"Tell me how you read and I will tell you who you are."
Children's Literature and Moral Development

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by

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A**bstract**

It is a common intuition that we can learn something of moral importance from literature, and one of the ways in which we teach our children about morality is through stories. In selecting books for children to read a primary concern is often the effect that the moral content of the story will have on the morality of the child reader. In this thesis I argue in order to take advantage of the contribution that literature can make to moral development, we need to teach children to read in a particular way. As a basis for this argument I use an account of moral agency that places emphasis on the development of moral skills - the ability to critically assess moral rules and systems, and the capacity to perceive and respond to the particulars of individual situations and to choose the right course of action in each - rather than on any particular kind of moral content. In order to make the most of the contribution that literature can make to the development of these skills, we need to teach children to immerse themselves in the story, rather than focusing on literary criticism. I argue that, contrary to the standard view of literary criticism as the only form of protection against possible negative effects, an immersed reading will help to prevent the child reader from taking any moral claims made in the story out of context, and so provide some measure of protection against possible negative moral effects of the story. Finally I argue that there are certain kinds of stories - recognisable by features that contribute to a high literary quality - that will enrich the experience of an immersed reading, and will therefore make a greater contribution to moral development than others.

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Tell me how you read, and I will tell you who you are.

Introduction

This thesis grew out of two observations that I have made about myself. First, if I look for the reasons behind many of my moral convictions, the first thing that comes to mind is usually a story. Second, the stories that have had the biggest impact on me have been those that I have read for pleasure, and not those that I have studied.

I was lucky enough to be born into a family that, while providing strong moral examples for me to follow, never put much emphasis on explicit moral rules or any overwhelming moral tradition. As a result I was left to construct my own moral code without much outside interference, and I did so mostly - although not completely - from the books that I read. This process was largely an unconscious one, but now that I am aware of it I am glad that it happened as it did. It gave me the opportunity to figure things out for myself; to learn what worked and what didn't, and why, and to understand the reasons behind the moral convictions that I hold. I will go further and say that this process would be a good one for any child to follow, and since books played such a major role in it, that an engagement with as many good books as possible is important.

That is where my second observation comes in. I was also lucky enough to be born into a family that loves to read. Books were a part of my life right from its beginning, and so I learned to read and to love to read, early on. I was fortunate that the books that I read at school, which were spoiled for me by the torturously dull lessons that accompanied them, were only a very small portion of the books that I read. For many of my classmates however, these books were the only ones they read throughout their school years, and since they seemed to get as little enjoyment out of them as I did, it is unlikely that they would have picked up the habit of reading after they left school.

These observations go a long way towards explaining my long-held frustration with the limits of literary criticism. Or rather, with the limits that literary criticism, as I was taught it at school and university, imposes on what can be learned from a story. There is something that we can learn from literature - something about what it is to be moral - and I think that the standard approach to stories taken in schools tends to get in the way of that.

I was fortunate in that I already loved to read by the time I reached the age of ten, at which I began to learn the basics of literary criticism. This was the point at which our English lessons switched over from *learning to read*, to *learning about reading*. The book we studied that year was Dodie Smith's *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*. I know it to be a very good book, but I got very little satisfaction out of my first reading of it. The fact that it took us an

entire school year to get through it was only the first of many frustrating things about this experience, although at the time it was the only one I could articulate. Instead of being allowed to just get on with it and enjoy the story, we were forced to stop after each section to answer long lists of questions. Who is this character? What has just happened? What does this word mean? Did we notice that the name 'de Vil' is actually the word 'devil'? What does that tell us about the character? While this knowledge was not completely uninteresting, I found that it interrupted the progression of the story to such an extent that I no longer had any real interest in what might happen next.

The situation did not improve in subsequent years. Although I spent the majority of my free time devouring as many books as I could get my hands on, I found little value in the books I was assigned to read at school, and grew less interested (and less cooperative) in the lessons devoted to them, although I am not foolish enough to think that this says anything negative about the quality of those books. I overcame my frustration enough to spend four years studying English literature at university level, but that didn't solve the problem. Despite making my way through an impressive list of titles, I found very little enjoyment in the task.

If it were simply a matter of enjoyment then I would not have pursued this any further. What I have come to realise however, is that my frustration with this system is rooted in something that is much more important. In placing so much emphasis on the study of literary criticism - on learning *about* stories - my education in English literature got in the way of what I could learn *from* stories.

The trouble is that from the moment when children reach the age where they are capable of reading quickly and fluently enough to follow a novel, they are asked to decode what they read. What is the plot of this story? What does this colour symbolise? Is this a reliable narrator? Is this a feminist text? What does it represent? What does it mean? The questions get more and more complex until, at university level, we are so used to deciphering the meaning of a text that we forget to enjoy the story. I do not want to say that this kind of knowledge is not worthwhile. I do want to say that those who focus on this kind of reading to the exclusion of all else are missing something. This focus comes at the cost of not only the enjoyment of a story, but also of the lessons that we can learn from stories; lessons that are more powerful than anything we can learn about literary devices and methods of representation.

Among other things, stories contain moral lessons. This is one of their primary functions. Stories give us the opportunity to learn about what it means to be moral. More importantly, I think that stories can teach us to *be* moral, not necessarily by teaching specific

moral lessons, but by allowing us to experience - through the story - situations that require a moral response.

