

# Fiction, Imagination, and Value

Lucy Anne Isabel Psaila  
UCL

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
MPhilStud in Philosophical Studies

## **DECLARATION**

I, Lucy Anne Isabel Psaila, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

Novels often offer readers the experience of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character's point of view. I use the phrase "imaginative engagement" as it presupposes the least about what the imagining involves, but it has been characterised as involving imaginatively "inhabiting" or "trying on" another's perspective. Further, the experience of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is often taken to be a valuable one. However, an explanation of *why* these experiences are valuable has received little attention. My aim is to provide that explanation. I will argue that the relevant imagining is best characterised as one which involves imagining an experience first-personally and as being had by another, as despite first appearances, this characterisation avoids common conceptual problems. Next, I argue that these imaginings can be valuable in the same way as when the point of view imaginatively engaged with is one the imaginer encounters "face-to-face". Using that result, I present three explanations of the imagining's value, starting with the tempting explanation that imaginative engagement is valuable because it is a way of acquiring phenomenal knowledge about what experiences are like. I argue that although this explanation is overambitious, the reader can nonetheless make improvements to their phenomenal knowledge. I then argue that these improvements provide the basis of two further explanations which have not been offered. The first is that imaginative engagement can improve the reader's understanding of the world, by improving their understanding of how general statements about the "human condition" apply to particular cases. The second is that imaginative engagement with a fictional character can enable the reader to "take others to be other human beings" and take them as having their own intricately detailed and separately existing mental lives.

## **IMPACT STATEMENT**

This thesis provides three explanations of why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character (where imaginative engagement involves something like “taking-up their perspective”) is a valuable experience that artworks, specifically novels, offer their audiences. Each aims to show that the imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can be valuable in the same ways that imaginatively engaging with someone who we encounter “face-to-face” can be valuable. Therefore, the result is significant for our understanding of the value of art, suggesting that it has more in common with the value of our day-to-day interactions than first appears. It will help to answer questions about what readers might learn from novels, when the novel can be a source of insight about the actual world, and the role of the imagination in that learning.

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# Introduction

Novels often offer their audiences the experience of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. I use the phrase “imaginative engagement” as it presupposes the least about what the imagining involves, but it has been characterised in various ways, including: “imaginatively inhabiting the perspective of another person” (Bailey, 2023, pg. 218), “‘trying on’ mental states which are *potentially available* to us but at a given moment *differing* from our own” (Zunshine, 2006, pg. 17, emphasis in original), “imaginative identification” (Budd, 1995, pg. 7), being “carried beyond [...] to another site of subjective experience” (Denham, 2020, pg. 206) and having “the occasion to shed our skin for a spell and inhabit other subjectivities” (Gibson, 2009, pg. 438). Further, each of these characterisations are made with the aim of claiming that imaginative engagement with a fictional character is one of the valuable experiences that novel-reading offers.<sup>1</sup> As Olivia Bailey notes, that claim “might strike us as obviously correct”, and no effort seems to have been made to reject it (*Ibid.*, pg. 218). However, compared to the prevalence of the claim, an explanation of *why* these imaginings are valuable has received little attention, aside from the suggestion that imaginative engagement with a fictional character is a way the novel can express its “power [...] to take us beyond ourselves”, and that being “taken beyond” is in some way valuable (*Ibid.*, pg. 235). So, my aim is to provide an explanation of why imaginative engagement with a fictional character is a valuable experience.

In Chapter 1, I will first characterise the “imaginative engagement” whose value I aim to explain, as one which involves imagining an experience both first-personally (*The Subjectivity Requirement*), and as being had by another (*The Alterity Requirement*) (Denham, 2000, pg. 206). Despite first-appearances, I argue that the characterisation is not contradictory, but instead best facilitates an explanation of the imagining’s value. Second, I will motivate two constraints on my explanation of why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is valuable. The first is that the explanation captures how it can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face” (Matravers, 2024b). The second is that the explanation captures its non-instrumental value. An explanation which satisfies both constraints may be hard to provide, as the explanations offered for the value of imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-

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<sup>1</sup> I focus only on novels, as the value of imaginative engagement is often appealed to as a way of explaining the value of novel-reading. However, I do not take novels to be “specially placed” to offer these experiences (Bailey, 2023, pg. 218). Many other artworks also offer their audiences the experience of imaginative engagement with a fictional character, including poetry, theatre, film, TV, and videogames. However, here I will only focus on novel-reading.

to-face” do not straightforwardly apply to imaginative engagement with fictional characters. Throughout, I aim to overcome this challenge.

I then provide three explanations of why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is a valuable experience. In Chapter 2, I provide two explanations which capture its epistemic value. The first is the tempting *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation: imaginative engagement is valuable because it is a way of finding out what certain experiences are like. However, I will argue that contrary to most versions of the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, imaginative engagement with a fictional character cannot afford the reader with the same degree of phenomenal knowledge as actually having the experience. Instead, they acquire phenomenal knowledge of a lesser degree, in which the reader learns more about how “what the experience is like” relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it. The second epistemic explanation is the *Understanding of the World* explanation: imaginative engagement is valuable because it is a way for the reader to improve their understanding of the world, specifically of the applicability of general statements about the “human conditions” to particular cases. In Chapter 3, I provide the *Empathic Projection* explanation, that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is interpersonally valuable, and an imagining is interpersonally valuable by enabling the imaginer to attend to, in some way, the other’s existence as the subjects of their own mental lives, involving an “acceptance of others as separate from me” (Avramides, 2023, pg. 305).

In presenting these three explanations, I aim to address the lack of attention given to explaining why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is a valuable experience. By doing so, I vindicate the prevalence of the claim that it is valuable, by more comprehensively explaining the different kinds of value it can have.



# Chapter 1:

## Characterising “Imaginative Engagement” and Explaining its Value.

### §1. Introduction

In Chapter 1, I have two aims. First, I will characterise the “imaginative engagement” whose value I aim to explain. Second, I will motivate two constraints on my explanation of why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is valuable, that it captures how it can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”, and that it captures its non-instrumental value.

Throughout, I will take what is imaginatively engaged with to be another’s “point of view”. To borrow Adrian Moore’s phrasing, a point of view is one’s “location in the broadest possible sense” (Moore, 2000, pg. 6). The broadest sense of location includes one’s location “in the world”, in time, space, historical and cultural context, and in relation to others, as well as one’s “individual make-up”, which includes what is unique to an individual “in virtue of [their] psychological and physical constitution” (Denham, 2000, pg. 185). To use Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* as an example, Clarissa Dalloway’s location “in the world” includes being in 1920s London, in the interwar years, married to Richard Dalloway, in a society where women have lower status than men. Her “individual make-up” includes having a fretful disposition, being slightly older than middle-age, and being inclined to reflect extensively on the past.

### §2. Characterising “Imaginative Engagement”

In (§2.), I characterise “imaginative engagement”. It is an imagining *of* an experience, as opposed to imagining *that* a proposition is true (Hopkins, 2024, pg. 1). Further, it satisfies the following requirements, adapted from Alison Denham, (Denham, 2000, pg. 206):

*The Subjectivity Requirement:* The imaginer first-personally imagines an experience.

*The Alterity Requirement*: The imaginer imagines that experience as being had by another.<sup>2</sup>

I will motivate each requirement in turn, by both surveying existing characterisations of the valuable experience novel-reading is taken to offer, and by attempting to provide a characterisation which facilitates an explanation of the imagining's value.

## §2.1. Motivating *The Subjectivity Requirement*

First, I will motivate *The Subjectivity Requirement*, that the experience is imagined first-personally. Within imaginings which are of experiences, Rae Langton makes a further distinction between subjective and objective imaginings (Langton, 2019, pg. 84). This is Richard Wollheim's distinction between the "centred" and "acentred" imagination: the subjective/centred imagination is "imagination in which one possesses a point of view internal to that which is [imagined]" and the objective/acentred imagination is "imagination in which one does not possess a point of view internal to that which is [imagined]" (Wollheim, 1984, pg. 72). To illustrate the difference, suppose the reader of *Mrs Dalloway* imagines Clarissa Dalloway hosting her party. If they imagine subjectively, they imagine the party from a first-person perspective, which is somehow connected to Clarissa Dalloway's first-person perspective of the party. The experience imagined is of hosting the party. If they imagine objectively, they imagine the party third-personally. The experience imagined is of watching Clarissa Dalloway host that party.

*The Subjectivity Requirement* is motivated by its coherence with existing characterisations of the valuable experience novel-reading is taken to offer. These characterisations are often stated in terms of "perspective-taking", "inhabiting", or "identifying with" a fictional character, and the subjective imagination seems necessary for these kinds of imagining. For example, Amy Coplan characterises "perspective-taking" as involving "construct[ing] another person's subjective experience" (Coplan, 2011, pg. 9). As the other's subjective experiences are presented to them first-personally, the first-personal imagination is necessary to "construct" their "subjective experiences" and take up their perspective. Accordingly, I will focus on subjective imaginings. However, when considering what the imagining's subjectivity contributes to its value, I will consider whether the objective imagination could also be valuable in the same ways.

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<sup>2</sup> These versions preserve the core of Denham's originals, whilst excluding some details which are not relevant to my purposes.

Further, the valuable experience that novel-reading offers is usually not only taken to be a subjective imagining of *an* experience, but of *another's* experience (Bailey, 2023, pg. 218). In fact, this addition is necessary for the imagining of an experience to amount to a form of imaginatively engaging with another's point of view, as merely imagining an experience can be done without any connection to another's point of view. What is imagined is the experience had by a certain point of view, such that the experience had is determined by the features of that point of view. For example, the reader imagines Clarissa Dalloway's experience of hosting the party, not what it might be like for *them* to host that same party. If the reader does not share Clarissa Dalloway's disposition to fret over trivial social occasions, the former involves imagining that experience of fretting, the latter does not.

However, in characterising the subjective imagining of another's experience, a conceptual problem arises, namely, how can one subjectively imagine another's experience. When introducing the subjective imagination, I left open how the reader's first-person perspective of hosting Clarissa Dalloway's party related to Clarissa Dalloway's own first-person perspective. A first-pass characterisation is that through the subjective imagination, the reader can first-personally access Clarissa Dalloway's own experiences of the party, such that their first-person perspective just *is* hers, and they experience what she experiences (Matravers, 2017, pg. 75). However, a common assumption, which I accept here, is that one's having first-personal access to an experience is sufficient for that experience to be theirs. For example, for Nagel, an experience is "essentially connected with a single point of view" (Nagel, 2013, pg. 167).<sup>3</sup> So, if the imaginer has first-personal access to an experience, then it seems that the experience is no longer another's experience, but one of their own. So, the first-pass characterisation cannot capture how the imaginer can subjectively imagine another's experience. Rejecting the first-pass characterisation seems to limit the value of imaginative engagement, as it seems to limit the extent to which the imaginer can "reach outside [their] mental lives", and therefore be "taken beyond themselves" in a valuable way (Matravers, 2024a). To address the conceptual problem, I suggest that rather than providing first-personal access to another's experience, the subjective imagination provides *an approximation of* the other's experience. Despite the apparent limitations of rejecting the first-pass characterisation, I

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<sup>3</sup> Even if that assumption is rejected, it is unclear what first-personal access to another's experience amounts to, and the underlying worry, that the first-pass characterisation cannot explain how the imaginer can first-personally access another's experience, remains.

will explore further what that approximation involves and maintain that this alternative characterisation is sufficient to explain how imaginative engagement can be valuable.

## §2.2. Motivating *The Alterity Requirement*

Next, I will motivate *The Alterity Requirement*, that the experience is imagined as being had by another. To do so, I will consider the distinction between imaginings which involve imagining an experience as being one had by oneself, or as had by another (Langton, 2019, pg. 78).

First, I will consider how the reader can imagine the experience as being one that *they* have had, by imagining “being [the other] in that situation”, which involves “a shift in self-location and a new grasp of how things appear and feel”. Langton calls this imagining “empathy” or “identification” (Langton, 2019, pg. 78).<sup>4</sup> The claim that artworks offer the valuable experience of imaginative engagement with a fictional character is often made about imaginings characterised this way. For example, Budd characterises the valuable experience as “imaginative identification” (Budd, 1995, pg. 7), and Denham characterises it as the reader’s being “transported” from their “discrete and isolated locus of experience” to another’s “site of experience” (Denham, 2020, pg. 17). However, Langton’s “empathy” is also conceptually problematic. It is conceptually incoherent for the characterisation to involve a “shift in self-location” because the imaginer cannot re-locate from one point of view to another. No imagining can change the imaginer’s location “in the world” or “individual make-up”. This conceptual incoherence is connected to the one raised in (§2.1.), as the inability to shift-location implies an inability to access first-personally what another point of view experiences. Given the conceptual problem, it is hard to clearly characterise the imagining in terms of “shifting self-location”, and so there is no clear characterisation of the imagining whose value is trying to be explained. So, I will reject the “shift in self-location” characterisation and focus on an alternative which better facilitates an explanation of its value. Once again, rejecting the “shift in self-location” characterisation may seem to limit the imagining’s value. If the reader cannot “shift self-location”, then the novel’s capacity to “take the reader beyond themselves” in a valuable

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<sup>4</sup> The reader might also imagine the experience as being one they have had by imagining it as being had by a different version of themselves. For example, they might use Clarissa Dalloway’s point of view as template for imagining themselves, as being the host of a party in 1920s high-society, being a more easily flustered person, and so on (Goldie, 2011, pg. 311). These imaginings are not the focus when considering the valuable experience offered by novels, so I set them aside.

way seems limited. However, I will argue that even without the characterisation of “shifting self-location”, the value of imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be explained.

To find an alternative characterisation, I turn to cases where the imaginer imagines the experience as being one had by another – imaginings which satisfy *The Alterity Requirement*. For example, the reader of *Mrs Dalloway* might imagine the experience of hosting that party and imagine that experience as being the one that Clarissa Dalloway has. These imaginings avoid the conceptual problem of “shifting self-location”, as the reader does not imagine being Clarissa Dalloway. Instead, they only require the imaginer to “conceive of at least some experiences in a way that is independent of their presence to [their] own consciousness” (Denham, 2000, pg. 205). As they avoid the “shifting self-location” conceptual problem, the characterisation in terms of *The Alterity Requirement* better facilitates an explanation of the imagining’s value. Therefore, even though it is less prevalent in existing characterisations of the valuable imagining offered by novel-reading, there is strong motivation for *The Alterity Requirement*.

There is a third conceptual problem which arises for imaginings which are characterised as satisfying both *The Subjectivity* and *Alterity Requirements*, but I will argue that it can be resolved. The problem is that it seems contradictory to describe an imagining as satisfying both requirements. As mentioned, what someone can experience first-personally is “essentially connected” with their point of view (Nagel, 2013, pg. 167). So, by first-personally approximating another’s experience, the imaginer is attempting to imagine the experience in a form which “essentially connected” to their own point of view. So, imaginings which satisfy *The Subjectivity Requirement* seem to involve the imaginer imagining the experience as being had by themselves. However, by *The Alterity Requirement*, they imagine it as being an experience had by another, suggesting that it is contradictory to describe an imagining as satisfying both requirements.

However, I argue that the apparent contradiction is resolved by the following distinction from Matthew Boyle: between imagining an experience “*as subject*” and “*as having a particular subject*” (Boyle, 2023, pg. 4, emphasis in original). The purpose of the distinction is to illustrate that imagining an experience first-personally does not necessarily involve imagining oneself to be the subject of that experience. Although imagining an experience subjectively “presupposes the existence of a subject”, it might be that no specific subject “falls within the scope of what is

imagined” (*Ibid.*). The distinction is plausibly illustrated by the example of how one can first-personally imagine swimming in the ocean, without imagining themselves to be the subject of that experience. Rather than imagining themselves as the “particular subject”, the imaginer imagines “only certain things [one] might experience: the chill of the water, the salty taste, the tug of the current” (*Ibid.*). So, plausibly, imagining an experience first-personally does not necessarily involve imagining oneself to be the “particular subject” of that experience.

I can now outline the solution to the apparent contradiction. Unlike Boyle’s examples, in the imaginings I focus on, a subject *does* “fall within the scope of what is imagined”. For example, the reader imagines that Clarissa Dalloway is the subject of the experience of fretting. Further, what the reader imagines is the *other’s* experience. For example, they imagine Clarissa Dalloway’s experience of hosting the party, not just *an* experience of hosting a party. Who the other is may determine the “things [they] might experience”, for example, Clarissa Dalloway’s fretfulness determines that the experience to be imagined is one which involves feeling uneasy while the guests arrive. However, it is worth clarifying how a subject “falls within the scope of what is imagined”. As Denham clarifies, *The Alterity Requirement* is an “external condition attached to [the imagined experience]”, meaning whether it is satisfied does not change the experience imagined (Denham, 2000, pg. 207). So, the subject does not “fall within the scope of what is imagined” in the sense that they feature in the contents of the imagined experience, but rather it is further imagined that the experience is had by another. As the reader’s first-personal imaginings do not necessarily involve imagining that the experience is one had by themselves, when they further imagine it to be had by another, no contradiction arises. Therefore, it is not contradictory to describe an imagining as satisfying both requirements, and I will use this characterisation to explain the imagining’s value.

### §2.3. Points of View and the Novel

Next, I will outline the points of view in novels which are available for the reader to imaginatively engage with. By doing so, I aim to illuminate how a novel can make a point of view amenable to imaginative engagement, which will further specify the imaginings whose value I aim to explain.

First, I will introduce a distinction between two kinds of point of view that novels offer for imaginative engagement: depicted and implied points of view. Depicted points of view feature in the novel itself, insofar as at least some details about its “location in the broadest sense” is included

in the novel, whereas implied points of view are external to the novel's events.<sup>5</sup> Depicted points of view are those of fictional characters, as the narrator shares information about their location "in the world" and their "individual make-up" (Palmer, 2002, pg. 40). Sometimes, a fictional character is also the narrator, and accordingly, the narrator is also a depicted point of view, such as Mrs de Winter, the first-person narrator of *Rebecca*.

