perspective, for the view that fictional texts represent worlds that do not exist even though these worlds obviously can, and *de facto* do, contain many elements that are familiar to us from our world. I call these worlds *reading worlds* and explain the relationship between reading worlds and the life world of readers. This will help support the argument that the encounter with fictional literature can invoke real feelings and that such feelings are by no means irrational, as some defenders of the paradox of fiction would like us to believe. It is the exemplary character of fictional texts that enables us to make connections between the reading worlds and the life world.

First and foremost, the article discusses the question of what it is that readers' feelings are in fact related to. The widespread view that these feelings are primarily related to the characters or events represented in a text proves too simple and needs to be amended. Whoever is sad because of the fate of a fictive character imagines how he or she would fare if in a similar situation. He or she would feel sad as it relates to his or her own situation. And it is this feeling on behalf of one's self that is the presupposition of sympathy for a fictive character. While reading, the feelings related to fictive characters and content are intertwined with the feelings related to one's own personal concerns. The feelings one has on his or her own behalf belong to the feelings related to fictive characters; the former are the presupposition of the latter. If we look at the matter in this way, a new perspective opens up on the paradox of fiction. Generally speaking, the discussion surrounding the paradox of fiction is really about readers' feelings as they relate to fictive persons or content. The question is then how it is possible to have them, since fictive persons and situations do not exist. If, however, the emotional relation to fictive characters and situations is conceived of as mediated by the feelings one has on one's own behalf, the paradox loses its confusing effect since the imputation of existence no longer plays a central role. Instead, the conjecture that the events in a fictional story could have happened in one's own life is important. The reader imagines that a story had or could have happened to him or herself. Readers are therefore often moved by a fictive event because they relate what happened in a story to themselves. They have understood the literary event as something that is humanly relevant in a general sense, and they see it as exemplary for human life as such. This is the decisive factor which gives rise to a connection between fiction and reality. The emotional relation to fictive characters happens on the basis of emotions that we would have for our own sake were we confronted with an occurrence like the one being narrated. What happens to the characters in a fictional text could also happen to readers. This is enough to stimulate corresponding feelings. We neither have to assume the existence of fictive characters nor do we have to suspend our knowledge about the fictive character of events or take part in a game of

make-believe. But we do have to be able to regard the events in a fictional text as exemplary for human life.

The representation of an occurrence in a novel exhibits a number of commonalities with the representation of something that could happen in the future. Consciousness of the future would seem to be a presupposition for developing feelings for something that is only represented. This requires the power of imagination. One has to be able to imagine what is happening to the characters involved in the occurrence being narrated in a fictional text, ›empathize‹ with them, and ultimately one has to be able to imagine that he or she could also be entangled in the same event and what it would be like. Without the use of these skills, it would remain a mystery how reading a fictional text can lead to feelings and how fictive occurrences can be related to reality. The fate of Anna Karenina can move us, we can sympathize with her, because reading the novel confronts us with possibilities that could affect our own lives. The imagination of such possibilities stimulates feelings that are related to us and to our lives. On that basis, we can participate in the fate of fictive characters without having to imagine that they really exist.

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