The question is how do we take advantage of this? Should we stop teaching literary criticism and start teaching moral lessons in the classroom? That seems too extreme, and also somewhat dangerous. I think that the moral lessons that we learn from stories - as children - are best learned, and perhaps only possible to learn, alone - without adult interference. So is the only option to go to the opposite extreme; to just let children get on with it and hope for the best?

I think that there is another option. Rather than abandoning literary criticism in favour of moral lessons (which is dangerous not only because of the difficulty we have in agreeing on what moral lessons children should be taught, but also because children tend to rebel against what they do not decide for themselves) or ignoring the moral lessons that exist in stories and hoping that children will find them for themselves (which leaves open the possibility that they will not), we need to find a middle road between the two extremes. I think that the solution is to teach children to read in such a way that they are open to, and aware of, the possibility that they can learn something of moral value from stories, without making explicit exactly what that is or insisting on any particular interpretation of it.

I will begin in Chapter One by outlining an account of moral agency on which to base this thesis. I will argue that moral agency requires two moral skills, or moral virtues. The first of these is the ability to assess individual moral rules, as well as moral systems as a whole, which will allow the agent to create an individual amalgam of moral content for which she can give reasons to support it. The second is what I am calling 'moral responsiveness', which is the ability to perceive the morally relevant features of each individual situation and to respond accordingly. An important part of moral responsiveness will be a capacity for empathy. The development of these two skills, or virtues, will give the agent an understanding of her own moral convictions, and allow her to respond creatively to new situations.

In Chapter Two I will discuss the possible contribution that literature could make to moral development. Most directly, stories are a source of moral examples. Just like real people, fictional characters can serve as examples that we can respond to. In addition to this function, stories can also contribute to the development of the moral skills mentioned above, by giving us the opportunity to experience and to assess moral situations. Stories can develop our capacity for empathy, by giving us access to the thoughts and emotions of fictional characters. I will also discuss the possibility that a story could have a negative effect on the

morality of the reader. One way to respond to this is to limit our selection of books for children to those that contain only moral perspectives of which we approve, but I think that this will, in turn, limit the contribution that stories can make to moral development.

In Chapter Three I will offer an alternative solution to this problem. One way to avoid the negative effects of any particular story is to employ the techniques of literary criticism, analysing the way in which the story is told in order to prevent ourselves from being affected by it. But this kind of focus creates other problems, which is where I began this project. Instead of literary criticism therefore, I will argue in favour of teaching children to immerse themselves in the story, entering as completely as possible into the world of the story. An essential part of this kind of reading, if it is to be valuable for moral development, will be an awareness of the moral dimensions of the story, which will allow for the exercise and development of moral skills, as well as providing a form of protection against negative influences.

Because the protection mentioned above will be minimal, we are left with the question of moral content. In Chapter Four I will discuss some criteria that could be used in selecting books for children, based on the way in which the content of stories is presented - on the literary quality of the story. Specifically, realism of presentation - the creation of a coherent and detailed fictional world, and of complex, nuanced fictional characters - will create the opportunity for the child reader to develop the moral skills discussed above, as well as creating a richer and more rewarding reading experience.

Defining the age group I am talking about when I talk about 'children' is difficult, since children learn to read at different ages. My interest is in those children who have already learnt to read independently, and who are therefore exposed to stories without an adult present to act as interpreter and intermediary between the story and the child. For the purposes of this thesis I am thinking of children between the ages of seven and fourteen years, but this is only an approximation. Many children learn to read much earlier than seven years, and a really good children's book can just as easily be read and enjoyed by an adult as by a child.

The kinds of books that I have in mind are those that are sometimes referred to as 'Children Classics'. By this I mean novels that are written specifically for children of approximately seven to fourteen years. Iconic authors who have written works that fall into the canon for this category include, in no particular order, Roald Dahl (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, The BFG* etc.), Edith Nesbit (*The Railway Children, The Wouldbegoods* etc.), Enid Blyton (*The Famous Five, St Clare's* etc.), F.W. Dixon (*The Hardy Boys*), Lucy

Maud Montgomery (*Anne of Green Gables*), Robert Louis Stevenson (*Treasure Island*), Mark Twain (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*), Beverly Cleary (*The Mouse and the Motorcycle, Ramona*), Frances Hodgson Burnett (*The Secret Garden, A Little Princess, Little Lord Fauntleroy*), Laura Ingalls Wilder (*Little House on the Prairie* etc.),William Nicolson (*The Wind on Fire Trilogy*), J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings*), C.S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), J.M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*), Joanna Spyri (*Heidi*), Lewis Carroll (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*), Lynne Reid Banks (*The Indian in the Cupboard*), Mary Norton (*The Borrowers, Bedknobs and Broomsticks*),Terry Pratchett (*The Bromeliad, The Carpet People* etc.), Lemony Snicket (*A Series of Unfortunate Events*), J.K. Rowling (*Harry Potter*) and Philip Pullman (*His Dark Materials Trilogy*).

I will draw on a few of the books mentioned above for examples to illustrate my arguments. There are many more that could be added to this list, but for the purposes of this thesis I want to keep to those books with which I am familiar. It seems important to say that even those books from which I draw examples of troubling perspectives, or possible negative effects, are books that I have enjoyed and read many times. This fits with my project, since the really badly written books are unlikely to have much of an effect on their readers anyway, and the ability to see problematic aspects of well-loved books is exactly the sort of ability that will be an important aspect of moral agency.