The experience whose value I aim to explain is imaginative engagement with fictional characters – the depicted points of view – as they are more amenable to imaginative engagement. To see why, I will compare them to the implied points of view. Sometimes, the narrator does *not* feature in the novel's events, but that such a point of view exists is implied by the novel. For example, the third-person narrator of *Mrs Dalloway* does not feature in the narrated events, but the omniscient narratorial style implies that there is such a point of view, even if no further information about it is also implied by novel. Even though the implied narrator "mediates the reader's access to [the novel's events]", they are not the "point of view [which] orients the narrative perspective", in the sense that they are not the point of view the narrative directs the reader's attention towards (Walton, 1990c, pg. 376). That orientating point of view is the point of view of the character that the implied narrator describes the circumstances of and directs the reader's attention towards. It is the fictional character's point of view which is amenable to imaginative engagement, as what the reader notices and the order they learn things mirrors what the character notices and learns (*Ibid.*, pg. 378). For example, the what the reader notices about Clarissa Dalloway's party mirrors her attention to that party. As imaginative engagement involves first-personally approximating the other's experience, mirroring their attention makes their experiences amenable to imaginative engagement, as the reader can closely track what their experiences are of. The role of the implied narrator is to guide the reader's attention to the depicted point of view, but the reader does not seem to imaginatively engage with that implied point of view. It is hard to see what form that imaginative engagement could take, when no information about it is given.<sup>6</sup>

However, some novels also have an implied point of view which the reader's attention and order of learning is made to mirror, so one might think it is not solely fictional characters which are

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<sup>5</sup> As I will outline in (§3.2.), imaginative engagement with a fictional character still requires the reader to supplement the information described in the novel. The distinction between depicted and implied points of view tracks whether that point of view *itself* features in the events of the novel.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps, objectively imagining Clarissa Dalloway's party could be thought of as imaginatively engaging with the omniscient narrator's point of view, although I will not explore this further.

amenable to imaginative engagement. I call this the “implied spectator”, a term borrowed from discussions about points of view in paintings. Some paintings depict their contents as “actually being seen”, and the contents of the painting may indicate what kind of person that spectator is (Hyman, 2006, pg. 87). The implied spectator is “brought into being by the content of the painting”, typically where the contents of the painting involve an “outward stare”, as if towards an occupied point of view (Harrison, 2005, pg. 30-31). I suggest that some novels also are “outward staring”, implying a spectator to the events depicted. For example, *An Orchestra of Minorities* concerns human Chinonso, and his guardian spirit. Chinonso has unwittingly murdered, and his guardian spirit must appeal his case to the God of Creation. The novel takes the form of that appeal, suggesting the implied spectator to the narrated events is the God of Creation. In this case, the what the reader notices and the order they learn things mirrors both the God of Creation and Chinonso’s experience of the novel’s events. However, Chinonso’s point of view is nonetheless still more amenable to imaginative engagement, as his position as an “orientating perspective” is more apparent to the reader. The reader is given more information about his “location in the broadest sense”, and so the fact that their awareness of events mirrors Chinonso’s is therefore more salient to the reader (Petraschka, 2021, pg. 230). As a result, his point of view is more amenable to imaginative engagement. So, I will focus on imaginative engagement with fictional characters, as the depicted points of view, they are most amenable to imaginative engagement.

Finally, I will consider the place of these imaginings in the reader’s appreciation of a novel. For Malcom Budd, a work’s value as art (which he calls *artistic value*) is determined by the “experiences a work of art offers”, and insofar as those experiences are valuable, that artwork is artistically valuable (Budd, 1995, pg. 2). Further, an artwork “offers” the experiences which it “*demand*s if it is to be understood” (*Ibid.*, pg. 4, emphasis added). I argue that experiences of imaginative engagement are *not* experiences which the novel “*demand*s”, although they can nonetheless be artistically valuable. As I have outlined, by directing the reader’s attention in the same way as theirs and providing information about them, the novel can make a fictional character’s point of view one which “orientates the narrative perspective”. So, what the novel “*demand*s” to be understood is an appreciation of how the narrative is orientated around that point of view. If the reader does not appreciate that orientating perspective, then they have failed to understand the novel, insofar as it is a narrative structured in a certain way. However, it is plausible that there are different forms that appreciation could take. For example, the reader might objectively imagine Clarissa Dalloway’s party, such that their attention to the details of the party is directed in the same way as hers,



appreciating that her point of view “orientates the narrative perspective”. So, imaginative engagement need not be “demanded” by the novel for it to be understood. However, it is one way of meeting the “demands” of the novel, with respect to appreciating the orientation of the narrative. So, if the reader meets the “demands” of the novel by imaginative engagement, those imaginings can be artistically valuable.

### §3. Explaining the Value of Imaginative Engagement

In (§3.), I will motivate two constraints on my explanation of why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is valuable. The first is that the explanation captures how it can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face”. The second is that the explanation captures its *non*-instrumental.

#### §3.1. Fiction versus “Face-to-Face”

First, I will outline the distinction between a fictional character’s point of view and the point of view of someone encountered “face-to-face”. So far, I have outlined the points of view that novels make available for imaginative engagement, but I have not yet considered the sense in which they are fictional. To do so, I will follow Peter Lamarque and Stein Olsen’s suggestion that fictional entities, including fictional characters, are those whose “nature and very existence [is] dependent logically on the descriptions in some originating fictive utterance”, and as a result they “owe their identity to their mode of presentation” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 88).<sup>7</sup> A “fictive utterance” is one which “presents sentences [...] for a particular kind of attention [...] for the audience to make-believe (imagine or pretend) that the standard speech act commitments associated with the sentences are operative even while knowing that they are not” (*Ibid.*, pg. 43). To adopt that “particular kind of attention” is to adopt the “fictive stance” (*Ibid.*, pg. 44). In other words, adopting the “fictive stance” involves make-believing that the utterances make true assertions about what is described, despite knowing that this is not the case.

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<sup>7</sup> It is sometimes unclear when a point of view originates in a fictive utterance. For example, it is unclear how far the point of view of Thomas Cromwell in *Wolf Hall* originates from the descriptions in the novel, or from the actual person Thomas Cromwell. I focus only on points of view which are clearly fictional, to explore the apparent explanatory problems that fictionality poses, without being overly distracted by its “fuzziness” (Walton, 1990a, pg. 140).

With that outline of which points of view are fictional, I will now consider which are not. For Lamarque and Olsen, “being fictional” is a property that narratives bear, and the fictionality of characters derives from the fictionality of their originating narrative, where a “narrative” is understood as a representation of events in a time sequence (*Ibid.*, pg. 29). So, “being non-fictional” is also a property of narratives, such as works of biography, history, psychoanalysis, or social documentation. As I will argue, the value of imaginative engagement with a fictional character when novel-reading sometimes depends on certain features the novel bears in virtue of being a narrative. These features could also contribute to explaining the value of imaginatively engaging with a non-fictional point of view, when reading a non-fictional narrative. Perhaps my explanation could be adapted to these cases, but I will not attempt to do so here.

However, there are other cases which imaginative engagement with a fictional character could be compared to, imaginative engagement with someone encountered “face-to-face.” Encountering someone “face-to-face” involves having “direct sensory acquaintance” with that person (Matravers, 2024b).<sup>8</sup> Often, one might imaginatively engage with someone they are able to have, or have had, “direct sensory acquaintance” with, even if they do not currently have that acquaintance. For example, one might imaginatively engage with their friend’s point of view whilst they are away on holiday. I will not focus on such cases, but I will take them to fall under the “face-to-face” category. Imaginative engagement with someone encountered “face-to-face” most differs from imaginative engagement with a fictional character.<sup>9</sup> Crucially, “*everything* that there is to know about an imaginary person is available in [the novel from which they originate]” (Vogler, 2007, pg. 14, emphasis in original). The reader is provided with all that information and can also have “direct access” to their mental states (Palmer, 2002, pg. 29). In contrast, when the point of view is a “face-to-face” one, learning about them requires a kind of “interpersonal inquiry”, a continuous process of learning which can never be completed (Dover, 2024, pg. 5). Relatedly, where there is the possibility of mutual interaction and inquiry with those they encounter “face-to-face”, given that they occupy the same environment in the actual world, there is no possibility of such interaction with a fictional character. Consequently, the comparison between imaginative engagement with a fictional character when reading a novel to imaginative engagement with someone encountered

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<sup>8</sup> Derek Matravers has plausible reasons for understanding “face-to-face” more broadly, as including anything which informs the agent’s actions, even if is only encountered via a representation (Matravers, 2024b). However, it is the narrower sense which is more suitable for my purposes.

<sup>9</sup> The distinction between fictional and “face-to-face” points of view is not always clear-cut. For example, when watching a play at the theatre, there are senses in which what the audience sees on the stage is both fictional and encountered “face-to-face”. However, the distinction is clear-cut when comparing fictional characters in novels to those encountered “face-to-face”.

“face-to-face” is the most striking one. Therefore, I will focus on this comparison, and argue that it can help to comprehensively explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

### **§3.2. The First Constraint: Those Encountered “Face-to-Face”**

First, I will motivate the first constraint on my explanation of why the experience of imaginative engagement with a fictional character is valuable, that it captures how it can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face”. I will also consider why an explanation which satisfies this constraint may be hard to come by.

#### §3.2.1 Motivating the First Constraint

First, I will motivate the constraint that the explanation captures how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face”. For Denham, *The Subjectivity and Alterity Requirements* jointly identify a “species” of imagination which involves “conceiving of another’s experiential point of view” (Denham, 2000, pg. 204). If all imaginings which satisfy both requirements form a “species”, it is *prima facie* plausible that all imaginings in that “species” can be valuable in the same way. Therefore, it is also *prima facie* plausible that imaginative engagement with both fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” can be valuable in the same ways.

However, even if imaginative engagement with fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” are part of the same “species” of imagining, there is reason to doubt that their being part of that same “species” is sufficient to motivate that they can be valuable in the same ways. As I outlined in (§3.1.), there are many differences between fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face”. There is one further difference which suggests that what is imagined differs in imaginative engagement with each. The difference is that a fictional character’s “location in the broadest sense” is only fixed to the extent to which the novel describes it, whereas the all the information about someone encountered “face-to-face” is fixed and specifiable. Perhaps, that difference produces a further one, between the experiences imagined in imaginative engagement with a fictional character compared to someone encountered “face-to-face”: the experience imagined in the former is in some way underspecified, compared to the experience imagined in the latter. For example, when the reader imagines Clarissa Dalloway’s experience of fretting, one might think that the experience imagined is importantly different to imagining a friend’s experience

of fretting over a party, as the details of Clarissa Dalloway's point of view are not fully specified the way the details of a friend's point of view are. So, what the reader imagines when they imaginatively engage with Clarissa Dalloway is some details of what might be experienced, such as feeling fretful as the guests arrive, but not who all the guests are, the precise way she feels towards all of them, and so on. Therefore, even if both imaginings satisfy *The Subjectivity and Alterity Requirements*, it may seem that the experiences imagined are sufficiently different, such that mere shared "species" membership does not motivate that imaginative engagement with fictional characters and those encountered "face-to-face" can be valuable in the same ways.

However, I will argue that the difference between the points of view of fictional characters and those encountered "face-to-face" does *not* produce a further difference in the experience imagined. As a result, shared "species" membership does motivate that imaginatively engaging with fictional characters and those encountered "face-to-face" can be valuable in the same ways. To do so, I will consider the following principle concerning how readers supplement what is described by a novel:

*The Principle of Verisimilitude:* Fictional states of affairs (objects, events, personages) can be assumed to be like ordinary states of affairs (objects, events, personages) failing indications to the contrary (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 94).

"Ordinary states of affairs" refers to how things tend to be in the actual world. I will outline how, if correct, *The Principle of Verisimilitude* means that the difference between the points of view of fictional characters and those encountered "face-to-face" does *not* produce a further difference in the experience imagined. Even though the reader may be given limited information about a fictional character, they may also not be given any indication that the fictional character is *not* physically and psychologically akin to an "ordinary" point of view. So, they take the fictional character to be specifiable to the extent that a "face-to-face" one is. The reader's tendency to treat fictional characters in this way is evidenced by how readers treat them as "transplantable", they often imagine those characters outside of the events of the novel, and wonder how they would act in different circumstances, what they would have been like if events had been otherwise, or what they would have done if some of their traits were different (Vogler, 2007, pg. 8). These forms of counterfactual speculation suggest the reader often treats fictional characters as having fully specified points of view, beyond what is described by the novel. Rather than imagining an underspecified experience, the reader uses the assumption that a fictional point of view is fully specifiable to complete the details of the experience imagined. For example, *Mrs Dalloway* does not specify whether Clarissa Dalloway reacts to stress by having the physiologically standard reaction

of a raised heart rate, as it does not specify all the details of her physical constitution. However, the novel also does not indicate that her physiology deviates from that of an “ordinary” human. So, when the reader imagines her experience of fretting over the party, they can assume the state of affairs described involves her raised heart rate and imagine her experience of the party accordingly. Additionally, even though those encountered “face-to-face” are fully specified, imaginative engagement with them is also done without knowing everything about their “location in the broadest sense”. Here, the imaginer must also make assumptions about their point of view. Therefore, there is no reason to think that the experiences imagined in either case are different in this way.

To finish my motivation of the first constraint, I will argue that as the experiences imagined in each case are relevantly similar, shared “species” membership *does* motivate that both cases of imaginative engagement can be valuable in the same ways. A further worry is that even if the experiences imagined in each case are similar, that similarity only arises from a mistake on the reader’s behalf – they are wrong to use *The Principle of Verisimilitude* to supplement the information described by the novel when imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. In which case, the similarity between the imagined experiences still would not motivate that both cases of imaginative engagement can be valuable in the same ways. To respond to that possible objection, like Lamarque and Olsen, I will argue that *The Principle of Verisimilitude* not only describes how readers take fictional states of affairs to be, but legitimately governs their supplementation of the novel, so the similarity between the imagined experiences does not rest on a mistake on the reader’s behalf.

First, granting Lamarque and Olsens’ conception of fiction as involving the adoption of the “fictive stance” towards “fictive utterances”, it is true that *The Principle of Verisimilitude* legitimately governs the reader’s supplementation of the novel. For them, “imaginative supplementation” is one of “the most basic constitutive responses to fiction”, meaning it is one of the responses which constitutes the “fictive stance” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 77). As the fictive stance involves “make-believing” that the “standard speech act commitments apply”, it involves “make-believing” that a “fictive utterance” describes an actual state of affairs. Where the novel lacks detail about that state of affairs, it best fits the practice of make-believe to supplement what is described by taking that state of affairs to be like “ordinary” ones. Therefore, on their conception of fiction and what the

“fictive stance” involves, it is legitimate for the reader to supplement the novel by using *The Principle of Verisimilitude*.

Second, I will address the “most compelling objection” to *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, it implies that “every story will include vast collections of remote facts immaterial to the narrative” (Friend, 2017, pg. 38). For example, because there is nothing in *Goldilocks* to indicate otherwise, it is true in the story that Tenzing and Hillary were the first to climb Everest, a result which suggests that such principles lead to the “excessive proliferation” of fictional truths (Walton, 1990b, pg. 148). For Stacie Friend, the “excessive proliferation” objection’s force lies in the fact that it makes fictional states of affairs “determinate in surprising respects” and does not accommodate their “intuitive incompleteness” (Friend, 2017, pg. 38). However, like Kendall Walton, I suggest that the “excessive proliferation” concern can be addressed by noting that there are “enormous differences in the importance of a work’s various fictional truths [...] Some are emphasised and highlighted; others remain in the shadows” (Walton, 1990b, pg. 148). So, that fictional truths are “excessively proliferated” is not a concern, as they just “remain in the shadows” of a novel. As a result, that the novel is “determinate in surprising respects” need not affect one’s reading of it. I will return to *The Principle of Verisimilitude* in Chapters 2 and 3, exploring how a novel can “emphasise and highlight” different truths. However, by defending *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, I have argued that the similarity between the experiences imagined when imaginatively engaging with fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” does not rest on a mistake on the reader’s behalf. So, that these imaginings are members of the same “species” of imagining motivates that the two can be valuable in the same ways. This completes my motivation for the first constraint, that the explanation captures how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face”.

### §3.2.2. Challenges in Satisfying the First Constraint

Next, I will outline why an explanation which satisfies the first constraint may be hard to provide. The challenge is that the explanations of the value of imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face” do not straightforwardly explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

To see the challenge, consider the explanations typically appealed to for the value of imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face”, that it is epistemically valuable, and that it is

interpersonally valuable. The epistemic explanations hold that imaginative engagement is a way of finding out what certain experiences are like (Matravers, 2011, pg. 26), and it is a way of improving our understanding of the world (Denham, 2001, pg. 606).<sup>10</sup> The interpersonal explanation holds that imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face” is valuable because it enables the imaginer to attend to, in some way, the other’s existence as subjects of their own mental lives, involving an “acceptance of others as separate from me” (Avramides, 2023, pg. 305). In this way, the imaginer learns that they are in the “company” of others who have their own separately existing minds (Cavell, 1999, pg. 424).

The challenge presents itself differently for each explanation, and I will introduce each in turn. For the epistemic explanations, the challenge is that a fictional character’s fictionality seemingly renders those explanations unsuitable for explaining the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. As I outlined, taking the “fictive stance” towards certain utterances involves “make-believing” that the text asserts truths about a state of affairs, whilst knowing that this is not the case. For Lamarque and Olsen, the “fictive stance” creates a distance “between what is said and what can be inferred”, explaining the thought that there is a “‘gap’ between fiction and reality” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 44). Merely “make-believing” that the utterances make true assertions about a state of affairs does not enable the reader to infer from the contents of those utterances to truths about the actual world. Therefore, fictional characters do not seem to be related to the actual world, such that imaginative engagement with them can be a way of learning what certain experiences are like and improving their understanding of the world. For the interpersonal explanation, the challenge is that the fact that the point of view imaginatively engaged with is one the imaginer encounters “face-to-face” appears to do important work in explaining how the imaginer can take it that they are in the “company” of others. Without the “direct sensory acquaintance” of being encountered “face-to-face”, it is hard to see how the imaginer could come to the sense of being in the “company” of others. So, it also seems that the interpersonal explanation cannot explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

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<sup>10</sup> Two further epistemic explanations hold that imaginative engagement with someone encountered “face-to-face” is a way of finding out what they are thinking or feeling (Avramides, 2023, pg. 316), or of finding out why they think as they do (Cassam, 2023, pg. 94). However, as the reader may have “direct access” to a fictional character’s mental states, imaginative engagement is largely not needed to learn what they are thinking or feeling. Perhaps, it can help to understand why a fictional character thinks as they do. Regardless, these explanations will not be my focus.

Throughout my explanations, I will argue that the challenges can be overcome. One might think that having accepted *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, the challenges simply dissolve. As fictional states of affairs can be taken to be like “ordinary” ones, it might seem highly plausible that the reader can have experiences of imaginative engagement with fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” which are valuable in the same ways. However, a further reason for accepting the principle is to highlight that even if it is accepted, it is still hard to see how the challenges can be overcome. For Lamarque and Olsen, the nature of the “fictive stance” creates “a gap between fictive content and the world, blocking inferences from what is the case *in the fiction* to what is the case (in the world)” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 95, emphasis in original). Here, they are concerned with the reader’s inability to infer from fictive utterances of the form “a is F” to truths about the actual world (*Ibid.*, pg. 81). Therefore, *The Principle of Verisimilitude* exclusively governs what is supplemented to the text, *not* what can be inferred from it. However, I will argue that the challenge can be overcome, such that the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can be explained in epistemic and interpersonal terms.

### **§3.3. The Second Constraint: Non-Instrumental Value**

Next, I will motivate the second constraint on my explanation of why the experience of imaginative engagement with a fictional character is valuable, that it captures its non-instrumental value.

#### §3.2.1. Motivating the Second Constraint: The “Training” Explanation

To motivate the second constraint, I will start with a tempting explanation which satisfies the first constraint. By seeing why that explanation is unsatisfactory, I will motivate the second constraint. As outlined, by *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, the reader takes fictional states of affairs to be like “ordinary” ones, meaning their imaginative engagement with fictional characters involves taking them to be like “ordinary” people. So, one might think that the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is to be explained by its similarity to imaginative engagement with those ordinarily encountered “face-to-face”. Further, another common suggestion is that the value of the experiences offered by artworks lies in how they train certain abilities, such that those abilities operate better in general (Gaut, 2009, pg. 444). Plausibly, the suggestion could apply to imaginative engagement. Perhaps, imaginatively engaging with fictional characters trains the faculty of imaginative engagement, including the ability to imaginatively engage with those encountered “face-to-face”, where “training the faculty of imaginative engagement” involves improving the approximation of the other’s experience. In which case, imaginatively engaging with fictional



characters could improve one's ability to imaginatively engage with those encountered "face-to-face". Further, the experience of imaginatively engaging with those encountered "face-to-face" can be epistemically and interpersonally valuable. So, by improving our ability to imaginatively engage with those encountered "face-to-face", imaginative engagement with fictional characters could help to produce further experiences of imaginative engagement which are epistemically and interpersonally valuable. Therefore, it could be instrumentally epistemically and interpersonally valuable. The appeal to training explains the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character in epistemic and interpersonal terms. So, it satisfies the first constraint, by capturing that imaginative engagement with fictional characters and those encountered "face-to-face" can be valuable in the same ways. However, this explanation makes the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character solely *instrumental*; it is valuable only because it helps to produce further valuable experiences, namely, imaginative engagement with those encountered "face-to-face".

However, explanations which capture only the instrumental value of imaginative engagement with a fictional character are unsatisfactory, when taken as comprehensive explanations of its value. Although having solely instrumental value does not limit how valuable these experiences can be, instrumental explanations fail to capture all the ways imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be valuable. First, imaginative engagement with a fictional character does *not* necessitate an improvement to the ability to imaginatively engage with those encountered "face-to-face".<sup>11</sup> A reader who imaginatively engages with Clarissa Dalloway's point of view may not get any better at imaginatively engaging with the people they encounter "face-to-face" in their daily lives in virtue of that experience. However, I find it intuitive that that reader may still have had a valuable experience. Second, the epistemic and interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered "face-to-face" is non-instrumental. So, the first constraint can be better satisfied if the explanation captures the non-instrumental value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, as then the explanations more closely match. Therefore, I aim to provide an explanation which captures the imagining's non-instrumental value, whilst also satisfying the first constraint.

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<sup>11</sup> Even Martha Nussbaum, who especially strongly commits to the claim that novel-reading trains the reader's ability to pay the right "attention" to actual other people, only takes the novel to provide "favourable conditions" for training that ability, not that any improvement is necessitated (Nussbaum, 1990, pg. 162).

### §3.2.2. Two Unsatisfactory Explanations

However, there is another explanatory strategy which satisfies both constraints yet is still not the sort of explanation I aim to provide. This strategy satisfies the first constraint by taking imaginative engagement with a fictional character to have instrumental epistemic and interpersonal value and satisfies the second constraint by appealing to a different source of non-instrumental value, such as artistic or hedonistic value. Combined, these two sources of value satisfy both constraints. I will argue that explanations of this sort are unsatisfactory and use them to clarify the sort of explanation that I will pursue instead.

Artistic or hedonistic value are tempting explanations of the non-instrumental value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. Starting with artistic value, the suggestion is that imaginative engagement with a fictional character is non-instrumentally valuable as it increases a novel's value *as art*, a kind of non-instrumental value. Recall that in (§2.3.), I argued that valuable experiences of imaginative engagement with a fictional character could contribute to the novel's artistic value. If those experiences have instrumental epistemic and interpersonal value, plausibly, that instrumental value can contribute to the novel's artistic value. In which case, the novel's non-instrumental value (its artistic value) would be at least partly determined by its epistemic and interpersonal value, as is the case for imaginative engagement with those encountered "face-to-face". Another tempting explanation of the non-instrumental value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is its hedonistic value, the pleasure of that imaginative engagement. For example, for Zunshine, "trying on' mental states which are *potentially available* to us but at a given moment *differing* from our own" is the basis of the reader's "enjoyment of fiction" (Zunshine, 2006, pg. 17, emphasis in original).

Both kinds of combined explanation satisfy the two constraints, and I accept that artistic and hedonistic value may have a role to play in comprehensively explaining the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. However, I will not pursue these explanations, as focusing on artistic and hedonistic value limits the extent to which the explanation matches the one given for the value of imaginative engaging with those encountered "face-to-face". The appeal to artistic value introduces a mediating value to relate the experience's non-instrumental value to its epistemic and interpersonal value. The appeal to hedonistic value moves away from the explanations given for the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered "face-to-face", by taking the main source of non-instrumental value to be hedonistic, rather than epistemic and interpersonal. If

imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face” is pleasurable, which presumably it can be, that does not constitute its main non-instrumental value. Consequently, I will argue that the explanations of why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is valuable can more closely match the explanations given for imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-to-face”, by arguing that imaginative engagement with a fictional character can have non-instrumental epistemic and interpersonal value.

#### **§4. Conclusion**

In Chapter 1, I have achieved two aims. First, I characterised the imaginative engagement whose value I will explain. These are imaginings of an experience, imagined first-personally (*The Subjectivity Requirement*), and as being an experience had by another (*The Alterity Requirement*). Second, I motivated two constraints on my explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character: that it captures how it can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with someone encountered “face-to-face” and that it captures its non-instrumental value. Consequently, the explanation I focus on satisfies both constraints by arguing that imaginative engagement with a fictional character can have non-instrumental epistemic and interpersonal value.

# Chapter 2:

## The Epistemic Explanations

### §1. Introduction

In Chapter 2, my aim is to provide two epistemic explanations of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. The first is the tempting *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation: it is valuable because it is a way of finding out what certain experiences are like. However, I will argue that, contrary to most versions of the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, imaginative engagement with a fictional character cannot afford the imaginer with the same degree of phenomenal knowledge as actually having the experience. Instead, they acquire only phenomenal knowledge of a lesser degree, in which the reader learns more about how “what the experience is like” relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it. Nonetheless, that lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge still enables the reader to come to a phenomenal “realization”, in which they “apprehend [the imagined experience] as a form or mode of human experience” (Walsh, 1969, pg. 87, emphasis in original). Further, the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation can be built off to provide a second epistemic explanation, the *Understanding of the World* explanation: imaginative engagement with a fictional character enables the reader to improve their understanding of the applicability of “general thematic statements” about the “human condition” to particular cases (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 325). I will outline each explanation in (§2.) and (§3.) respectively.

The claim that imaginative engagement with a fictional character is epistemically valuable is often made within the debate about “aesthetic cognitivism” (whether an artwork’s epistemic value increases its value as art) where it is sometimes claimed that by offering epistemically valuable experiences of imaginative engagement, the novel’s value as art is increased (Schellekens-Dammann, 2023). Instead, my focus will be on explaining how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be epistemically valuable in the first place, rather than considering whether that epistemic value also increases the novel’s value as art. However, I will consider how certain features the novel bears in virtue of being a narrative or literary work contribute to the explanation of how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be valuable. Many of these features may be thought of as aesthetic features of the work, and as a result, the *Phenomenal Knowledge* and

*Understanding of the World* explanations perhaps capture how the aesthetic features of a novel can contribute to its epistemic value, although I will not explore this further here.

## §2. The *Phenomenal Knowledge* Explanation

In (§2.), I will present the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation: imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is valuable because it is a way of finding out what certain experiences are like. The explanation is tempting, as imagining an experience is “naturally connected” to “[truths] concerning what other people’s experiences of the world are like” (Bailey, 2023, pg. 218). If correct, the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation satisfies both the constraints I outlined in Chapter 1. First, the value of imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-to-face” is also explained by the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, capturing that the two can be valuable in the same ways. For example, if one’s “brother is on the rack”, then imaginative engagement with him is a way of “learning what his suffering is like” (Langton, 2019, pg. 97). Second, the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation captures the non-instrumental value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. I will assume that the epistemic value of phenomenal knowledge, like other kinds of knowledge, may be both instrumental and non-instrumental. However, the experience of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is non-instrumentally epistemically valuable in the sense that it is that experience itself which affords the imaginer with phenomenal knowledge, rather than being a means to other experiences which provide phenomenal knowledge.

I will present the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation by outlining how an imagining’s satisfaction of *The Subjectivity* and *Alterity Requirements* contributes to it providing the reader with phenomenal knowledge. Starting with *The Subjectivity Requirement*, I will argue that, contrary to most versions of the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, imaginative engagement with a fictional character cannot afford the imaginer with the same degree of phenomenal knowledge as actually having the experience. Instead, they can only acquire phenomenal knowledge of a lesser degree, in which the reader learns more about how “what the experience is like” relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it. Turning to *The Alterity Requirement*, I will argue that lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge still enables the reader to come to a phenomenal “realization”, in which they “apprehend [the imagined experience] as a form or mode of human experience” (Walsh, 1969, pg. 87). In other words, they “realize” what kinds of human experiences are generally like.

## §2.2. *The Subjectivity Requirement*

First, I will consider what role *The Subjectivity Requirement*, imagining an experience first-personally, plays in explaining how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be a way of finding out what certain experiences are like.

### §2.2.1. The Nature of Phenomenal Knowledge: Part 1

To see the role *The Subjectivity Requirement* plays in the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, I will first consider what kind of phenomenal knowledge novels are taken to provide. First, it is assumed that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can only provide epistemically valuable phenomenal knowledge by providing the reader with knowledge of what “real” experiences are like (Bailey, 2023, pg. 220), (Gibson, 2008, pg. 583). For Bailey, the reader can acquire phenomenal knowledge of what “real people’s experiences” are like by learning about fictional character’s experiences which “partially or fully mirror [the experiences of real people]” (Bailey, 2023, pg. 220). For example, what is epistemically valuable is not that the reader can learn what Clarissa Dalloway’s experience of hosting a party is like, instead, by learning what Clarissa Dalloway’s experiences are like, they can learn what the experiences of “real” women in 1920s English high society were like.

Second, the epistemic value of the phenomenal knowledge acquired by novel reading is taken to arise from the novel’s capacity to “take the reader beyond themselves”. Imaginatively engaging with a fictional character “can be seen as compensating for the extremely limited way we each encounter the world” (Gibson, 2008, pg. 582). For Berys Gaut, the novel provides the reader with phenomenal knowledge “by broadening our experience to encompass things we might never otherwise have undergone or felt” (Gaut, 2009, pg. 438). To illustrate, consider *Mrs Dalloway* again. The events described are of a specific hostess at a specific party with a specific guest-list in 1920s London. Given that the party is fictional, it is trivially true that no reader of *Mrs Dalloway* would have otherwise had the experience of being at that party. However, the phenomenal knowledge that novels are taken to provide is knowledge of “*kinds* of human experience” (Gibson, 2008, pg. 582, emphasis in original). So, there are two ways the reader can be understood as acquiring phenomenal knowledge of experiences beyond the “limits” of their own: the imagined experience can either be of a kind that they have never had, or a kind they have had, in which case the imagined experience is a familiar one re-cast in different circumstances to their own.

### §2.2.2. The Subjectivity Requirement and Phenomenal Knowledge

I will now consider what role an imagining's satisfaction of *The Subjectivity Requirement* plays in explaining how it can provide the reader with phenomenal knowledge. As Bailey notes, it is a "philosophical orthodoxy" that "learning what an experience is like does require that the contents of that experience be presented to us in a first-personal mode" (Bailey, 2023, pg. 221).<sup>12</sup> As the "orthodoxy" is *prima facie* plausible, I will take it as my starting point, although I will later suggest that it can be resisted when it comes to acquiring phenomenal knowledge from novel-reading. To see its plausibility, recall from Chapter 1, that a reader's first-personal imagining of another's experience cannot provide them first-personal access to that experience, but instead approximates the other's experience. To be an approximation of the other's experience at all, it seems that the imagining must be done first-personally, as that is the perspective from which the other has that experience. Further, the paradigm route to phenomenal knowledge is actually having the relevant experience, which involves having "the contents of that experience be presented to us in a first-personal mode", giving reason to think that an imagining's being subjective is necessary for it to provide phenomenal knowledge (*Ibid.*).

However, I will argue that, contrary to most versions of the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, imaginative engagement with a fictional character cannot afford the imaginer with the same degree of phenomenal knowledge as actually having the experience. As outlined, the phenomenal knowledge the reader is taken to acquire is of "real" experiences beyond the "limits" of their own. So, imaginative engagement with a fictional character is often presented as a mere "alternative route" to phenomenal knowledge of experiences the reader would not otherwise have, rather than one which is epistemically worse than actually having that experience (*Ibid.*, pg. 220). However, rather than being a mere "alternative route", I will argue that imaginative engagement with a fictional character can only provide a lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge than actually having the experience. As I discussed in Chapter 1, a first-pass characterisation of first-personally imagining another's experience takes it that the imaginer first-personally accesses the other's experience, such that they experience what the other experiences. The first-pass characterisation would explain how imaginative engagement with another can be an "alternative route" to phenomenal knowledge, as on this characterisation, the imaginer's first-personal access to the

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<sup>12</sup> Langton and Denham both accept the "orthodoxy". For Langton, first-personal imaginings "mimic perception" which "enables us to grasp 'what it is like facts' about the other's experience" (Langton, 2019, pg. 91), and for Denham, imaginings which are not subjective "exclude the phenomenological features of the experience" (Denham, 2000, pg. 202).

experience is the same as if they actually had that experience. I argued that the first-pass characterisation is conceptually incoherent, and ought to be replaced with the characterisation that the subjective imagination instead approximates the other's experience. However, it is hard to see how that characterisation can explain how the reader could acquire the same phenomenal knowledge of experiences "they would not have otherwise undergone" as actually having those experiences. In Chapter 1, I mentioned that the incoherence of the first-pass characterisation may be worrying, as it limits the extent to which the imaginer can "reach outside [their] mental lives" (Matravers, 2024a). Here, that worry arises again, as the limits on how far the imaginer can "reach outside [their] mental lives" seems to also limit the phenomenal knowledge that can be acquired by imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.<sup>13</sup>

To illustrate the worry further, I will focus on one way that my characterisation appears to limit the phenomenal knowledge which can be acquired through imaginative engagement with a fictional character. The worry is that imaginative engagement "distorts" the experience imagined, such that first-personally approximating an experience cannot be a way of learning what that experience is like (Goldie, 2011, pg. 309). Suppose that the imaginer, who is *not* claustrophobic, is stuck in a tunnel with their claustrophobic friend (Matravers, 2024a). When imagining their friend's experience of being stuck in a tunnel, they must attempt to accommodate for the difference in their claustrophobic dispositions; they not only first-personally approximate their friend's view of the tunnel, but also feeling panicky on account of being in that tunnel. To do so, the imaginer must actively imagine having a claustrophobic disposition. However, that is not how their friend's claustrophobic disposition features in their experience of being stuck in the tunnel, they do not need to think about their claustrophobic disposition for panic to set in. So, there are limits on how well the imaginer can first-personally approximate their friend's experience of being in the tunnel. What is imagined is instead a "distortion" of the experience, suggesting that imaginative engagement with the friend's point of view cannot provide the same degree phenomenal knowledge of what their experience is like as actually having that experience. The degree of "distortion" depends on how different the dispositions of the imaginer and the point of view imaginatively engaged with are, for example if the imaginer were also claustrophobic, it would be lessened. Therefore, the "distortion" worry is especially pronounced when it comes to imaginative

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<sup>13</sup> The problem is perhaps less severe for imaginative engagement with those encountered "face-to-face", as in these cases the imaginer shares the same environment as that point of view, providing them with alternative information about what the other's experience is of. However, they still cannot achieve more than approximation of the other's experience, given the conceptual problem.



engagement with fictional characters, as the novel can heighten the difference between the reader's dispositions and the dispositions of the fictional character imaginatively engaged with. For example, consider Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*, which is narrated by a fig tree, who has been transplanted from Cyprus to London, and narrates its longing for its home-island. The fig-tree, given its long lifespan, is disposed to feel nostalgic about events that happened hundreds of years ago. Its experience of nostalgia is also shaped by its ability to communicate chemically through the soil with other trees. The reader (presumably) shares neither of these dispositions, and consequently it seems the reader's first-personal approximation of the fig-tree's experiences of nostalgia cannot provide them with any degree of phenomenal knowledge.