Chapter One: An Account of Moral Agency

In this chapter I will outline an account of moral agency which will serve as a basis for this thesis. The aim of this chapter is to show that this account is plausible, and that if we accept it - as I propose to do - then we need to give equal importance to the development of each of its main components in the process of moral education.

On this account of moral agency, in order to become a fully developed moral agent a person must fulfil three requirements; she must accept some form of moral content, and she must possess two moral skills or virtues. The first of these is the necessary critical reasoning skills to assess her actions and her moral code. The second is moral responsiveness, which is the capacity to make moral judgements about individual situations and to respond based on those judgements. In order to support this claim I will discuss two theories of moral agency and development: first, the position that claims rationality is the most important feature of moral agency, and second, the position that gives greater importance to moral perception, or what I am calling moral responsiveness. I intend to show that rather than prioritising one over the other the aim of moral education should be to develop both in conjunction with one another.

Moral Content

Although the main focus of this chapter, and of this thesis as a whole, will be on the development of the two moral skills or virtues listed above, some discussion of moral content is necessary. I do not want to commit myself to any particular account of moral content in this thesis. It could take the form of a set of moral commitments or basic moral principles that serve as a guide for action, or a set of tendencies towards certain kinds of behaviour or responses to situations. In most cases I think it will be a combination of the two; a set of rules or generalisations combined with certain patterns of behaviour. Whatever this moral content looks like, my main interest is in the ways in which it is developed and continues to develop throughout our lives, and in the reasons that we have for adhering to it.

An essential part of our early education involves learning this moral content, either through rote learning and repetition, or through imitation of others. From an early age we are taught by adults about acceptable behaviours, a set of accepted ways to respond to certain circumstances (such as sharing with others who have less than oneself, or obeying one's parents, for example), and a set of basic moral rules (such as 'tell the truth' or 'don't hurt others' and other similar rules). By insisting on and rewarding honesty, for example, our

parents instil a pattern of behaviour, or a moral rule, in us. This serves as a guide for action, and a standard against which we compare the behaviour of others. We also learn through exposure to moral examples, both good and bad. These examples include the behaviour of family members and teachers, as well as that of our peers, but also often come from stories. Fictional characters, particularly those with whom we identify, or who we admire, can provide us with strong moral examples.

Since all of our early influences and examples will most likely be from a single society, the basic amalgam of moral content that we develop will be similar to that of the people around us. This allows us to function within our society by teaching us what that particular society considers right and wrong, and helping us to keep within the bounds of acceptable behaviour. Aside from this social function, the establishment of this basic moral content is important for two reasons: first, learning this moral content from her society helps the child to form the basic concepts of right and wrong, which will be essential for the later stages of moral development, and second, this moral content gives the child a base from which to work. The subsequent process of moral development will involve assessing aspects of this moral content, and then either affirming them, adapting them, or discarding them in favour of others. This will eventually create the unique moral content by which each of us lives. This process cannot even begin however, without some form of moral content to use as a starting point; something to assess and change.

Despite the importance of learning this initial moral content however, this is only the beginning of the process of moral education. At this early stage, the child will not have a full understanding of the reasons behind this moral content. If she adheres to it, this will be largely the result of obedience to authority figures, or some form of intuition, or some combination of the two. In order to become a fully developed moral agent the child needs to go through the process of assessment and adaptation mentioned above, so that she can form a unique amalgam of moral content that she adheres to out of choice, and for which she can give an account of the reasons which support it. It is the aim of moral education to give the child the tools necessary for this process. These tools will include moral skills or virtues.

I will use the terms 'moral virtues' and 'moral skills' interchangeably in this thesis. I am basing this on Julia Annas's claim that a virtue is a particular kind of skill. The crucial element of a skill is an understanding of the reasons behind our actions and choices. The skilled person does not merely hit on the right action by chance, or simply imitate others. Instead she understands what it is that she is doing, and why, and can explain it to others. In the case of moral content, it is the difference between following moral rules out of respect or

fear of authority, or imitating the behaviour of others, and acting morally because we are able to perceive for ourselves what would be the right thing to do and have made a choice to do it. The virtuous person

> is not just the person who does in fact do the morally right thing, or even does it stably and reliably. She is the person who *understands* the principles on which she acts, and can thus explain and defend her actions.[1]

For the purposes of this thesis therefore, the term 'moral skill' implies this kind of in depth understanding of the reasons for an action or choice, or an ability that will contribute to the virtue that Annas describes. In order to become a fully developed moral agent, or virtuous person, the child needs to develop two moral skills: critical reasoning skills and moral responsiveness.

Critical Assessment

Critical reasoning skills are essential to moral agency. These skills play a crucial role in the making of moral judgments and decisions - giving us the ability to recognise the actions available to us in each situation, and the ability to reason through the possible consequences of each one in order to make a choice - as well as in the assessment of our moral content as described above. As a result, theories of moral development often place great emphasis on the development of rationality. In this section I will discuss the conception of the fully developed moral agent that results from such theories, and the importance of critical reasoning for moral agency.