There is a further worry about whether imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can provide the phenomenal knowledge it is taken to, of "real" experiences beyond the "limits" of the reader's own. This is a version of the worry discussed in Chapter 1, that the explanations given for the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered "face-to-face" cannot be straightforwardly adapted explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. John Gibson states the worry as follows: there is "no *real* experience the what-it-is-like of which [fictional characters] could inform us", since being fictional, those characters have never experienced anything at all (Gibson, 2008, pg. 583, emphasis in original).<sup>14</sup> Even if one maintains that fictional characters *have* had experiences, then these can only be fictional experiences, and Gibson's worry that there are no "*real* experiences" that a fictional character could inform us about persists. As the "real" experiences include any experience which has been experienced in the actual world, the "real" experiences encompass more than the experiences had by those encountered "face-to-face". So, the challenge is not that the point of view's being encountered "face-to-face" is explanatorily important, but rather that the fictionality of a fictional character's point of view appears to obstruct the explanation.

However, I will argue that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can nonetheless provide the reader with an epistemically valuable improvement to their phenomenal knowledge, even if it is less than the phenomenal knowledge acquired from actually having the experience. They can still learn more about how the "what the experience is like" relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it. I will consider what role

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<sup>14</sup> Like Bailey, Gibson takes it that phenomenal knowledge is only epistemically valuable if it is of "real" experiences, but unlike Bailey, he does not think novel-reading can provide phenomenal knowledge of that sort.

*The Subjectivity Requirement* plays in providing that improved phenomenal knowledge. First, I will argue that the first-personally approximation of the other's experience is sufficient to explain how the reader can acquire the lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge, by addressing the "distortion" worry. There are certain features of fiction (and narratives generally) which make it plausible that the characterisation of "first-personal approximation" does not prevent the reader from acquiring *any* phenomenal knowledge. Recall from Chapter 1 that a fictional narrative can make a fictional character's point of view amenable to imaginative engagement by controlling the reader's attention, such that they learn and notice details in the same way the character does (Walton, 1990c, pg. 378). One way of interpreting this observation is that "fiction can also manipulate our attention in ways that temporarily nudge us away from our home [dispositions]" (Bailey, 2023, pg. 233).<sup>15</sup> So, by manipulating the reader's attention, the novel can direct it in such that it mirrors the attention that someone with that disposition would have. For example, by directing the reader's attention in line with Clarissa Dalloway's, their attention follows hers as the guests arrive at the party, and they notice the trivial details the fretful person is disposed to spot. Also, by directing the reader's attention in line with the fig-tree's, their attention follows the tree's as it reflects on the past, and they notice which past events a nostalgic being with a long lifespan takes as poignant. So, the novel can "take the reader beyond" their own dispositions, such that when they first-personally approximate the experience, they can learn more about how what the imagined experience is like relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it.<sup>16</sup> This is a lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge compared to that acquired by actually having that experience. The novel can only manipulate the reader's attention such that it matches the attention of someone with the relevant disposition, it cannot actually alter the reader's dispositions. So, imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is not a mere "alternative route" to actually having the experience. However, by first-personally approximating the other's experience, the reader can improve their phenomenal knowledge of how "what the experience is like" relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it. So, an imagining's satisfaction of *The Subjectivity Requirement* can improve the reader's phenomenal knowledge.

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<sup>15</sup> Bailey's term is "sensibilities" rather than "dispositions", but I take them to be sufficiently similar. It is worth noting that she takes this to be a secondary way that novels enable readers to acquire phenomenal knowledge of other's experiences. The paradigm for Bailey is that the novel first enables the reader to see that their dispositions are more alike others' dispositions than first appears, thereby enabling them to imagine others' experiences (Bailey, 2023, pg. 231). Even if this is the case, it does not resolve genuine "distortion" problems, so I will not focus on it here.

<sup>16</sup> Note, the reader who shares the fictional character's dispositions, such as the fretful reader of *Mrs Dalloway*, is also "taken beyond" in their learning about what her experience is like, as they learn what that experience is like in circumstances other than their own.

Having addressed the “distortion” worry, I have argued that the reader can acquire the lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge of what a fictional character’s experiences are like. However, I have not yet established that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is a way of learning what “real” experiences are like. To see the role of *The Subjectivity Requirement* further, I will consider how it can improve the reader’s phenomenal knowledge of “real” experiences. Recall that for Bailey, the reader learns what “real” experiences are like by learning what a fictional experience which “mirrors” that “real” experience is like. To respond to Gibson’s challenge, that imaginative engagement with a fictional character cannot be a way of learning what “real” experiences are like, I will consider what that “mirroring” involves. First, recall *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, that failing indications to the contrary, fictional states of affairs can be assumed to be like “ordinary” ones. Lamarque and Olsen denied that *The Principle of Verisimilitude* enables the reader to infer from fictive utterances, such as “Clarissa Dalloway is fretting”, to claims about the actual world. However, this denial does not mean that *The Principle of Verisimilitude* cannot play any role in explaining how the reader can learn from novel-reading. The principle governs how the reader takes the fictional states of affairs described to be, which are the states of affairs that they first-personally imagine experiences of. So, when the reader first-personally approximates a fictional character’s experiences, what is imagined is an experience of fictional states of affairs, which are relevantly like “ordinary” ones. For example, when the reader of *Mrs Dalloway* first-personally imagines the experience of hosting an awkward fictional party, they take the fictional party to be relevantly similar to an “ordinary” one, such that the psychological and social facts which determine the obligations of the host, the rules of social etiquette, and the awkwardness of having all of one’s acquaintances in the same place at once, are taken to be the same in both cases. So, the imagined experience is of a state of affairs which “mirrors” how “real” states of affairs tend to be. Even if the imagined experience does not “mirror” a specific “real” experience of a “real” person (the sort of case that Bailey focuses on), it nonetheless “mirrors” how “real experiences” tend to be. So, through imaginings which satisfy *The Subjectivity Requirement*, the reader can improve their phenomenal knowledge of “real” experiences by improving their phenomenal knowledge of fictional experiences which are relevantly similar to how “real” experiences tend to be.

It might seem that the role of *The Principle of Verisimilitude* here limits the range of novels which can afford the reader with the lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge. For example, *Mrs Dalloway* lacks indication that the points of view available for imaginative engagement differ from “ordinary” ones, so it is perhaps intuitively plausible that *The Principle of Verisimilitude* governs what the reader imagines. However, where novels contain clear “indications to the contrary”, it is worth

considering how *The Principle of Verisimilitude* might nonetheless govern what the reader imagines. For example, consider again the fig-tree narrator of *The Island of Missing Trees*. Here, the reader is given many indications that the fictional states of affairs differ from “ordinary” ones, the tree is highly sentient and reflects on the passage of time and the futility of human conflicts. However, for the reader to make-believe that the text describes actual events, they must make-believe that all the features of that scenario are specifiable, and it best fits the practice of make-believe to take those features as being specified as they are in an “ordinary” scenario. For example, the reader is not given indications to the contrary to think that the tree does not experience nostalgia in the same kinds of conditions as the “ordinary” experiencers of it, and this can guide their imagining of the tree’s experience of it. Therefore, I suggest that even when the imagined experience is of a fictional state of affairs which substantially differs from “ordinary” ones, when the reader’s imagining of that experience satisfies *The Subjectivity Requirement*, it can nonetheless improve their phenomenal knowledge of “real” experiences.

### §2.2.3. The Necessity of *The Subjectivity Requirement*

To finish my discussion of *The Subjectivity Requirement*, I will consider whether the “philosophical orthodoxy”, that “learning what an experience is like does require that the contents of that experience be presented to us in a first-personal mode”, holds when focusing on acquiring the lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge when novel-reading (Bailey, 2023, pg. 221). Consider the alternative to the subjective imagination, the objective imagination, which involves imagining third-personally. In an objective imagining of Clarissa Dalloway’s party, where she features from the third-person perspective, it might seem that the only improved phenomenal knowledge the reader could arrive at is of what it is like to *see* someone fretting over a party, not of what it is like *to fret* over that party. However, I will tentatively suggest that the objective imagination also improve the reader’s phenomenal knowledge of the latter.

There are certain techniques available for novels (and other pieces of narrative, such as biographies or works of history) to use, which illustrate how the objective imagination could be a way of improving the reader’s phenomenal knowledge. One technique is “psycho-narration” (Cohn, 1978, pg. 19), such as the following from *Mrs Dalloway*:

“Oh dear, it was going to be a failure; a complete failure, Clarissa felt it in her bones as dear old Lord Lexham stood there apologising for his wife who had caught a cold at the Buckingham Palace garden party” (Woolf, 2018, pg. 155).

Here, Mrs Dalloway’s mental states are third-personally narrated by an omniscient narrator, which is taken to give the reader “direct access” to her mental states (Palmer, 2002, pg. 29).<sup>17</sup> For Palmer, having “direct access” to those mental states involves not having “to infer the working of other minds from surface phenomena such as speech, body language, behaviour and action”, and does not depend on first-personally imagine their experiences (*Ibid.*). Although the reader’s access to those mental states *is* mediated by an implied narrator, (meaning that the text implies that there is a narratorial point of view, but not anything further information about that point of view), given the lack of information about that narrator and their omniscient authority, the reader has no sense of their access to the fictional character’s mental states being mediated and therefore has the impression of having “direct access” to those mental states. I suggest that having the sense of “direct access” to a fictional character’s mental states indicates how the reader can improve their phenomenal knowledge through the objective imagination. When the reader imagines objectively, through the sense of direct access to a fictional character’s mental states, their attention nonetheless follows the fictional character’s, such that they can directly track how the character’s mental states change in connection to other features of the fictionally described scenario. For example, in the psycho-narrated excerpt from *Mrs Dalloway*, the reader’s attention follows Clarissa Dalloway’s, towards the fact that Lord Lexham’s wife is unable to attend the party on account of a cold, and they can directly access her impending sense of failure that follows. By being able to directly track the relation between Clarissa Dalloway’s mental states and the fictional states of affairs, I suggest that the reader is able, through the objective imagination, to improve their phenomenal knowledge of what her experience is like. Given that the sense of “direct access” afforded by “psycho-narration” plays an important role in drawing out the potential of the objective imagination, it is unclear how far taking a third-personal perspective on those encountered “face-to-face” can also improve the reader’s phenomenal knowledge. Regardless, I suggest there is reason to resist the “philosophical orthodoxy”, and consequently that *The Subjectivity Requirement* is necessary for the reader to improve their phenomenal knowledge by imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

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<sup>17</sup> I do not want to solely associate the objective imagination and third-person narration (or the subjective imagination and first-person narration). I only suggest that psycho-narration highlights the objective imagination’s potential.

## §2.2. *The Alterity Requirement*

Next, I will consider what role *The Alterity Requirement*, imagining the experience as being had by another, plays in the explanation of how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can improve the reader's phenomenal knowledge. I will argue that it is necessary for what Dorothy Walsh calls a "realization", which is to "apprehend [an experience] *as* a form or mode of human experience" (Walsh, 1969, pg. 87, emphasis in original).

### §2.3.1. The Nature of Phenomenal "Realization"

To see the role *The Alterity Requirement* plays, I will outline what the phenomenal "realization" is. As mentioned, novel-reading is often taken as a way for the reader to learn what "kinds" of experiences are like (Gibson, 2008, pg. 588). That thought is reflected in Gaut's choice of examples of what phenomenal knowledge novel-reading can provide: what it is like to experience "being in love" and "suffering the loss of a child" (Gaut, 2009, pg. 483). For Denham, the reader can acquire phenomenal knowledge of what a "kind" of experience is like because artworks "express" the "general form" of a kind of experience. For example, Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* "expresses awe before the infinite itself, in its general form", rather than just "one particular occasion" of it (Denham, 2001, pg. 625). Further, not only does the audience see the experience's "general form", but they also "see it as such", as having that form (*Ibid.*).

However, it is unclear how one can have phenomenal knowledge which is of what a "kind" of experience is like, rather than of what a specific experience is like, because "if we subtract out reference to the specific ways in which some agent actually does experience the world, the supposed knowledge one will gain will no longer be properly [phenomenal] knowledge" (Gibson, 2008, pg. 588). To address Gibson's worry, I suggest that the phenomenal knowledge the reader can acquire of a "kind" of experience is best understood in Walsh's terms of "realization". For Walsh, "to realize our own experience is to attend to the qualitative character of our mode of having or undergoing it", allowing someone to "apprehend it *as* a form or mode of human experience" (Walsh, 1969, pg. 87, emphasis in original). In other words, it is a way of apprehending the "general form" of that experience, at is involves apprehending it as a kind of experience that is one of the "possibilities of [human] experience" (*Ibid.*, pg. 91). Rather than "subtracting out the specific ways the agent actually does experience the world", Walsh's "realization" involves attending to those very specificities. Below, I will consider how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can provide the reader with a phenomenal "realization".

### §2.3.2. *The Alterity Requirement* and Phenomenal “Realization”

I will argue that *The Alterity Requirement* has an important role to play in explaining how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can provide the reader with a phenomenal “realization”. Specifically, it explains how the reader can “see [the experience] as such”, as expressing the “general form” of that kind of experience. It is worth noting that Walsh agrees that novel-reading provides a lesser degree of phenomenal knowledge than actually having the experience, as the reader’s imagining of the relevant experience may be “in many ways incomplete or incorrect” (*Ibid.*, pg. 89). However, she nonetheless holds that novel-reading can afford the reader with phenomenal “realization”. In fact, she further notes that the “experience presented in literary art is far more available for realization than actual life experience” (*Ibid.*, pg. 90). This is because the experience can be “elaborated and developed in point of subtlety and in point of complexity” (*Ibid.*). For example, Clarissa Dalloway’s experience of fretting is subtly elaborated in the excerpt quoted in (§2.2.3), through the omniscient narratorial style. Further, Walsh allows that one can “realize our own experience [...and] another person’s experience”, and the latter is achieved by “imaginative participation” but does not distinguish whether it is easier to realize “our own” or another’s experience (*Ibid.*, pg. 87). However, I will argue that it is easier to “realize” an experience when it is another person’s, specifically, when the imagining satisfies *The Alterity Requirement*, and is imagined as being had by someone else.

To illustrate this, I will consider *Mrs Dalloway* again. As mentioned in (§2.1.1.), there are two cases to distinguish, where the reader has or has not had an experience of the relevant kind. To illustrate the role of *The Alterity Requirement*, I will focus only on cases where the reader *has* had an experience of the relevant kind. This restriction might appear to limit the extent to which novel-reading can provide epistemically valuable phenomenal knowledge, but I will argue that in these cases, the reader can nonetheless have an epistemically valuable phenomenal “realization. So, suppose that the reader, like Clarissa Dalloway, has experienced an excessive pre-emptive sense of failure. Given the “subtlety” and “complexity” of how that experience is described by the novel, when the reader imagines her experience, they are drawn to “attend to the qualitative character of [having it]”, the details of “what that experience is like”. Further, by imagining that experience as being had by another, by are drawn to “attend to the qualitative character” of *another’s* having that experience specifically. As the reader has already had that experience, they can compare the “qualitative character” of the other’s experience with their own, for example, they might find that they have the same wariness of greeting the guests as Clarissa Dalloway, but not quite a deep-rooted sense of impending failure. By “attending to the qualitative character” of both their own and the other’s

experiences, the reader can come to learn what aspects of that experience are tied to their specific circumstances, and which are independent of them. By learning what aspects of their experiences are shared with the experiences of others, the reader can come to “apprehend it *as* a form or mode of human experience”, which is shared by other people (Walsh, 1969, pg. 87, emphasis in original). In this way, an imagining’s satisfaction of *The Alterity Requirement* contributes to explaining how the novel can provide the reader with a phenomenal “realization”.

To finish my discussion of *The Alterity Requirement*, I will flag one possible concern with my discussion of the phenomenal “realization”. The worry is raised by Bailey, who suggests that the fact that the novel highlights how our experiences are more similar to others’ than first appears is “disappointing”, as it points to a “concealed homogeneity”, and accordingly, the novel’s ability to “whisk the reader off to other psychological vantage points” is limited (Bailey, 2023, pg. 231).<sup>18</sup> However, I suggest that the explanatory role of *The Alterity Requirement* avoids that potential sense of “disappointment.” It is true that I have focused on how the reader can come to see that their experiences share a “general form” with the experiences of others. However, that “realization” is afforded by imagining another’s experience and imagining that the experience is had by another. So, that similarity is “realized” via the other’s experiences, which may be nonetheless markedly different from the reader’s own experience of the same kind, such as the nostalgic reader of *The Island of Missing Trees*, who “realizes” the “general form” of nostalgia via the fig-tree’s experiences. Rather than finding a “concealed homogeneity”, the reader can find the range of different experiences which nonetheless fall under the same “general form” of experience.

To conclude (§2.), I have provided the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. I have argued that, contrary to most versions of the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, imaginative engagement with a fictional character cannot afford the reader with the same degree of phenomenal knowledge as actually having the experience. Instead, they can acquire phenomenal knowledge of a lesser degree, in which they learn more about how the “what the experience is like” relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it. Additionally, the reader can be provided with a phenomenal “realization”, in which they come to “apprehend [the experience] *as* a form or mode of human experience” (Walsh, 1969, pg. 87, emphasis in original). As phenomenal “realizations”

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<sup>18</sup> Specifically, Bailey is concerned with a “concealed homogeneity” of the dispositions which determine what is experienced.



are associated with the experiences described in literary works, given the “subtlety” and “complexity” of how they can be described, the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation given here perhaps differs from one given for the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. The difference between the two explanations is required to accommodate for the features of novel-reading which shape the reader’s imaginative engagement with a fictional character. However, I have nonetheless argued that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, like imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”, can be non-instrumentally epistemically valuable by improving the reader’s phenomenal knowledge.