One theory of moral development that emphasises the importance of rationality is found in the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who distinguishes three levels of moral development. He divides these further into six stages, but for my purposes the three main groupings will suffice. At the first, *preconventional*, level, a child is responsive to moral rules, but interprets them first in terms of reward or punishment and later in terms of the instrumental satisfaction of need. At the second, *conventional*, level, there is a focus on conforming to the expectations of a family, society or religion, and approval from these groups is seen as valuable in its own right, regardless of other consequences. At this level, right behaviour is judged in terms of what is pleasing or acceptable to others, the behaviour of the majority and respect for authority. At the final, *postconventional*, level, the focus shifts to the validity of moral values and principles independent of social convention. Right action is defined in terms of individual rights and standards of behaviour agreed on by society, and

[1] Annas, 67

there is an awareness of the relativism of personal values. In the final stage on this level, right action is defined by "the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles".[2]

Rationality is of great importance to the final level described above. It is through critical reasoning that we are able to determine the validity of moral values and principles without relying on social convention or sources of authority. Although we still make use of social conventions - such as the individual rights and acceptable behaviours agreed upon by society - critical reasoning gives us the ability to assess these conventions and to develop reasons for complying, or not complying, with these conventions. By making use of our knowledge of these rights and standards of behaviour in combination with critical reasoning, we can make judgements about right action. In most societies, for example, social convention requires that we are honest in our dealings with others. We teach our children this practice, and expect them to conform to it, but simple conformity is insufficient for moral agency, and so we also teach them the reasons that underlie the convention, as well as the skills to search for those reasons themselves. At the highest level of moral development the decision to act honestly will be the result of a process of reasoning, considering alternative courses of action and their possible consequences before deciding on one. Making a moral commitment to act honestly at all times is a generalisation of these individual decisions. Critical reasoning does not cease to operate at this point however, because there may be situations in which adhering to this moral commitment or rule is inappropriate - when telling the truth could result in harm, for example - and critical reasoning is required in order to choose an alternative course of action. The end result of this process is that the amalgam of moral content that we develop is based on ethical principles, for which we can give a rational explanation and justification.

The ideal moral agent on this type of account then will be someone who is capable of understanding the reasons behind the moral rules that she follows, and who chooses to follow them as a result of this understanding. In addition to this, she will have the critical reasoning skills necessary to assess her own moral system, and to recognise when there is a need for individual aspects of moral content to be altered.

The critical assessment of moral rules and systems can take two forms, both of which are necessary for moral agency. First, we can assess a moral system on its own terms, and second, we can assess it in comparison with other moral systems or in terms of metaethical principles. To assess a moral system on its own terms requires the ability to recognise

[2] Kohlberg, 55

inconsistencies within the system, such as when the application of a moral rule in a particular situation will contradict some central ideal or moral principle. This will require an understanding of these central moral principles that is comprehensive enough to enable us to recognise when such a situation arises. Take for example the moral rule that we should always tell the truth. If we encounter a situation in which telling the truth will result in some kind of harm - such as allowing a murder to take place - then following that particular rule in this situation would be contrary to the moral principle that, for example, we ought to preserve life whenever possible, or that we should not assist those who intend to do harm, or something along those lines. This situation requires that we make an exception to the moral rule that we should always tell the truth, in order to avoid acting against one of our central moral principles. To assess a moral system as a whole requires that we search for a justification for our adherence to it. This can involve comparing it with other moral systems that are based on different moral ideals, or searching for metaethical principles that can serve as justification for our ideals. For this kind of assessment to be possible, we first need to have knowledge that other moral systems exist, some of which will be based on ideals that contradict our own, and an understanding of these ideals. Once we have this knowledge, we can make use of critical reasoning to compare and contrast these systems with our own, and to search for metaethical principles that will give us the means to choose between them.

Critical reasoning skills are therefore essential to moral agency, and the development of these skills will be an important part of moral education. While these skills are necessary however, I do not think that they are sufficient for moral agency. In the following section I will discuss a third requirement - moral responsiveness - and show that this is also necessary for moral agency.

Moral Responsiveness

The theory of moral agency discussed above, with its emphasis on rationality, is closely connected to the conception of the rational self as the true self. However, this kind of conception could lead to a lack of awareness of, and attention to, other aspects of the self, which include emotions and desires. These other aspects of the self, and not only the rational self, will play a role in determining our actions and moral choices, and so a successful theory of moral agency should take these into account. In this section I will claim that in addition to critical reasoning skills, moral agency also requires moral responsiveness. Morality is both cognitive and affective, and what I call moral responsiveness is that element of moral agency that makes use of our emotions. In order to develop moral responsiveness therefore, moral

education needs to focus on two areas: first, the development of a particular way of perceiving moral situations, which will necessarily involve emotions, and second, the development of a capacity for empathy.

If we conceive of moral beings as primarily rational beings, then moral agents will require only the most general of moral concepts, such as 'good' and 'right', and so any theory that holds rationality to be the most important aspect of moral agency will focus on definitions of these concepts and the theories of right action that follow from these definitions. Simon Haines argues that this creates a problem, because he claims that when we talk about obligation or duty, or of moral right and wrong, we are relying on a conception of morality that no longer survives. The modern sense of the word 'moral'

> implying an implicit compulsion to act in a certain way, depends … on the survival of a law conception of ethics, and ultimately a divine law conception, which only makes sense within the now-collapsed Judeo-Christian framework.[3]

The absence of this framework means that morality is reduced to a few elementary common denominators. Being largely abstract and separated from our actual experience of the world, these common denominators serve little practical purpose. For example, the abstract rule 'tell the truth', as I discussed above, must sometimes be disregarded because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Instead of these abstract concepts, Haines argues that what is needed is a moral vocabulary that gives weight to the moral concepts that we use. He claims that what is needed is a greater knowledge and understanding of the historical context from which these moral concepts are drawn. However, I think that this weight need not come only from this knowledge of context. An alternative is to focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the emotional underpinnings of moral concepts. In order to understand moral concepts we need to live within them, to experience them, which I will argue necessarily involves an emotional component. To attempt to separate the affective and cognitive elements of moral perception is to impoverish our understanding of moral concepts.