### §3. The *Understanding of the World* Explanation

Using my *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation as a starting point, I will argue that the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can also be given a second epistemic explanation. I call this the *Understanding of the World* explanation, which holds that imaginative engagement with a fictional character can improve the imaginer’s understanding of the world. Many accept that novel-reading is a way for the reader to improve their understanding of the world, and that it is epistemically valuable in virtue of this.<sup>19</sup> However, the potential connection between the epistemic value of imaginative engagement with a fictional character and the epistemically valuable understanding of the world that novel reading can provide has not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, I will argue that one way imaginatively engaging with fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” can be valuable in the same way is by improving the imaginer’s understanding of the world. I take “understanding” in general to involve one grasping the relations between what they already know. Here, I will be specifically concerned with understanding which involves grasping the applicability of “general thematic statements” to different particular cases (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 325). As with phenomenal knowledge, I assume that this understanding may be both instrumentally and non-instrumentally valuable. However, the experience of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is non-instrumentally epistemically valuable in the sense that it is the experience itself improves the imaginer’s understanding, rather than being a means to other experiences which provide that understanding.

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<sup>19</sup> See (Green, 2022) for an overview.

### §3.1. Understanding of the World and Those Encountered “Face-to-Face”

The ability of imaginative engagement with a fictional character to improve the reader’s understanding of the world has not been explored, so I will start with imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-to-face”. For Langton, first-personally imagining another’s experience “can contribute to knowledge, by revealing morally salient facts, not only about what hunger feels like to the hungry, but about the value of food to the hungry” (Langton, 2019, pg. 92). So, as well as an improved phenomenal knowledge of the other’s experience, imaginative engagement with another can also improve one’s knowledge of what is valuable. To further see the potential epistemic value of imaginatively engaging with another, Denham and Moore make the following assumption about the epistemic significance of having a point of view: that each point of view has “unique access” (Moore, 2000, pg. 3) to certain “aspects of reality” (Denham, 2001, pg. 606). For example, for Moore, our understanding of death is something which is “conditioned by” our own point of view: “each of us will die, each of us is affected by the deaths of others, and each of us understands death from that perspective” (Moore, 2000, pg. 3).<sup>20</sup> For example, suppose that the imaginer has a friend, whose mother is dying. The friend has decided to withhold that information from their mother. According to Denham, standing in a relationship to someone provides us with “the power to illuminate [of that person] qualities which are not otherwise evident [from other ways of learning about them]” (Denham, 2001, pg. 606). So, as the imaginer does not stand in a familial relationship to their friend’s mother, certain qualities of her situation may not be evident to them, such as her serenity of mind or the true extent of her physical decline. This may be the case even if the imaginer also has “direct sensory acquaintance” with the mother. The imaginer and their friends’ “locations in the broadest sense” may be similar in various respects, but as they also differ in important ways, there are “aspects of reality” which are more evident to the imaginer’s friend. So, imaginatively engaging with the friend is a way of coming to understand the peacefulness that dying in ignorance may bring, improving their understanding of death.

I will clarify how a point of view can have “unique access” to certain “aspects of reality”, such that imaginative engagement with them can also allow the imaginer to access those “aspects of reality”.

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<sup>20</sup> Moore does not consider how our understanding of death can be improved by imaginatively engaging with another, but as he usefully illustrates how one’s understanding of the world may be conditioned by a point of view, it is a helpful example.

If a point of view has strictly *unique* access to “aspects of reality”, then imaginative engagement with that point of view cannot also give the imaginer access to those “aspects of reality”. Instead, I will take it that a point of view may have “unique access” to certain “aspects of reality” in the sense that their point of view is “peculiarly appropriate for picking out [those aspects of reality]” (Moore, 2000, pg. 52). For example, the friend’s point of view is “peculiarly appropriate” for seeing that their mother’s suffering is alleviated, given facts about her “location in the broadest sense” and her proximity (physically and emotionally) to her mother. Their “unique access” to those “aspects of reality” lies in their first-personal access to their experiences of those “aspects of reality”, where those experiences are ones which provide some kind of distinct access to those aspects. As I have argued from Chapter 1, an imaginer can only first-personally approximate the other’s experiences, not first-personally access them. So, in approximating the other’s experience, the imaginer can only approximate the other’s “unique access” to certain “aspects of reality”. By imaginatively engaging with their friend’s point of view, the imaginer can approximate their access to those “aspects of reality”. I will argue that the approximation of their access to those “aspects of reality” is sufficient for imaginative engagement to improve one’s understanding of the world.

I will briefly consider and set aside the worry that the assumption of “unique access” is flawed. One might instead think that the “aspects of reality” which a point of view appears to have “unique access” to are instead projections of that point of view’s evaluations *onto* the world (Denham, 2001, pg. 606). For example, when the imager imaginatively engages with their friend, what they learn is their friend’s evaluative projections onto their mother, rather than features of their mother that the friend has “unique access” to. Further, Langton’s suggestion that imagining another’s experience can contribute to knowledge also does not hinge on the assumption of “unique access”, as learning the value of food to the hungry does not require that experience imagined is one had by a point of view with “unique access” to that value, it may just be one among many points of view with whom imaginative engagement could provide that knowledge. However, I will grant the assumption of “unique access”, as I will argue that it can play an important role in explaining how imaginative engagement with a fictional character when novel-reading can improve the reader’s understanding of the world in a certain way, specifically, that it improves their understanding of the applicability of “general thematic statements” to particular cases.

### §3.2. *The Subjectivity Requirement*

First, I will consider what explanatory role *The Subjectivity Requirement* plays in explaining how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can improve the reader's understanding of the world.

#### §3.2.1 The Nature of the Understanding of the World: Part 1

To see what that role is, I will first consider what kind of understanding of the world novels are taken to provide. Lamarque and Olsen define literary works as narratives which have “something to say about the ‘human condition’” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 276). Accordingly, they consider the following account of how the reader of a literary work may learn about the “human condition”:

*The Propositional Theory of Literary Truth:* The literary work contains or implies general thematic statements about the world, which the reader as part of an appreciation of the work, has to assess as true or false (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 325).<sup>21</sup>

Although Lamarque and Olsen hold that the reader cannot justifiably infer from fictive utterances of the form “a is F” (“Clarissa Dalloway is fretting”) to truths about the actual world, they allow that through a certain appreciation of literary works, which may include fictional ones, the reader can learn “general thematic statements about the world”. A work “implies general thematic statements” insofar as appreciating the work involves using those propositions to “organise into an intelligible pattern the events and situations described literally in a work” (Lamarque & Olsen, 1996, pg. 327). To see how *The Propositional Theory of Literary Truth* works, consider Isabel Allende's *Violeta*, which follows the course of the eponymous narrator's 100 year-long life. As she ages, many of her friends and relatives die in quick succession. At first, that series of events may appear to be a coincidence, however, to organise these events into an intelligible pattern, the reader may use the proposition that “people of older ages are increasingly likely to experience the deaths of people they know.” Consequently, that proposition is implied by *Violeta*.

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<sup>21</sup> Lamarque and Olsen reject the second claim, that the reader must assess the proposition's truth as part of literary appreciation. As this claim is not relevant to my purposes, I will also set it aside.

Further, an example of a literary work “containing” a general truth is Tolstoy's opening of *Anna Karenina*: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” As these cases do not bring out the role of imaginative engagement in improving the reader's understanding of the world, I will not consider them.

Before using *The Propositional Theory of Literary Truth* to explain how imaginative engagement with a fictional character can improve the imaginer's understanding of the world, I will clarify in what sense the statements a literary work implies are "general thematic" ones. Lamarque and Olsen take the theory to be "a plausible interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine" (*Ibid.*, pg. 325) that "[art] deals more with universals", where "universals" are "the sort of things that according to likelihood and necessity a certain kind of person tends to say or do" (Aristotle, 1997, 51b8). Having accepted *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, which refers to "ordinary" states of affairs, how things tend to be, it might seem plausible that the understanding of the world that novel-reading provides also concerns tendencies. However, one might doubt that novels really imply "general thematic statements" of that kind. The novel is also concerned with "specific characters and events as these inhabit specific times and places" (Denham, 2001, pg. 622). Often, those "specific characters and events" are "on the whole [...] *too exceptional*" (Gibson, 2008, pg. 583, emphasis in original), and for Posner, the lives novels depict are "recognizably human" but also "more intense, more charged with significance" than actual human lives, and to neglect this observation is to neglect how novel reading can be pleasurable (Posner, 1997, pg. 21). For example, the protagonist of *The Wasp Factory*, Frank, and what he gets up to (such as killing wasps and using their mode of death to predict the future), although "recognizably human", is perhaps "too exceptional" for the novel to imply "general thematic statements" about what a "certain kind of person tends to say or do". Therefore, it is unclear whether literary novels imply "general thematic statements" about human tendencies. To determine whether this is the case, either more must be done to identify exactly which tendencies novels imply "general thematic statements" about, or a sense of "generality" which does not appeal to tendencies must be found.

### §3.2.2 The Subjectivity Requirement and Understanding the World

Using *The Propositional Theory of Literary Truth*, I will now consider what role an imagining's satisfaction of *The Subjectivity Requirement* plays in explaining how it can improve the reader's understanding of the world. Suppose that the reader first-personally imagines experiences of the novel's "events and scenarios", and those "events and scenarios" are ones which imply a "general thematic statement" when organised. I will consider whether the subjectivity of that imagining affects the reader's understanding of the implied "general thematic statement". Consider Allende's *Violeta* again. To organise the novel's events into an intelligible pattern, the reader may use the proposition that "people of older ages are increasingly likely to experience the deaths of people they know", such that this is a "general thematic statement" implied by the novel. Given Violeta's "location in the broadest sense", specifically the relationships she has to those who die, she has

“unique access” to various aspects of the fictional states of affairs, including the suffering, peacefulness, untimeliness, or poignancy of each loss. When the reader imaginatively engages with Violeta’s, they first-personally approximate the “unique access” she has to those aspects of the fictional states of affairs. So, the proposition that “people of older ages are increasingly likely to experience the deaths of people they know” is implied by the organisation of events which the reader first-personally approximates Violeta’s experience of. Violeta need not have “unique access” to the “general thematic statement”, instead, she has “unique access” to the relevant features of the fictional states of affairs, and the organisation of those events implies that statement. So, the epistemically valuable improvements to their phenomenal knowledge, outlined in (§2.), also improve the reader’s understanding of the world. For example, an improved phenomenal knowledge of Violeta’s experiences of loss enables the reader to grasp how that “general thematic statement” applies in her specific circumstances. As a result, given the imagining’s satisfaction of *The Subjectivity Requirement*, the reader’s understanding of the “general thematic statement” has a phenomenal character, they do not just entertain the statement, but they imaginatively experience how it may be true in some given circumstances.

However, there is reason to doubt that *The Subjectivity Requirement* can improve the reader’s understanding of the world in this way. This is another version of the worry raised in Chapter 1, that the explanations given for why imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face” is valuable cannot be straightforwardly adapted to fictional characters. To see the challenge, it is worth noting how Langton’s *Understanding of the World* explanation, which does not make that assumption, appears to be immune from it. When the reader first-personally imagines the fig-tree’s experiences of nostalgia, for example, that imagining is governed by *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, such that they take the experience to be of a state of affairs which is relevantly similar to “ordinary” ones. So, in improving their phenomenal knowledge of what that experience is like, the reader can also learn what events and objects of value provoke nostalgia in real experiences of it, such that they can learn about the value of home for the displaced, for example. This version of the *Understanding of the World* explanation amounts to a *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation of the kind given above, and I have already resolved the challenge for that explanation.

For my *Understanding of the World* explanation, the challenge lies in the fact that the “aspects of reality” that a fictional character has “unique access” to are the aspects of a fictional state of affairs. So, if subjectively imagining another’s experience can reveal the “aspects of reality” that they have

“unique access” to, imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can only provide access to aspects of a fictional states of affairs. Those fictional states of affairs depend on “fictive utterances” for their existence, and further, the reader adopts the “fictive stance” towards those utterances, such that they suspend inferences from those utterances to truths about the actual world. So, it is unclear how imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can improve the reader’s understanding of the world. Although Denham and Moore both seem to be focused on the understanding of the world which can be acquired from imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-to-face”, it is unclear how important they take their being encountered “face-to-face” to be in the explanation.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it seems that the fictionality of the point of view imaginatively engaged with obstructs that explanation, suggesting that *The Subjectivity Requirement* cannot play the role outlined above in the *Understanding of the World* explanation.

However, I suggest that the above challenge can be overcome, by further considering the role of *The Principle of Verisimilitude*. Recall that Lamarque and Olsen deny that the principle allows the reader to infer from fictive utterances, like “Violeta is ageing”, to truths about the actual world. They provide *The Propositional Theory of Literary Truth* as an alternative explanation of how the reader can learn from novel-reading. However, it does not explain how the reader learns that those “general thematic statements” apply to the actual world. I argue that *The Principle of Verisimilitude* can provide that explanation. When reading *Violeta*, the reader takes the fictional states of affairs as being like “ordinary” ones, and when they first-personally approximate Violeta’s access to those events, they take her experiences to be of states of affairs which mirror “ordinary” ones in relevant ways. For example, they take facts about human biology, ageing, the kinds of events which can cause death in humans, and so on, to be the same as in “ordinary” states of affairs. So, when the novel implies the proposition that “people of older ages are increasingly likely to experience the deaths of people they know”, the reader first-personally experiences its being true for states of affairs which are relevantly similar to the actual world, such that they can learn that it is true in the actual world. So, *The Principle of Verisimilitude* explains how the reader can improve their understanding of the applicability of “general thematic statements” to particular cases, by enabling them to subjectively imagine states of affairs in which it is true, which are relevantly similar to the actual world.

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<sup>22</sup> One might think that their being encountered “face-to-face” is important, as that means the imaginer has their own access to the objects and events the other has “unique access” to.

In (§2.), I suggested that first-personally imagining events assumed to be relevantly similar to “ordinary” ones was a way for the reader to improve their phenomenal knowledge. Here, that improved phenomenal knowledge also enables the reader to experience how a “general thematic statement” applies to a particular case. It is worth noting that, given my suggestion that *The Subjectivity Requirement* may not be necessary for imaginative engagement to improve the reader’s phenomenal knowledge, it may also not be necessary to improve their understanding of how “general thematic statements” can apply in particular cases. I suggested that the objective imagination may be an alternative route to phenomenal knowledge. As another’s “unique access” to “aspects of reality” is provided by their experiences of reality, the above result implies that the objective imagination may also improve the reader’s understanding of the world. Regardless, I have outlined how, when an imagining satisfies *The Subjectivity Requirement*, reader’s understanding of the applicability of “general thematic statements” is improved, as they imaginatively experience states of affairs where they apply.

However, the explanation I have outlined applies to a limited range of novels. The events of *Violeta* adhere to human tendencies in a way that other novels do not. Consider *The Wasp Factory* again, and protagonist Frank’s documentation of his strange activities and events of his life, which evade easy organisation under a “general thematic statement”. It might seem that attempting to use “general thematic statements” to render intelligible the events of the novel is a mistake. The final chapter of the novel is entitled “What Happened to Me”, meaning that the reader is made aware from the outset that they are lacking crucial information about Frank’s past, and that any attempt to organise the novel’s events before then will be a futile attempt to organise an incomplete series of events. However, even when the reader learns what happened in Frank’s past, they still cannot organise the novel’s events into an intelligible pattern, such that a “general thematic statement” is implied. For example, upon learning what happened in Frank’s past, the reader may be tempted to organise his subsequent activities into an intelligible pattern by using the proposition “children who are mistreated by their parents exhibit morally deviant behaviour.” However, even though these events, strictly speaking, are such that they manifest an instance of that “general thematic statement”, the nature of Frank’s parental mistreatment and his subsequent deviant behaviour are both so unusual and disturbing that appealing to that statement does not organise the novel’s events into an intelligible pattern.



Nonetheless, I suggest that there are two ways a novel's failure to imply a "general thematic statement" can be epistemically valuable. First, the reader's understanding of the *limits* of "general thematic statements" can be improved. When the reader imagines Frank's experiences subjectively, they first-personally approximate a set of experiences which lie at the limits of what can be helpfully accounted for by that statement. However, *The Principle of Verisimilitude* once again governs the reader's importing of information, such that they take the nature of parental obligations and facts about human biology to be the same as in the actual world. Even though the novel contains lots of strange events, they do not provide "indications to the contrary" with respect to these details, and so the reader can take the fictional states of affairs to be like "ordinary" ones in that regard. Given the ways that Frank's circumstances are relevantly similar to "ordinary" ones, the reader can grasp the *inapplicability* of the "general thematic statement". Through their improved phenomenal knowledge of Frank's experiences, they can experience the limits of that "general thematic statement" to account for all cases of moral deviance in mistreated children. In this way, subjectively imagining Frank's experiences can nonetheless be epistemically valuable with respect to learning "general thematic statements" about the world, and *The Subjectivity Requirement* can improve the reader's understanding of the world when reading such novels. Second, I suggest that there is another sense of "generality", which does *not* appeal to the idea of tendencies, such that even novels like *The Wasp Factory* can imply "general thematic statements" of this kind. I will return to this sense of "generality" in Chapter 3, when I provide the interpersonal explanation.

### §3.3. *The Alterity Requirement*

Next, I will consider what role *The Alterity Requirement*, imagining the experience imagined as being had by another, plays in the *Understanding of the World* explanation. If first-personally imagining another's experience is sufficient for the reader to approximate the "aspects of reality" that another has "unique access" to, then it is initially unclear what further explanatory work there is for *The Alterity Requirement* to do. However, I will argue that *The Alterity Requirement* contributes to the reader's understanding of "general thematic statements", by improving their understanding of its very generality.

#### §3.3.1 The Nature of the Understanding of the World: Part 2

Before considering the explanatory role of *The Alterity Requirement*, it is worth noting an unclarity in *The Propositional Theory of Literary Truth*. It is unclear how exactly a reader uses "general thematic statements" to organise the novel's events. Specifically, it is unclear whether the reader uses a

“general thematic statement” that they already know, which they take *to* their organisation the novel’s events, or whether the “general thematic statement” is one the reader purely takes *from* their attempts to organise the novel’s events, such that the implied proposition can be one the reader did not already know. Although Lamarque and Olsen are open to the latter, and considering those cases would increase the epistemic value of reading literature, I will set aside them, as it is easier to see *The Alterity Requirement’s* role by looking at the former cases, where the reader brings the “general thematic statement” *to* their organisation of the novel’s events. I will argue that even though these cases initially appear to have limited epistemic value, this is not the case. The reader’s bringing of a “general thematic statement” to the work does not require that they are consciously aware that they are doing so, as “much pleasure in art is a pleasure of recognition of what we vaguely knew was there but never saw before” (Murdoch, 1997b, pg. 12). So, for these cases to involve an improved understanding of the world, they must renew, in some significant way, the reader’s awareness of a “general thematic statement” that they already know. My suggestion is that the significance lies in the fact that when imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, the reader does not merely come to a renewed awareness of a statement which happens to be a general one, they also become aware of that statement’s generality.

### §3.3.2 *The Alterity Requirement* and the Understanding of the World

I will argue that it is *The Alterity Requirement* which is necessary for the reader to become aware of that statement’s generality. Consider *Violeta* again. Prior to reading it, the reader may “vaguely know” that “people of older ages are increasingly likely to experience the deaths of people they know”, and the process of organising the novel’s events into an intelligible pattern may draw their attention to what they “vaguely knew” but “never saw before”. That “general thematic statement” is one which could also be learnt by reading census statistics about trends in ages of death. Both offer the reader the chance to their renew awareness of a statement they already know, and further, both are a way of learning that the statement is *generally* true, that it tends to be true across all humans. However, imaginatively engaging with a fictional character provides a renewed awareness of statement’s generality in a different way to reading statistical information. In studying statistical information, the reader merely comes to see *that* “people of older ages are increasingly likely to experience the deaths of people they know”. In contrast, when reading *Violeta*, the renewed awareness the reader can have of the statement is more than just of *that* it is true for others. When reading *Violeta*, the events the reader organises to renew their awareness of the statement are imagined such that they approximate Violeta’s first-personal access to them. If these imaginings also satisfy *The Alterity Requirement*, then the experiences the reader organises to reach that renewed

awareness are also imagined as not being their own. So, when the reader's awareness of that statement is renewed, it is renewed via experiences they imagine as being another's. That draws their attention to the statement's generality, as they experience its application in circumstances other than their own. In this way, through the satisfaction of *The Alterity Requirement*, the novel "takes the reader beyond themselves" in an epistemically valuable way, improving their understanding of the applicability of "general thematic statements" such that their attention is drawn to the generality of those statements.

However, the explanatory role of *The Alterity Requirement* for novels whose events cannot be easily explained by appealing to a "general thematic statement" remains to be seen. Consider *The Wasp Factory* again. As there is no "general thematic statement" which the text implies, the explanatory role of *The Alterity Requirement* cannot be to draw the reader's attention to the generality of an implied statement. Instead, the epistemic value of these texts, with respect to improving the reader's understanding of human tendencies, lay in how they improved the reader's understanding of the limits of "general thematic statements" about tendencies. When a "general thematic statement" is implied, the explanatory work done by *The Alterity Requirement* is to highlight that the statement is also true in circumstances beyond their own, drawing their attention to the claim's generality. By analogy, the explanatory work done by *The Alterity Requirement* in novels like *The Wasp Factory* is to highlight that the statement does *not* hold in those circumstances, drawing their attention to the limits of the statement's generality. The reader experiences, via the experiences of another, the failure of a "general thematic statement" to hold, thereby bringing their attention to its lack of generality. Therefore, *The Alterity Requirement* improves the reader's understanding of the world by drawing the reader's attention to the extent of a "general thematic statement's" generality.

To conclude (§3.), I have presented the *Understanding of the World* explanation for the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. I have outlined the role that both *The Subjectivity* and *Alterity Requirements* play in that explanation, establishing that as with those encountered "face-to-face", imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be an epistemically valuable source of understanding of the world. I note two caveats on my conclusion. First, the *Understanding of the World* explanation emphasised the organisation of fictional events as a way of learning from novel-reading, yet the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered "face to face" is explained with reference to individual instances of imaginative engagement, rather than the organisation of multiple instances. Although that difference limits how far the value of imaginative engagement

with fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” can be given the same explanation, the difference is needed for the explanation to be sensitive to the nature of reading literary fiction. Second, the explanation only applies to reading “literary” novels, and I have not fully explored how wide the range of “literary” novels is. However, by comparison to imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-to-face”, I have provided a new explanation of why imaginatively engaging with fictional characters can be valuable.

#### **§4. Conclusion**

To conclude, I have presented my epistemic explanations of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, establishing that it can share the same non-instrumental epistemic value as imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. I provided two epistemic explanations, the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, and the *Understanding of the World* explanation. The former holds that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is a way of learning about what experiences are like and “realizing” the form of those experiences, the latter that it is a way of improving one’s understanding of the applicability of “general thematic statements” about the world to particular cases.

# Chapter 3:

## The Interpersonal Explanation

### §1. Introduction

In Chapter 3, my aim is to present a second type of explanation of why imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can be valuable, which captures its non-instrumental value and how it can be valuable in the same ways as imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. I will call this the *Empathic Projection* explanation, that that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can have “interpersonal” value. In rough, imaginings have interpersonal value insofar as they enable the imaginer to attend to, in some way, the other’s existence as subjects of their own mental lives, involving an “acceptance of others as separate from me” (Avramides, 2023, pg. 305). First, I will outline how imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face” can be interpersonally valuable, but then present a challenge to adapting that explanation to the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. Next, I will survey existing explanations of the value of art which appeal to interpersonal value and argue that they do not capture the non-instrumental interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character when novel-reading (§2.). However, I will argue that an explanation of that sort can be given. Once again, I will take *The Subjectivity Requirement* (§3.) and *The Alterity Requirement* (§4.) in turn and outline the role they play in explaining how imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can be non-instrumentally interpersonally valuable.

### §2. Interpersonal Value and Imaginative Engagement

My aim in (§2.) is three-fold. First, I will outline how the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face” has been explained in interpersonal terms. Next, I will present a challenge to using this explanation to explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. Finally, I will survey the existing accounts which explain the value of some of the experiences artworks offer in interpersonal terms and argue that they do not capture the non-instrumental interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character when novel-reading.

## §2.1. Interpersonal Value and Those Encountered “Face-to-Face”

First, I will outline two explanations of how imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face” can be interpersonally valuable, that it is a way of seeing the other’s *interests* as worthy of consideration in our moral reasoning, and that it is a way of “taking another to be *another* human being” (Avramides, 2023, pg. 317, emphasis in original). As I will outline, the second explanation will be my focus in the rest of the chapter.

I will start by outlining the first interpersonal explanation. Even though I will not focus on it, outlining that explanation will help to articulate further what it means for an imagining to have interpersonal value. It holds that imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-to-face” is a way for the imaginer to learn what another’s “preferences, interests or choices” are (Langton, 2019, pg. 89). By learning what their “preferences, interests, or choices” are through imaginative engagement, the imaginer is able to “give weight to [another’s] inclinations and interests as if they were his own” (Hare, 1965, pg. 94). So, imaginative engagement is a way for the imaginer to come to see the other’s interests as worthy of consideration in their own moral deliberations about how to act. To clarify why this explanation is an interpersonal one, and further articulate what it means for an imagining to be interpersonally valuable, I will compare it to a different explanation from Denham. She holds that imaginatively engaging with another is a way for the imaginer to experience “how [others] conceive of their interests” (Denham, 2000, pg. 143), such that they can be used to form moral evaluations of the other, for example, to answer the question “Was [X] selfish and untrustworthy?” (*Ibid.*, pg. 141).<sup>23</sup> The difference between Langton and Denham’s explanations is that in the latter, imaginative engagement is valuable because it enables the imaginer to learn about the other’s interests so they can better morally evaluate them, whereas in the former, it is valuable because it enables the imaginer to learn about the other’s interests so they can see those interests as worthy of consideration in their own moral deliberations. The latter involves taking the other purely as an object of evaluation, the former involves taking them as being the subject of interests which are worthy of moral consideration. So, imaginings which are interpersonally valuable involve appreciating the other’s subject status and accordingly taking them to be as such.

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<sup>23</sup> Denham uses Anna Karenina as an example here, but she takes the explanation to apply to all cases of imaginative engagement, fictional or otherwise (Denham, 2000, pg. 143).

I will now present the second interpersonal explanation, which I will call the *Empathic Projection* explanation, and it will be my focus throughout the rest of the chapter. The first explanation focused on seeing the other's *interests* as worthy of consideration in moral deliberation. In contrast, the second takes imaginative engagement to be interpersonally valuable by enabling the imaginer to see the other *person* in a certain way, to "take another to be *another* human being", as having mental lives of their own, rather than being mere objects (Avramides, 2023, pg. 317, emphasis in original). For Cavell, the capacity to do so is "empathic projection": "my identification of you as a human being is not merely an identification *of* you but *with* you" (Cavell, 1999, pg. 421, emphasis in original). Note Anita Avramides's emphasis on "*another* human being". "Empathic projection" does not merely involve taking another to be a human being but taking them to be *another* human being, which requires an "acceptance of others as separate from me" (Avramides, 2023, pg. 305). It is also worth noting that "empathic projection" is a "crucial part" of what Cavell calls "acknowledgement" (*Ibid.*, pg. 317). "Acknowledgement" is the appropriate response to the other's mental states, for example, it is not sufficient to merely know that another is in pain, but one must also "acknowledge" their pain. It "goes beyond knowledge [...] in its requirement that I *do* something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge" (Cavell, 1969, 257, emphasis in original). Here, I will focus only on the "empathic projection" component of "acknowledgement". As Cavell does not precisely specify what kind of imagining "empathic projection" involves, it is unclear whether it satisfies *The Subjectivity* and *Alterity Requirements*. However, I will argue that "empathic projection" is nonetheless a useful way of explaining the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

To further articulate what it means for an imagining to have interpersonal value, I will outline how the *Empathic Projection* explanation differs from the *Understanding of the World* explanation. Empathic projection is a way of "taking another to be *another* human being". So, it might seem that it is epistemically valuable, as it improves the imaginer's understanding of the kind of entities (human beings) which exist in the world. However, I suggest that the value of empathic projection cannot be explained solely in epistemic terms. It is through empathic projection that the imaginer "appreciates that [the other is] a being who truly thinks and feels" (Avramides, 2023, pg. 317). For Cavell, that appreciation is significant, as "if there are no other human beings, then what befalls me is a generalized and massive [deception]", in which the mind "cheats me [...] into taking it that it has company" (Cavell, 1999, pg. 424). So, empathic projection enables the imaginer to "appreciate" both the moral significance of the other's mental life, and that they are in the other's "company", addressing the risk that they are in "isolation from the other" (Avramides, 2023, pg.

320). This suggests that the value of empathic projection cannot be explained solely in epistemic terms. However, even if its value is solely epistemic, it cannot be explained by my *Understanding of the World* explanation, which concerned how imaginative engagement can improve the reader's understanding of the applicability of "general thematic statements" about how kinds of people tend to act. So, I will treat the *Empathic Projection* explanation separately regardless.

## §2.2. A Challenge to an Interpersonal Explanation

Next, I will present a challenge to using the *Empathic Projection* explanation to explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. The challenge is another version of the one outlined in Chapter 1, which was that the explanations given for the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered "face-to-face" cannot be straightforwardly adapted to explain the value of imaginatively engaging with fictional characters. To see the challenge to an *Empathic Projection* explanation, it is useful to start with the first interpersonal explanation (which focused on the other's *interests*), although I otherwise set it aside. Imaginative engagement with a fictional character can reveal what the character's interests are, for example, in reading *Mrs Dalloway*, the reader can come to learn what Clarissa's interests are, such as not having her party ruined by unexpected guests. However, although imaginative engagement with Clarissa Dalloway may be a way of learning what her interests are, it is not a way of taking those interests as worthy of consideration in one's own moral deliberation about how to act. As Clarissa Dalloway's interests are fictional, they are not interests which ought to feature in the reader's moral reasoning about how to act. Moral reasoning about what one ought to do which might need to consider Clarissa Dalloway's interests is reasoning about whether to attend the party, if so at what time, who to mingle with, and so on, none of which are actions the reader can decide to do. Therefore, it does not seem that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can be interpersonally valuable by enabling the reader to see their interests as ones they ought to consider in their own moral reasoning.

I can now outline the challenge to an *Empathic Projection* explanation. For the first interpersonal explanation, the challenge is that although imaginative engagement enables the reader to learn what a fictional character's interests are, it does not enable them to see those interests as being ones they ought to consider in their moral reasoning. Similarly, for the *Empathic Projection* explanation, the challenge is that although imaginative engagement enables the reader to take a fictional character as a "being who truly thinks and feels", it does not enable the reader to "take them to be *another*



human being” who they are in the “company” of. In Chapter 1, I outlined how the reader takes fictional points of view as being like those encountered “face-to-face”, as having a fully specifiable point of view. So, when the reader imaginatively engages with a fictional character, it is plausible that they take them as a “being who truly thinks and feels”. However, that the reader takes the fictional character in this way does not enable them to take them as being another human being who they are in the “company” of.<sup>24</sup> Although the reader may have a sense of being in “company” when imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, it is plausible that this sense is misguided; the reader cannot be in the “company” of a fictional character, as they do not exist with their own separate mind.<sup>25</sup>

Further, that the point of view imaginatively engaged with be one the imaginer encounters “face-to-face” seems to play an important role in the *Empathic Projection* explanation. For Cavell, “empathic projection” is to be compared closely to seeing, it is “more than merely seeing” (Cavell, 1999, pg. 421), and “seeing you *as human* depends on nothing more than my capacity for empathic projection” (*Ibid.*, pg. 423, emphasis added). That “empathic projection” is compared closely to “seeing” suggests Cavell takes being “face-to-face” and having “direct sensory acquaintance” with another is important to “empathic projection’s” ability to show the imaginer that they are in “company”. So, the challenge to adapting the *Empathic Projection* explanation to imaginative engagement with a fictional character is even stronger than it was for the epistemic explanations, as unlike in these explanations, that the point of view is encountered “face-to-face” appears play an important explanatory role. Nonetheless, I will argue that the *Empathic Projection* explanation can explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

To finish setting out the challenge, I will clarify what relevance a fictional character’s fictionality has in producing the challenge. Above, I noted that a point of view’s being encountered “face-to-face” does important explanatory work in the *Empathic Projection* explanation. So, it is worth considering whether the fictionality of the point of view imaginatively engaged with contributes

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that as “acknowledgement” involves responding to the other in a certain way, the reader cannot “acknowledge” a fictional character, as they cannot say or do anything which would amount to that response. I am interested in whether even the “empathic projection” component of “acknowledgement” can do anything to explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

<sup>25</sup> Woolf conceives of novel-reading as involving the author and the reader as being in each other’s company (Lee, 2000, pg. 101). So, one might think that the challenge can be resolved by claiming that imaginative engagement with a fictional character is a way for the reader to take themselves as being in the company of the author. However, I will overcome the challenge without appealing to this contentious view of novel-reading and the role of the author.

anything further to the challenge. The challenge also seems to arise when the point of view imaginatively engaged with is not a fictional one, but also is not encountered “face-to-face”. This suggests that it is the fact that fictional characters are not encountered “face-to-face”, rather than their being fictional, which raises the challenge to an *Empathic Projection* explanation. For example, consider imaginative engagement with a person from the distant past, such as the elite Etruscan woman, Seianti, who died in 150 BC. As when a point of view is fictional, it seems that even if imaginative engagement with Seianti can show her as having had a mental life, it is unclear that it can show the imaginer that they are in “company” rather than “isolation”. So, it seems that it is the failure of a point of view to be encountered “face-to-face”, rather than its being fictional, which poses the challenge to the *Empathic Projection* explanation.

However, I suggest that a fictional character’s fictionality *does* make the challenge especially intractable. There is one tempting way to account for the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with someone from the distant past. As “the Etruscans did actually live” (Bassani, 1998, pg. 10), imaginative engagement with them can reveal them *as having been* human beings. As fictional characters did not actually live, any interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with them cannot also be explained in this way. It seems the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with someone from the distant past depends on a connection to the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. However, it is harder to draw a similar connection for fictional characters, making the challenge especially intractable. As is familiar from my previous discussions, the answer to the challenge can be expected to lie with *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, and the ways the reader can take fictional states of affairs to be like “ordinary” ones. I will spell out that solution in more detail, providing an *Empathic Projection* explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character.

### **§2.3. Art and the Interpersonal: Existing Accounts**

To find a solution to the challenge, I will survey the existing interpersonal explanations of the value art. Unlike the epistemic explanations, where the similarities between the epistemic value of imaginatively engaging with fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” are better established, the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character when novel-reading is relatively unexplored. So, I will begin with a broader focus on the potential interpersonal value of artworks more generally.

First, I suggest that Schier's account of why the audiences of theatrical tragedy find it to be a valuable experience is a useful comparison to novel-reading. For Schier, the experience of tragedy is non-instrumentally valuable because it improves the audience's knowledge of what it is like to suffer, because it makes "[the] experience available to us as it were from within" (Schier, 1983, pg. 84). The non-instrumental value he attributes to the experience of watching a tragedy is at least partly interpersonal. Through that experience "we are reminded vividly that men are not islands – it is one of the bonds uniting us that we imaginatively share in fates that are not yet ours, but may be soon" (Schier, 1983, pg. 84). In other words, the imaginer sees that the rest of the audience has similar concerns as they do and entertains the different outcomes they might suffer. As Schier is concerned solely with theatre, Goldie's "emotional sharing" is a tempting further explanation of how merely watching the same tragedy can be interpersonally valuable experience in this way. Goldie describes how artworks can facilitate "emotional sharing", which occurs when "two or more people experience an emotion [...] and those people are aware that they are experiencing the same emotion towards the same object" (Goldie, 2008, pg. 192). For example, an audience member of a production of *Hamlet* may experience intense pity, and also be aware that the rest of the audience feels the same. So, it is a way of taking the rest of the audience to be other human beings, as the imaginer can appreciate that they have "thoughts and feelings" similar to their own.