There is a close connection between moral judgments and emotions. The judgment that a moral rule has been violated generally elicits a negative emotional response. In his argument for the claim that "emotions co-occur with moral judgements",[4] Jesse Prinz cites scientific studies that show a connection between making a moral judgment and activity in the part of the brain that controls emotions. It is difficult, in practice, to separate moral judgments from these emotional responses. However, this is often the stated aim of theories

[3] Haines, paraphrasing Anscombe, 23
[4] Prinz, 30

of moral development that give priority to rationality; to make moral judgments through rational deliberation without allowing emotions to interfere. Emotions need not be an interference however, since they are a central part of how we interact with others. Behaviour and character can often only be made sense of "in terms of an underlying structure of emotion",[5] which is connected to the way that we respond to one another, and with the ways in which we make judgments about how to act.

In the same way that making a moral judgment elicits an emotional response, emotions can have an effect on our moral judgments. A negative emotion "can give rise to a negative moral appraisal without any specific belief about some property in virtue of which something is wrong".[6] This is what we often refer to as moral intuition. We have a feeling that something is either right or wrong, or that someone has a good or a bad character, even when we have no rational support or evidence for the feeling and so cannot explain why we have it. These intuitions are not always correct, but nevertheless we do use our emotions as a guide for our moral judgments.

Given this connection between the two, it seems that emotions will play an important role in moral development. Prinz observes that children have to be trained to conform to moral rules, and further, that the methods generally used by parents and teachers all involve emotions in some way.[7] The three main techniques that he describes are the assertion of power, which elicits fear in a child, alerting the child to the harm she has caused someone else, which causes distress, and the withdrawal of love (which can also take the form of social ostracism) which causes sadness. In each case, emotions are used as a tool for moral teaching and enforcement.

Prinz makes the further claim that "emotions are also necessary in a synchronic sense".[8] If a person makes a moral judgment, such as 'killing is wrong' for example, but does not have any negative emotions towards the idea of killing, then it is difficult to see how that person could be sincere in making that moral judgment. A complete lack of emotional response to moral situations could be seen as a kind of moral blindness. He argues that cultural differences in moral values provide indirect support for this view, stating that "if moral values are not driven by reason or observation, then it is plausible to think they hinge on culturally inculcated passions".[9] In other words, the differences that we find between the

[5] Haines, 32
[6] Prinz, 31
[7] Prinz, 31
[8] Prinz, 32
[9] Prinz, 33

moral systems of different cultures give support to the idea that these moral systems are not so much the result of rational deliberation and choice, as the result of culturally reinforced emotional responses to certain acts or situations.

This claim does not mean that we can never make dispassionate moral judgments. We can make the moral judgment that killing is wrong by using rational deliberation, and emotions need not necessarily play a role in making the general judgment. When we are confronted with a particular situation however, such as a murder, we should feel some form of negative emotion towards the act. Emotion serves as a condition for sincerity. We do not always have to feel the attendant emotions in order to make a moral judgment, but if we never feel them at all then we cannot be said to hold that particular moral judgment to be true.

Emotion plays another important role in moral understanding, in the form of empathy, which David Pizarro defines as a "primary moral emotion",[10] and which serves as a moral indicator. Empathy involves feeling the emotions of another person, and helps us to identify situations that require a moral response. Once we have recognised that a moral response is necessary, emotions then serve as a basis for moral judgments, providing us with an initial and immediate response to the situation, on which we can base our judgment about what action is required.

Given this correlation between emotions and moral judgments, and that emotions can have an effect on our moral judgments, it makes sense that the development of full moral agency will require that we take emotions into account. Teaching a child how to understand and make use of emotions in connection with moral judgments will therefore be an important part of moral education, and this will take the form of the development of moral responsiveness.

Moral responsiveness is the ability to perceive and respond to the particulars of individual moral situations, and to make use of our emotional responses and intuitions in order to act rightly. Moral responsiveness is akin to the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.[11] Virtue, for Aristotle, is closely connected to practical wisdom, which is the ability to choose the right course of action in each set of circumstances. It is a "capacity for thinking correctly about how to respond to particular circumstances as they arise",[12] and is what allows us to determine the mean – the virtuous response – in each situation. A

[10] Pizarro, 359
[11] Aristotle, NE Book 1
[12] Lovibond, 11

virtuous person is therefore someone who is "characterised by a certain state of receptivity"[13] to the world and to other people.