However, I argue that Schier's interpersonal explanation cannot straightforwardly capture the interpersonal value of novel-reading, as there are certain features of the activity of novel-reading which pose further challenges to providing an interpersonal explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. Suppose that an audience member of *Hamlet* imaginatively engages with Hamlet. For Schier, the interpersonal value of that imaginative engagement must lie in how it enables the imaginer to see that the rest of the audience has similar concerns as they do. Through "emotional sharing", when the imaginer imaginatively engages with Hamlet, they can see that the rest of the audience's attention is similarly directed. Therefore, if imaginatively engaging with Hamlet is an interpersonally valuable experience, the experience that is interpersonally valuable is not *just* imaginatively engaging with Hamlet, but rather imaginatively engaging with Hamlet, in the presence of other audience members, who they take to be engaged in a similar activity. It is worth noting that Schier captures the non-instrumental interpersonal value of watching tragedies, as the tragedy is not taken to facilitate a subsequent valuable experience of imaginative engagement, but rather it is imaginative engagement with a fictional character, done in the presence of others who are also engaging with the artwork, which has interpersonal value. However, it does not straightforwardly explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional

character when novel-reading. Compared to the theatre, reading a novel offers a more private engagement with an artwork, as it is paradigmatically done by oneself.<sup>26</sup> For example, imaginatively engaging with *Clarissa Dalloway* cannot be done in the presence of others who the reader takes to be engaging in a similar imaginative activity, in the same way that imaginatively engaging with *Hamlet* can be. So, if imaginatively engaging with a fictional character when novel-reading can be interpersonally valuable, it is that experience alone which can be so. Therefore, the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character whilst novel-reading cannot be captured by Schier's explanation.

I will now consider what alternative explanation could be given to explain the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. There are two further explanations which attribute interpersonal value to novel-reading, which are also unsatisfactory. First, Bailey takes it that novel-reading “reveals to readers that characters (and by extension, the real people whom those characters faithfully represent) are in an important respect *like them*”, (Bailey, 2023, pg. 231, emphasis in original). So, Bailey attributes an interpersonally valuable experience to novel-reading, in that it is a way for the reader to “take others to be other human beings”, as having their own mental lives. However, for Bailey, the interpersonally valuable experience *precedes* imaginative engagement, as once the reader learns that characters are like them in important respects, they are *then* able to imagine their experiences (*Ibid.*). So, even if correct, Bailey does not explain the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. Second, for Nussbaum, briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, attending to fictional characters (which may include imaginative engagement) is interpersonally valuable. However, it is only *instrumentally* interpersonally valuable, as it “trains” our ability to attend to those encountered “face-to-face” (Nussbaum, 1990, pg. 162). As I outlined in Chapter 1, an explanation which appeals to “training” is tempting given the role of *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, and that the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character seems to originate from the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. The appeal to “training” is even more tempting for the interpersonal explanation, as the especially intractable challenge outlined above makes it hard to connect the interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character to the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. So, an explanation which captures the non-instrumental interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character has not been given.

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<sup>26</sup> And it is the paradigm cases, rather than reading-aloud, for example, whose value I aim to explain, as an explanation which does not cover these cases is extremely limited.

However, I suggest that an explanation of this kind can be developed from the following remark from Iris Murdoch:

“In the case of the novel, the most important thing thus to be revealed, not necessarily the only thing but incomparably the most important thing, *is that other people exist*” (Murdoch, 1997b, pg. 282, emphasis added).

Initially, Murdoch’s remark might seem strange, as it presupposes that the existence of others as requiring “revealing” and that the “revelation” can be achieved by novel-reading. As I will outline, Murdoch’s remark is highly resonant with *Empathic Projection* explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. Further it does not hold that the artwork must be engaged with in the presence of others for it to be interpersonally valuable. As a result, I will argue that developing her remark provides a non-instrumental interpersonal value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, which is a version of the *Empathic Projection* explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”.

### **§3. *The Subjectivity Requirement***

I will develop Murdoch’s remark into an *Empathic Projection* explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character when novel-reading. To do so, I will first consider what role *The Subjectivity Requirement* plays in that explanation.

#### **§3.1. The Nature of the “Revelation”**

Before outlining the explanatory role of *The Subjectivity Requirement*, I will first sketch what it is about the existence of other people which might require “revealing”, to address the initial strangeness of Murdoch’s remark. Clarifying the features of Murdoch’s “revelation” shows that it is importantly similar to Cavell’s “empathic projection”. That similarity indicates that the *Empathic Projection* explanation can explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character when novel-reading. I will start outlining those similarities, which will highlight the explanatory role of *The Subjectivity Requirement*.

First, for Murdoch, what it is about other people which might require “revealing” to us is the “unutterable particularity” of “the mind of man” (Murdoch, 1959, pg. 52). What we struggle to grasp about others is not merely that they are the subjects of their own mental states, but that

those minds are “unutterably particular”. Although Murdoch does not specify how she understands “unutterable particularity”, she indicates two ways of taking it. First, the “unutterable particularity” of the other’s mind could refer to the intricate details of their mental life, which we do not often attend to. For example, one might be aware that their friend is worried about her ailing mother but may not be aware that she is nonetheless at peace with the decision she has made to withhold medical information from her, but nonetheless is also with a pre-emptive sense of grief about her incoming loss, whilst also feeling nostalgic for the times they enjoyed together, and so on. “Unutterable particularity” in the first sense refers to the propositional information which answers the question of “what goes on inside [the other’s] mind?” (Murdoch, 1997c, pg. 255).

However, when discussing the “revelation”, Murdoch seems to understand “unutterable particularity” in a second sense. Here, she claims that grasping the “unutterable particularity” of another, rather than learning propositional information, is a non-cognitive matter, involving “love”, which is “the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for, this otherness”, and is “the extremely difficult realisation that something other than yourself is real” (Murdoch, 1959, pg. 52). So, the second sense of “unutterable particularity” is a matter of grasping the other’s otherness, or the separateness of their mental life from one’s own. That second sense of “unutterable particularity” is importantly similar to what Cavell takes “empathic projection” to show the imaginer. As it involves coming an “acceptance of others as separate from me”, it also involves coming to take the other as having their own mental life, which exists in “confinement from [the imaginer’s]” (Cavell, 1999, pg. 423). So, to see the explanatory role of *The Subjectivity Requirement*, I will consider how it contributes to the reader’s taking the other as an “unutterable particular” in the second sense, that they have their own separately existing mental lives.

Second, I will outline how taking the other as an “unutterable particular”, in the sense that they have their own separately existing mental lives, can be thought of as a “revelation”. In Chapter 2, I suggested that the improved understanding of the world that the reader comes to is a “renewed awareness” of what they “vaguely knew was there but never saw before” (Murdoch, 1997a, pg. 12). As novel-readers do not deny that others have their own separately existing mental lives, Murdoch’s “revelation” is also best thought of as a “renewal” of how the reader takes others to be. However, “renewed awareness” acquired in the *Understanding of the World* explanation was of the applicability of “general thematic statements”. In contrast, Murdoch’s “revelation” cannot be merely a “renewed awareness” of the statement “other people exist as unutterable particulars”. As

outlined above, for Murdoch, the other's "unutterable particularity" is recognised through the non-cognitive relation of "love". It is unclear whether the "taking another as *another* human being" involved in Cavell's "empathic projection" is also a non-cognitive relation. For Cavell, "acknowledgement" is non-cognitive, as it also involves "an active response to others", but he does not specify whether the "empathic projection" part of "acknowledgement" is also non-cognitive (Avramides, 2023, pg. 322). As a result, it is unclear exactly how similar Murdoch's "revelation" and Cavell's "empathic projection" are. Regardless, the "revelation" involved in novel-reading is a non-cognitive one and I will understand it as involving a "renewed grasp" of others as "unutterable particulars".

To further outline how taking the other as an "unutterable particular" can be thought of as a "revelation", recall that Murdoch takes the novel to "reveal *that other people exist*" (Murdoch, 1997b, pg. 282, emphasis added). What is "revealed" is something about "other people" *in general*, rather than about a specific individual person. Recall that in Chapter 2, I focused on "general thematic statements" which are "general" in the sense that they refer to how kinds of people tend to act. However, I suggested that novels could also be a way of learning generalities which are *not* "general" in the sense that they refer to human tendencies, but in a second sense of "generality", to be discussed. I return to that second sense of "generality" here, and I will suggest that what is "revealed" about "other people" is general in that sense. To see what that sense of "generality" is, it is worth noting that for both Murdoch and Cavell, "love" and "empathic projection" respectively are how others *ought* to be taken. They differ in why they take this to be the case. For Cavell, it is because nothing, not even "empathic projection", "*guarantees* the presence of [...] thoughts and feelings in others" (Avramides, 2023, pg. 322, emphasis added). So, others ought to be taken as other human beings, in line with the natural intuition to do so (*Ibid.*, pg. 318). In contrast, for Murdoch, "loving perception" *can* guarantee that others exist as "unutterable particulars", as "loving perception" is "the discovery of reality" (Murdoch, 1952, pg. 51). Regardless, both hold that others *ought* to be viewed in this way. Therefore, the second sense of "generality" that I am interested in is one that refers to how people universally *ought* to be viewed. So, the reader's renewed grasp is of others *in general* as "unutterable particulars", where "in general" is understood in this sense. In Chapter 2, I outlined *The Propositional Theory of Literary Truth*, which explains how novel reading can improve the reader's understanding of the applicability of "general thematic statements" about human tendencies to particular cases. An alternative account of learning from novels will be needed to explain how the reader can renew their grasp of others in general as "unutterable particulars", where "general" is understood in this sense.

### §3.2. *The Subjectivity Requirement* and the “Revelation”

Given the nature of the “revelation”, I will now outline the role of *The Subjectivity Requirement* in the *Empathic Projection* explanation. Specifically, I will consider how an imagining’s satisfaction of *The Subjectivity Requirement* contributes to a “renewed grasp” of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. Here, “in general” refers to how people universally ought to be viewed, and “unutterable particular” refers to the other’s having their own “separate” mental life.

To do so, I return to Schier’s suggestion that the interpersonally valuable experience that theatrical tragedy offers is enabling the audience to see how others are like them, by similarly imagining possible tragic fates that may befall them. The tragedy does so because it makes “an experience available to us as it were from within”, and therefore makes that experience available to the audience “on the most intimate footing” (Schier, 1983, pg. 84).<sup>27</sup> As I outlined, Schier’s explanation does not straightforwardly explain the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character when novel reading. However, I suggest by putting the reader “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experiences, the novel can be interpersonally valuable by “revealing” that others exist as “unutterable particulars”. I will first argue that being “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experience is necessary for imaginative engagement with that character to renew the reader’s grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. First, I will outline how *The Subjectivity Requirement* can put the reader on that “most intimate footing”. I will then consider further what is involved in making an experience “available to us as it were from within”, to determine whether *The Subjectivity Requirement* is necessary for the reader to have that interpersonally valuable experience.

#### §3.2.1 Being “on the most intimate footing”

First, I will argue that being “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experience is necessary for imaginative engagement to have interpersonal value. Specifically, it is necessary for imaginative engagement to “reveal” that others in general exist as “unutterable particulars”. So, I will outline how the imagining’s satisfaction of *The Subjectivity Requirement* can put the reader on that “most intimate footing”.

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<sup>27</sup> It is unclear how being “on the most intimate footing” with the experience could contribute to the interpersonal value of theatrical tragedy. Perhaps, by putting the audience into more intimate contact with the play, they are also put into a more intimate contact with each other by “emotional sharing”. However, as theatrical tragedy is not my main concern, I set aside this worry.



Before doing so, I will clarify what it means for an experience to be made available “on the most intimate footing”. Recall from Chapter 1, that the reader can only first-personally approximate a fictional character’s access to their experiences. Here, I suggested that perhaps that characterisation limits the extent to which the novel can “take the reader beyond themselves”, as they cannot experience another’s experiences. Similarly, the characterisation also seems to prevent a fictional character’s experiences from being made available “on the most intimate footing”. As a first-pass, having another’s experience made available “on the most intimate footing” seems to involve being able to have the same access to that experience as that person, something which my characterisation denies is conceptually coherent. The “most intimate footing” that the reader can be placed on cannot be the first-pass “footing”. Instead, “the most intimate footing” available is one which the reader can achieve through *The Subjectivity Requirement*, by first-personally approximating the other’s experiences. I will argue that the “intimate footing” available is sufficient for imaginative engagement with a fictional character to be interpersonally valuable.

To do so, I will argue the reader can come to a renewed grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”, in the sense that refers to the other’s having a “separate” mental life of their own, by first grasping their “unutterable particularity” in the other sense, which referred to the intricate details of their mental life. Consider Clarissa Dalloway’s fretting over the party again. Her “unutterable particularity” in the first sense, that she has an intricately detailed mental life, could be learnt propositionally; the reader could learn a list of propositions, that she has trivial worries, past regrets, anxiety about the course of her life, the urge to perform a certain social role, and so on. However, when imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, the reader does not merely learn a list of propositions. Instead, they use those details to form their first-personal approximation of their experience. The more closely the reader attends to those details in approximating their experience, the more closely their approximation matches the experience, and accordingly, they are placed “on the most intimate footing” with that experience. In this way, the imagining’s satisfaction of *The Subjectivity Requirement* can place the reader “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experience.

Further, I argue that by being “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experience, the reader can also come to renewed grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”, in the sense which refers to their having their own separate mental lives. Recall again *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, that unless given indications to the contrary, the reader takes “fictional states of

affairs (objects, events, personage)” to be like “ordinary” ones. So, when the reader attends to the intricate details of Clarissa Dalloway’s experiences, for example, they take her to be like an “ordinary personage”, as having a mental life relevantly similar to that of an “ordinary” person. Once again, Lamarque and Olsen deny that the reader can use *The Principle of Verisimilitude* to infer from fictions to truths about the actual world. However, as I argued in Chapter 2, there are other ways that the principle can explain how the reader learns from novel-reading. I suggest that this is the case here too, and it enables the reader to renew their grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. By being “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experience, there is no sense of that character being in “separation” or “confinement” from the reader. To be able to take actual others as having their own separate mental lives, the reader cannot simply compare fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face. Instead, it is the contrast between the reader’s engagement with each which enables them to come to a renewed grasp of others in general exist as “unutterable particulars”. The reader takes fictional characters to be relevantly similar to those encountered “face-to-face”, as being “unutterable particulars” in the sense of having an intricately detailed mental life. However, by being “on the most intimate footing” with the fictional character’s experience, the comparative “confinement” or “separation” of actual others’ mental lives is made apparent. So, the sense that the intricately detailed mental life of the other exists in “separation” is emphasised by comparative intimacy the reader has to fictional characters. Further, by making the other’s confined mental life salient to the reader through the contrast between a fictional character and those they encounter “face-to-face” in their “ordinary” life, they renew their grasp of actual others *in general* as “unutterable particulars”, in the sense that they ought to be viewed as such. Through *The Principle of Verisimilitude* and that comparison, the challenge for an interpersonal explanation that I presented in (§2.2.) is addressed - imaginative engagement with a fictional character can “reveal” to the reader that they are in “company”, rather than “isolation”, by “revealing” that “ordinary” people exist as “unutterable particulars”. In sum, *The Subjectivity Requirement* is one way the reader can be put “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character, and as a result of that “intimacy”, the comparative “confinement” of relevantly similar actual others can be “revealed”. In this way, *The Subjectivity Requirement* plays an important role in explaining how imaginatively engaging with a fictional character can be interpersonally valuable, by enabling the reader to renew their grasp of actual others in general as “unutterable particulars”.

### §3.2.2. The Necessity of *The Subjectivity Requirement*.

Next, I consider further what is involved in making an experience “available to us as it were from within”, to determine whether *The Subjectivity Requirement* is necessary for the reader to have that

interpersonally valuable experience. Recall that Schier's focus is theatrical tragedy, which involves the audience third-personally observing the events on stage and does not seem to involve first-personally imagining the character's experiences. So, it seems that for Schier, an experience can be made "available to us as it were from within" by the tragedy without the play requiring that the audience first-personally imagine that experience. Instead, making an experience "available to us as it were from within" is a matter of the character providing an articulation of what their experience is like. That articulation is available in artworks in a way that it is not in "ordinary" life, as "ordinary" people cannot articulate what their experiences are like so well while they are undergoing them. For example, Hamlet makes the experience of melancholy or despair "available to us as it were from within", by being able to express what that experience is like in his soliloquies, in a way that "ordinary" melancholics cannot whilst they are having that experience:

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely.

So, for Schier, an experience can be made "available to us as it were from within" without the subjective imagination, and consequently, the audience can also be put "on the most intimate footing" with that experience without it. In Chapter 2, I suggested that the subjective imagination may not be necessary for the reader to improve their phenomenal knowledge of what the others' experiences are like, or for them to learn what "aspects of reality" the other has "unique access" to. As a result, it seems that the subjective imagination is also not necessary for the reader to be "on the most intimate footing" with a fictional character's experiences. If correct, *The Subjectivity Requirement* is also not necessary for the reader to renew their grasp of others in general as "unutterable particulars". The alternative to the subjective imagination is the objective imagination, which involves imagining the other third-personally. In Chapter 2, I suggested that the objective imagination could play the same explanatory role as the subjective, given the technique of "psychonarration", which affords the reader "direct access" to a fictional character's mental states. Perhaps, the objective imagination can also put the reader "on the most intimate footing" with a fictional character's experiences, such that it enables them to have the interpersonally valuable experience.