Practical wisdom is the common cognitive element of all the virtues, and is therefore closely connected with a capacity for critical reasoning. However, rather than the rigid application of a rationally defined moral code, it involves a particular way of seeing, an openness to the particulars of situations and the ability to notice and take those into account and so choose the right course of action. John McDowell argues that it is inevitable that situations will arise

> in which a mechanical application of the rules would strike one as wrong – and not necessarily because one has changed one's mind; rather one's mind on the matter [will not be] susceptible of capture in any universal formula.[14]

In such cases, where a moral rule cannot be found that is applicable, the right course of action must be found through some other means, drawn from the situation itself. Practical wisdom is important for this, but it is not enough on its own. An important component of virtuous action in the Aristotelian picture is having the right feelings about one's actions or about a situation and so emotions will play an important role in choosing the right course of action. Since it is empathy that alerts us to the necessity of a moral response, empathy will be an essential component of moral agency. Morality is other-directed, and so an ability to imagine or to experience the feelings of others will be necessary, or at least beneficial, to making moral decisions. It is from this experience or imagining of emotion that we will draw the means to make the right decision is each particular situation.

Empathy is defined as "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect",[15] caused by witnessing, hearing about, imagining, or even reading about the emotional state of another person. Empathy can be distinguished from sympathy, which is "feelings for another".[16] Sympathy involves concern for another and for his well-being, and more specifically, concern for his sake. Empathy, on the other hand, involves feeling what the other person feels, or rather, what we imagine or believe that the other feels or could be expected to feel given the circumstances. Empathy is the result of emotional contagion, which is "the communication of one's mood to others",[17] and which is an important part of the way that we interact socially. We mimic the facial expressions, vocalisations and postures of other people, and so learn to

[13] Lovibond, 17
[14] McDowell, quoted in Lovibond, 30
[15] Keen, 208
[16] Keen, 208
[17] Keen, 209

recognise these things as indicators of mood, which aids us in communicating with each other. If empathy is an advantage in social interaction, it is reasonable to think that it will also be an advantage in making moral judgments.

It is possible that, unlike sympathy, empathy need not involve concern for the well-being of the other, and Stephen Darwall argues that it can in fact be consistent with "the indifference of pure observation or even the cruelty of sadism".[18] If this is the case, it might be better to advocate the importance of sympathy, rather than empathy, for moral responsiveness. However, while a concern for the well-being of others is certainly a good thing, more important for moral agency is an understanding of the feelings of others. Sympathy is too closely connected to the self, to the feelings that the agent herself has for the other person. Empathy, on the other hand, need not involve the feelings of the agent herself. It is a

> more precisely sensitive receptivity to the suffering of another or others through available data; and awareness, understanding and experience of humanity and human suffering.[19]

Empathy gives us a deeper insight into the feelings of others than sympathy, and will therefore be more valuable for moral agency. This is not to say that sympathy is unimportant, but it is likely that sympathy will follow naturally from empathy. Pizarro distinguishes between two kinds of empathy.[20] Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand the point of view and emotions of another person. This form of empathy is closely connected to what we believe the emotions of the other person to be, or what we believe their emotions are likely to be given the circumstances. Affective empathy is the vicarious emotional response that, in some cases, accompanies the understanding gained through cognitive empathy. For example, we can understand, in a cognitive sense, that someone who has lost a loved one will feel grief, but this is not the same thing as feeling grief ourselves. Affective empathy involves feeling that grief along with the other person. While it is possible to have one without the other, I think that to have a capacity for both will be a significant advantage to moral agency. In cases where we do not feel sympathy for the other, affective empathy may serve as a means of generating sympathy. If we can experience, even briefly, the feelings of another, then it is not so great a step to having feelings for them, and to feeling concern for their well-being.

[18] Darwall, 161
[19] Daniel, 103
[20] Pizarro, 359

I stated above that the development of moral responsiveness will require moral education to focus on both the development of a particular way of perceiving moral situations and the development of a capacity for empathy. One way to achieve the first of these goals is to conceive of morality as a form of thought in itself, as opposed to being based on any particular content, or as derived from authority.[21] Barbara Cowell draws an analogy with science education which, particularly at the higher levels, is not about imparting content to students, but rather about teaching them a method of approach; a way of thinking about scientific questions. In a similar manner, moral education is not so much about teaching children moral rules, but rather about teaching them how to approach moral situations.

In conclusion, moral agency requires a certain kind of perception, an openness to the world and to other people. Part of the process of moral education is therefore teaching a child to perceive moral situations in a certain way. Cowell suggests that this is done by working with the moral intuitions of the child, and showing her how those intuitions should be modified or acted upon depending on the details of the circumstances. The use of emotions will often play a role here, such as in the methods described above in which parents use negative emotions to reinforce moral lessons, drawing the child's attention to the morally relevant features of the situation. This is similar to the Aristotelian conception of acquiring virtue first through imitation of a more accomplished person and later through an understanding of the appropriate response to moral situations. The child's intuitions are initially modified through an encounter with an adult, who gives her an example to follow in that particular situation. Moral education makes use of many of these encounters with the aim of helping the child to reach the point where she can perceive for herself which of her intuitions are appropriate and which are not in any given situation.

As discussed above, one of the most important tools available to us in the development and exercise of moral perception is emotion. Our emotional responses to situations, as well as the ability to recognise and respond to the emotions of other people, are a central part of moral agency, and so the development of this kind of moral perception, or moral responsiveness, will be important for moral agency.

Both reason and emotion will therefore be important for moral agency, and so we cannot prioritise one over the other. In order to allow for the development of full moral agency, moral education needs to focus on developing both critical reasoning skills and moral responsiveness.

[21] Cowell, 38

Chapter Two: The Role of Literature

In Chapter One I outlined an account of moral agency that includes three necessary components: first, the acceptance of some form of moral content, second, the ability to make use of critical reasoning skills in order to assess moral rules and systems, and third, a capacity for moral responsiveness. In this chapter I will discuss whether an engagement with literature could contribute to the development of these three requirements.

It is important to note that our engagement with literature alone will not be sufficient for the development of moral agency. At best, literature can make a contribution to moral education, which must be combined with other aspects of education in order to be effective. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss exactly what this contribution could be, and how it might work, with a view to determining how we can best take advantage of it.

It is also important to note that whatever the effects of literature on moral development may be, it is by no means certain that these effects will all be positive ones. The fully developed moral agent described in Chapter One could perhaps engage with any story and take only positive effect from it. However, since my focus is on the development of moral agency, the kind of reader with whom I am concerned will not yet be a fully developed moral agent. In this chapter therefore, I will deal first with the positive contributions that literature could make to moral development, and then discuss some concerns that have been raised about the possible negative effects of imaginative engagement with stories. I will offer a possible solution to the problems that these concerns present in Chapter Three.

The Role of the Imagination

Our engagement with literature is an engagement through the imagination, and so if literature is to play any role in moral development it will most likely be through the development of the imagination. The role of the imagination in moral development is twofold: first, one of the ways in which we learn about the world and other people is through the imagination, and second, the imagination itself will play a role in moral agency. In this section I will discuss the first of these roles. The second is closely connected to moral responsiveness, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

The use of conceptual imagining - which involves imagining the truth of a proposition in order to see what would follow from it - is fairly common in education. We also make use of this kind of thinking in order to make decisions by imagining the possible consequences of our actions. Of course, knowledge of the real world is indispensible for this, but it is the

imagination that allows us to utilise that knowledge in making decisions. We imagine different possible futures, and choose the action that we think most likely to lead to the future that we want.

In addition to this use of the imagination, there is a second form of imagination which Berys Gaut terms "experiential imagining". This involves more than simply imagining the truth of a proposition. It involves imagining *what it would be like*, or *what it would feel like*, if that proposition were true, or if a particular course of events were to take place. It is "a matter of entertaining a sensory or phenomenal thought without commitments to the thought-content's truth or instantiation".[22] It is this kind of imagination that we use when we are asked to put ourselves 'in someone else's shoes', or in other words, to empathise with them. Experiential imagining is what is involved in our engagement with fiction, and will be important for moral development and agency. Gaut argues that the more vividly we imagine something the more we will learn from the imagining and that since morality concerns both motivations and feelings

> moral learning not only involves knowing that such-and-such is the case … but is also concerned with knowing how to act and how to feel.[23]

Experiential imagining will therefore play an important role in moral learning, since it involves an imaginative acquaintance with the situation, beliefs, desires and emotions of another person or persons.

If literature contributes to moral education then, it is likely that it will do so by developing our capacity for imagination. Given that some people have a greater capacity for imagination than others, it makes sense that we can "benefit from being guided in our imaginings by those with greater imaginative talents than we possess".[24] Gaut argues that artists, writers and poets are drawn from those people who have great imaginative ability, and art and literature provides such people with a platform from which to guide others.

Moral Content

The moral content of a story is similar to the moral content of the real world. In every society there are moral rules, accepted standards of behaviour, and implied views about what it means to be a good person and about what virtue is. A story contains the same sort of moral content, to a greater or lesser degree of complexity. Sometimes there is an explicit moral

[22] Gaut, 151
[23] Gaut, 157
[24] Gaut, 145

claim that a story is demonstrating or reinforcing (such as in fables), and sometimes there is not. Engaging with a story is not unlike spending time in a particular society. There will always be some form of moral context in which the events of the story take place, which is expressed in the speech and behaviour of the characters as they react to those events, and emphasised through the way in which the story is told.

Throughout this thesis I will be working with a distinction between the moral content *in* a story, and the moral content *of* a story. The two are very closely linked to one another, but there is a subtle distinction to be made between them. The moral content *in* the story refers to the moral status of the actions of characters, and the stated or implied beliefs of those characters. This moral status is, to a certain limited extent, independent from the beliefs or attitudes of the author. Any action or interaction between characters will have this moral status. A murder, for example, has moral status, as does a lie, or an act of kindness.

Such actions can be written or told about in such a way as to present only the action itself. However, a story does more than just present us with the facts about actions and events. It tells us about these things in such a way as to create certain reactions in us. A story asks us to feel something about what it describes, to view it in a certain way. This is the moral content *of* the story, made up by the choices the author makes about how to portray the moral content *in* the story.

As an example, consider J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. The climax of the book is the death of Headmaster Albus Dumbledore at the hands of Severus Snape, who confirms by this action his status as a Death Eater, the name given to followers of the evil Lord Voldemort. A simple statement of fact, such as "Snape killed Dumbledore",[25] describes an action that has a moral status, but does little else. In isolation, it has little impact. What gives that statement weight is the entirety of the story; in which the killings perpetrated by Death Eaters are condemned, and Dumbledore serves as the leader of those fighting against them. The combination of these things changes that simple statement of fact into something terrible. It is the loss of a cherished guide and father figure, and the confirmation (at this point in the story anyway) of our worst suspicions about Snape. The action is therefore portrayed in a completely negative way. Interestingly, the same action is portrayed in a different light in the following novel in the series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, when Snape gives Harry access to his memory of a conversation with Dumbledore. Having discovered that Voldemort intends to have Draco Malfoy murder him, and also that, due to a

[25] Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 566

cursed injury, he cannot expect to live longer than a year in any case, Dumbledore asks Snape to kill him.