To see how the objective imagination could do so, I will examine a case of psycho-narration which does *not* put the reader “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experiences. Consider Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, which like *Mrs Dalloway*, uses third-personal psycho-narration:

“This getting up early, he thought, makes one quite stupid. A man needs his sleep” (Kafka, 1971, pg. 90).

The psycho-narration of Gregor Samsa’s thoughts is sufficient for the reader to grasp his “unutterable particularity” in the first sense, having an intricately detailed mental life, as the reader gets an answer to the question “what goes on inside his mind?” However, unlike *Mrs Dalloway*, the psycho-narration of *Metamorphosis* does not also put the reader “on the most intimate footing” with Samsa’s experiences, as it merely records the propositional content of his thoughts. It does not contain further details which enable the reader to acquire phenomenal knowledge of Samsa’s experiences to the degree they can of Clarissa Dalloway’s, as the psycho-narration does not describe in detail what his experiences are of and how they are determined by his “location in the broadest sense”. In Walsh’s terms, it is lacking “complexity” and “subtlety” in its descriptions of Samsa’s experiences (Walsh, 1969, pg. 90). As the reader is not put “on the most intimate footing” with Samsa’s experiences, the comparative “confinement” of relevantly similar “ordinary” people is not “revealed”. So, their imaginative engagement with him does not enable the reader to come to a renewed grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars” in the sense that they have their own “separate” mental lives. Therefore, objectively imagining a fictional character’s experiences can be interpersonally valuable only when the novel describes those experiences in sufficient “subtlety” and “complexity”. Although I have not comprehensively outlined all the techniques that novels (and other narratives) might use to put the reader “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experiences, it seems that *The Subjectivity Requirement* is not necessary for the reader to have interpersonally valuable experiences when novel-reading.

### §3.2.3. The Range of Interpersonally Valuable Novels

To finish (§3.), I will consider further the range of novels which can provide interpersonally valuable experiences of imaginative engagement. To do so, it is worth noting that for Murdoch, the apprehension of “unutterable particularity” is a sublime experience. The sublime is characterised by a conflict between reason and imagination, sparked by what is “vast, powerful, and terrifying” (Murdoch, 1959, pg. 45). As the imagination cannot “compass what is before us”, “reason imposes upon us as a law the comprehension of what is before us is a totality” (*Ibid.*), where a “totality” is a “total complete ordered picture” (Murdoch, 1997a, pg. 263). In terms of my

account of *The Subjectivity Requirement*, the imaginer may struggle “compass” all the details of the other’s experience in their first-personal approximation of that experience, and so impose that all those details fit together in a “total complete ordered picture”. Sublime experiences are typically thought to be produced by vast formlessness, such as nature, but Murdoch pits herself against that picture with her suggestion that what sublime experiences can be produced by “unutterable particularity, and the most particular and individual of all natural things is the mind of man” (Murdoch, 1959, pg. 52). Her motivation for adopting this eccentric picture of the sublime is to provide “a total theory of art” which captures the greatness of tragedies (Murdoch, 1997b, pg. 262). For Murdoch, tragedy is the greatest artform, as it is concerned with the “unutterable particularity” of the “mind of man”, and by understanding the sublime in this way, she aims to enable a Kantian-inspired theory of art to capture this fact (*Ibid.*, pg. 51).

If the apprehension of “unutterable particularity” is a sublime experience, then it seems that only a narrow range of novels can provide interpersonally valuable experiences of imaginative engagement. First, the sublime is associated with feelings of “exhilaration” and “terror”, suggesting that “unutterable particularity” is not to be grasped in novels which are not associated with these feelings. Second, Murdoch further associates the sublime with tragedies, suggesting that novels which are *not* tragedies do not offer experiences of imaginative engagement with fictional characters which are interpersonally valuable. However, it is plausible that the reader can grasp the other’s “unutterable particularity” through novels which are not tragic, and which do not lend themselves to the feelings of terror associated with the sublime. For example, the reader of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, a comedy, who imaginatively engages with Bridget’s self-sabotaging pining for terrible men, in attempting to first-personally approximate that pining, may have their attention drawn to the “unutterable particularity” of others. So, unlike Murdoch, I emphasise that others can be grasped as “unutterable particulars” by imaginative engagement with fictional characters in novels which are not tragic and not commonly associated with feelings of terror. Instead, I suggest that the conflict between reason and imagination can be associated with any kind of novel which offers the reader the experience of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, such that they attempt to grapple with all the details of their experiences. The resulting “revelation” may be marked by a kind of “exhilaration”, but need not be purely associated with novels which lend themselves to “terror”, or which are tragic.

Additionally, Murdoch is generally pessimistic about the range of novels which are interpersonally valuable. In this respect, “almost every work of art is a failure” (Murdoch, 1997b, pg. 280). For her, the main activity involved in novel-writing is the creation of fictional characters (Murdoch, 1997c, pg. 253). However, post-19<sup>th</sup> Century novels tend to fail in creating fictional characters, by either overly focusing on conveying truths or on historically contingent details (Murdoch, 1997b, pg. 278). These novels cannot create characters which are “like real people” (*Ibid.*, pg. 281), in the sense that they are “contingent, messy, boundless, infinitely particular, and endlessly still to be explained” (*Ibid.*, pg. 274). Consequently, these novels do not “reveal that other people exist”. However, as my focus has been on how imaginatively engaging with a fictional character’s experience can be valuable, rather than the whole process of creating a “real” fictional character, my *Empathic Projection* explanation is perhaps more optimistic about the range of novels which can be interpersonally valuable.

#### **§4. *The Alterity Requirement***

Next, I will continue to develop the *Empathic Projection* explanation by considering the explanatory role of *The Alterity Requirement*, that the experience is imagined as being had by another. *Prima facie*, it seems that an imagining’s satisfaction of *The Alterity Requirement* is necessary for the “revelation”, as the reader not only renews their grasp of others in general as separately existing “unutterable particulars”, but they also grasp the other’s very “otherness” by “taking them to be *another* human being”. I will argue that *The Alterity Requirement* is necessary to explain two further features of the reader’s renewed grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. First, it is necessary for the reader to not only come to a renewed grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”, but also for them to further grasp that it is others *in general* that they are taking as other human beings. Second, it is necessary for the reader to experience “interpersonal self-consciousness” when novel-reading, which is a feature of that renewed grasp.

##### **§4.1. *The Alterity Requirement* and Generality**

First, I will argue that *The Alterity Requirement* is necessary for the reader to not only come to a renewed grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”, but also for them to further grasp that it is others *in general* that they take to be this way. In Chapter 2, I argued that an imagining’s satisfaction of *The Alterity Requirement* could draw the reader’s attention to the generality of a “general thematic statement” about human tendencies. I suggest it plays an analogous role in my

*Empathic Projection* explanation, where “generality” instead refers to how people universally ought to be viewed.

To do so, recall from my discussion of *The Subjectivity Requirement* that the reader is able to renew their grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. When the reader is “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experiences, that intimacy “reveals” the comparative “confinement” of “ordinary” others, who the reader takes the fictional character to be relevantly similar to. If the imagining also satisfies *The Alterity Requirement*, then the experience the reader is “on the most intimate footing” with is imagined as being had by another. In which case, the reader’s grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars” is renewed via experiences imagined as being had by another. Further, given *The Principle of Verisimilitude*, it is renewed via experiences imagined as being had by another who is relevantly similar to “ordinary” others, who can be encountered “face-to-face.” So, imaginative engagement with a fictional character which satisfies *The Alterity Requirement* makes salient to the reader that “ordinary” others may well exist as “unutterable particulars”, and as a result, ought to be viewed as such. By having their grasp renewed via experiences imagined as being had by another, the reader further grasps that it is others *in general* that they are taking to be that way, where “general” is understood in the sense which refers to how people universally ought to be viewed.

It is also worth noting that even the novels which did not imply any “general thematic statements” about human tendencies, like *The Wasp Factory*, can “reveal” that others exist in this way. Perhaps, these novels have an even greater power to do so, as their deviation from the “ordinary” can increase the reader’s sense that their grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars” is renewed via experiences other than their own, and consequently that it is others *in general* who they take to be this way. For example, the reader of *The Wasp Factory* is placed “on the most intimate footing” with Frank’s experiences, as they attempt to first-personally approximate all the details of Frank’s experiences – being morally bankrupt, living an isolated life on an island, having a troubling and complicated relationship with his father, and so on. That “intimate footing” with Frank’s experiences “reveals” the comparative “confinement” of others, enabling the reader to renew their grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. When those imaginings satisfy *The Alterity Requirement* and are imagined as being had by Frank, it is made salient to the reader that “ordinary” others, who are relevantly similar to Frank, may well exist as “unutterable particulars”. In this case, the reader can see that *even* Frank, who falls far beyond the normal tendencies of human behaviour,

is relevantly similar to “ordinary” people, making it especially salient that others may well exist as “unutterable particulars”. So, they see that even those people who fall beyond the normal tendencies of human behaviour may exist as “unutterable particulars”, and they further grasp that it is other *in general* who they take to be that way.

#### §4.2. *The Alterity Requirement* and “Interpersonal Self-Consciousness”

Second, I will argue that the satisfaction of *The Alterity Requirement* is necessary for the reader to experience “interpersonal self-consciousness” when novel-reading. To do so, I will start by further outlining what is involved in “taking another to be *another* human being”. As Richard Moran notes in commentary on Cavell, “‘being other’ is a purely relational matter, a role or position I occupy with respect to some people, and that they in turn occupy with respect to me” (Moran, 2011, pg. 248). So, “taking another to be *another* human being” involves taking there to be a certain relation between oneself and the other. Given the relational nature of “otherness”, it involves the following “duality”: “The question whether there are other minds is exactly as much a question about me as about anyone else [...] Do others know of my existence?” (Cavell, 1999, pg. 442). So, “taking another to be *another* human being” runs two ways, as taking the other that way also involves taking oneself to be in a position to be “taken as another human being” by others as well. To understand the “duality”, I will understand “taking another to be *another* human being” as involving “interpersonal self-consciousness”, where a subject is “conscious of oneself as an object represented by others” (O’Brien, 2012, pg. 101). Therefore, if imaginative engagement with a fictional character can really enable the reader to renew their grasp of others in general existing as “unutterable particulars”, those imaginings must be able to generate feelings of “interpersonal self-consciousness” in the reader.

However, it is hard to see how imaginative engagement with a fictional character could generate feelings of “interpersonal self-consciousness” in the reader, as the “duality” appears to be missing from imaginative engagement with a fictional character. When the point of view imaginatively engaged with is encountered “face-to-face”, there is the possibility for mutual interaction, which is lacking when the point of view is fictional. As mentioned, novel-reading is a distinctly private activity, and as a result, the reader is not presented with another who “represents them as an



object”.<sup>28</sup> An alternative view of “interpersonal self-consciousness” comes from Sartre, who allows that it can be produced when one merely *imagines* that someone is conscious of them, even if no-one actually is. For example, feelings of “interpersonal self-consciousness” may be produced when one hears creaking floorboards whilst looking through a keyhole and imagines that someone might catch them in the act of spying (Sartre, 2018, pg. 355). However, novel-reading does not involve these imaginings either, for example, the reader of *Mrs Dalloway* does not imagine that Clarissa Dalloway is conscious of them. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, some novels are “outward staring”, for example, *An Orchestra of Minorities*, which is addressed to the God of Creation who falls outside the events of the novel. Here, the reader imaginatively engages with Chinonso or his guardian spirit, and then imagines that the God of Creation is conscious of those characters. However, even these novels do not seem to produce the “interpersonal self-consciousness” that is involved in “taking another to be *another* human being”, as the reader does not imagine that anyone is conscious of *them*. So, it is hard to see how imaginative engagement with a fictional character could generate the relevant feeling of “interpersonal self-consciousness”.

However, I suggest that, despite first appearances, imaginative engagement with a fictional character can produce feelings of “interpersonal self-consciousness” in the reader, and *The Alterity Requirement* is necessary for it to do so. As I outlined above, the reader renews their grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”, and further, they grasp that it is others *in general* who they take to be this way. In doing so, they grasp that others *in general* are such that they could also take the reader to be another human being. In other words, by grasping the generality of the others who they “take to be other human beings”, they further grasp that it is others *in general* who can also take them to be another human being. For Sartre, “interpersonal self-consciousness” can be produced by merely imagining that there is another conscious of oneself. Similarly, by making the possibility of others existing as “unutterable particulars” salient to the reader, “interpersonal self-consciousness” can be produced in the reader. As it is the imagining’s satisfaction of *The Alterity Requirement* which makes the possibility of actual others existing as “unutterable particulars” salient to the reader, it is also necessary for the imagining to produce “interpersonal self-consciousness”. In this way, imaginative engagement with a fictional character can have the same the “duality” as imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”.

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<sup>28</sup> Watching theatrical tragedy is more amenable to producing “interpersonal self-consciousness” in the audience, as they may become conscious of themselves “as an object represented by” other audience members, as they know that other audience members may know they are feeling a certain way.

## §5. Conclusion

To conclude, I have presented the *Empathic Projection* explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character. That interpersonal value lies in how imaginative engagement can enable the reader to renew their grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. To finish, I will note two ways my *Empathic Projection* explanation seems to differ from Cavell’s. First, my *Empathic Projection* explanation holds that imaginative engagement with a fictional character is valuable by renewing the reader’s grasp of others in general as “unutterable particulars”. In contrast, Cavell’s focus is on “empathic projection” which allows the imaginer to take the person imaginatively engaged with specifically to be a human being, as through “empathic projection” someone is “singled out for my attention” (Cavell, 1999, pg. 423). Cavell also states that “the others in the room [do] not vanish in relevance” when one “empathically projects” into another, suggesting that perhaps “empathic projection” is also a way taking others *in general* as human beings (*Ibid.*). However, that is not his focus, and that the difference in emphases of the two explanations is required to accommodate for the features of novel-reading which shape the reader’s imaginative engagement with fictional characters. Second, I argued that the reader is put “on the most intimate footing” with a fictional character’s experiences, which “reveals” the comparative “confinement” of “ordinary” people, who the reader takes the fictional character to be relevantly similar to. So, the others taken to be other human beings do not include the point of view imaginatively engaged with. However, in Cavell’s “empathic projection” explanation, it is the person imaginatively engaged with who is taken to be another human being. So, it seems that my *Empathic Projection* explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character differs from Cavell’s explanation of the value of imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. However, Cavell also holds that “empathic projection” creates the sense that “the other [...] will be able to step out of their confinement from me” (Cavell, 1999, pg. 423). So, it is by the feeling of the other “stepping out of their confinement” that the imaginer can “take the other to be *another* human being”. As in my *Empathic Projection* explanation, it is through a comparative lack of “confinement” that the imaginer can take the another to be a human being. Therefore, the difference between two interpersonal explanations are not important ones. As a result, I have provided a more expansive account of the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character, by establishing that it can share the same interpersonal value as imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”.

## Concluding Remarks

I began with the observation that imaginative engagement with a fictional character is often taken to be one valuable experience novels offer, but that the explanation of why these imaginings are valuable as received comparatively little attention. In what followed, I addressed that gap. I characterised “imaginative engagement” as satisfying *The Subjectivity and Alterity Requirements*, such that it involves imagining an experience first-personally and that it is had by another, before motivating that an explanation should capture the imagining’s non-instrumental value and the value it shares with imaginatively engaging with those encountered “face-to-face”. Next, I started with the tempting *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation, that imaginatively engaging with a fictional character is valuable because it is a way of finding out what certain experiences are like. Contrary to most versions of it, I argued that imaginative engagement with a fictional character cannot afford the imaginer with the same degree of phenomenal knowledge as actually having the experience. Instead, they acquire phenomenal knowledge of a lesser degree, which is nonetheless epistemically valuable, as it improves the reader’s knowledge of how “what the experience is like” relates to what it is an experience of, and the features of the point of view which experiences it. Subsequently, I also argued that the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character could be explained by the *Understanding of the World* explanation: it is a way for the reader to improve their understanding of the world, specifically of the applicability of “general thematic statements” about how kinds of people tend to act to particular cases. Finally, I argued that its value can also be given an *Empathic Projection* explanation, meaning it enables the imaginer to “take others to be *other* human beings”. In each explanation, *The Subjectivity and Alterity Requirements* explain how the imagining can be valuable in these ways, despite the limitations which initially seemed apparent in that characterisation.

To finish, I will briefly comment on the range of novels these explanations hold for. As I took the *Phenomenal Knowledge* explanation as my starting point, there is reason to think that these explanations only apply to imaginative engagement with fictional characters within a specific kind of novel, ones which describe the experiences of fictional characters with “complexity” and “subtlety” (Walsh, 1996, pg. 90). Plenty of novels do not do this, such as detective stories (Zunshine, 2006, pg. 121), or Hemingway’s “behaviourist” novels, which describe how characters behave, rather than their experiences or mental life (Cohn, 1978, pg. 9).<sup>29</sup> Perhaps, I have only

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<sup>29</sup> Although a lack of “complexity” and “subtlety” may sound like a criticism, these are just simply a different sort of novel.

explained the value of imaginatively engaging with a fictional character for a limited range of novels. However, I noted in Chapter 1 that one difference between fictional characters and those encountered “face-to-face” is that we have “direct access” to the mental states of the former, but not the latter (Palmer, 2002, pg. 29). That difference is most heightened in novels where the characters’ experiences are described in “subtlety” and “complexity”. So, by focusing on that sort of novel, I have been focusing on cases of imaginative engagement with a fictional character which *most* differ from cases of imaginative engagement with those encountered “face-to-face”. So, I have argued that imaginative engagement with fictional characters in these novels can be valuable in the same ways as with someone encountered “face-to-face”, despite there being features of novel-reading which shape the epistemic and interpersonal explanations given. However, I have also argued that it is *in virtue of* those differences that they can be valuable in that way. If my explanations apply only to a limited range of novels, looking within those limits suggests that imaginative engagement with a fictional character can be valuable in the same ways as with someone encountered “face-to-face” to a higher degree than one might expect.

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