> 'Ultimately, of course, there is only one thing to be done if we are to save him from Lord Voldemort's wrath.'
>
> Snape raised his eyebrows and his tone was sardonic as he asked, 'Are you intending to let him kill you?'
>
> 'Certainly not. You must kill me.'
>
> There was a long silence, broken only by an odd clicking noise. Fawkes the phoenix was gnawing a bit of cuttlebone.
>
> 'Would you like me to do it now?' asked Snape, his voice heavy with irony. 'Or would you like a few moments to compose an epitaph?'
>
> 'Oh, not quite yet,' said Dumbledore, smiling. 'I daresay the moment will present itself in due course. Given what has happened tonight,' he indicated his withered hand, 'we can be sure that it will happen within a year.'
>
> 'If you don't mind dying,' said Snape roughly, 'why not let Draco do it?'
>
> 'That boy's soul is not yet so damaged,' said Dumbledore. 'I would not have it ripped apart on my account.'
>
> 'And my soul, Dumbledore? Mine?'
>
> 'You alone know whether it will harm your soul to help an old man avoid pain and humiliation,' said Dumbledore. 'I ask this one, great favour of you, Severus, because death is coming for me as surely as the Chudley Cannons will finish bottom of this year's league. I confess I should prefer a quick, painless exit to the protracted and messy affair it will be if, for instance, Greyback is involved - I hear Voldemort has recruited him? Or dear Bellatrix, who likes to play with her food before she eats it.'
>
> His tone was light, but his blue eyes pierced Snape as they had frequently pierced Harry, as though the soul they discussed was visible to him. At last Snape gave another curt nod.[26]

This conversation means that Harry, and the reader, is asked to take a very different view of Snape's actions. Instead of a cold-blooded murder, Snape killing Dumbledore is portrayed as an act of mercy. The moral content *in* the story changes, because we are given new information, but this is also a difference in the moral content *of* the story. The same action can be portrayed in either a positive or a negative light. The choices that the author makes in how the moral content *in* a story is portrayed will make up the moral content *of* that story.

Perhaps the simplest way that literature can contribute to moral development is by providing children with moral examples to be either emulated or avoided. Fictional characters, particularly those that children admire, or with whom they identify, provide role models for action in much the same way that real people do. These examples are one of the

[26] Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 548

sources from which we draw moral content. The example itself - of a particular kind of action or behaviour, such as violence, for example - will be a part of the moral content *in* the story, but whether that example is one to be followed or avoided is determined by the moral content *of* the story.

In Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* for example, the heroine, Sara Crewe, uses her trick of pretending to be a princess as both a source of strength in difficult times, and as a code of behaviour. When her wealthy father sends her to a boarding school in England, Sara finds that her only true difficulty is how much she misses him. Her natural kindness and boundless imagination help her to make friends among her schoolfellows, and the worldly headmistress treats her well because of her wealth. Although she might easily have become self-satisfied and spoilt, her belief that a princess would be always even-tempered, gracious, generous and kind serves as an ideal which she does her best to live up to at all times. The passage below is the first test of her ability to do so. An older pupil who is jealous of Sara has heard of her latest imagining, and uses it to attack her when Sara defends one of the younger girls, to whom Sara is something of an adopted mother.

> Sara got up quickly on her feet. It must be remembered that she had been very deeply absorbed in the book about the Bastille, and she had had to recall several things rapidly when she realised that she must go and take care of her adopted child. She was not an angel, and she was not fond of Lavinia.
>
> 'Well,' she said, with some fire, 'I should like to slap *you* - but I don't want to slap you!' restraining herself. 'At least, I both want to slap you - and I should *like* to slap you - but I *won't* slap you. We are not little gutter children. We are both old enough to know better.'
>
> Here was Lavinia's opportunity.
>
> 'Ah, yes, your royal highness,' she said. 'We are princesses, I believe. At least one of us is. The school ought to be very fashionable now Miss Minchin has a princess for a pupil.'
>
> Sara started towards her. She looked as if she were going to box her ears. Perhaps she was. Her trick of pretending things was the joy of her life. She never spoke of it to girls she was not fond of. Her new 'pretend' about being a princess was very near to her heart, and she was shy and sensitive about it. She had meant it to be rather a secret, and here was Lavinia deriding it before nearly all the school. She felt the blood rush up to her face and tingle in her ears. She only just saved herself. If you were a princess, you did not fly into rages. Her hand dropped, and she stood quite still a moment. When she spoke it was in a quiet, steady voice; she held her head up, and everybody listened to her.

> 'It's true,' she said. 'Sometimes I do pretend I am a princess. I pretend I am a princess, so that I can try and behave like one.'[27]

Sara is a compelling character, and a powerful role model. Outwardly she is an ordinary child, albeit an extremely fortunate one, at least in the earlier part of the story. Inwardly - mentally and morally - however, she displays a strength that separates her from her peers. The force of the story comes when Sara's fortune changes after the death of her father and the loss of his fortune, which leaves her in the hands of the headmistress, who allows her to remain at the school only as a servant. Until that point the kindness, courtesy and generosity that she shows towards everyone around her are admirable, but do not require any great effort on her part. After that point, when she is treated badly by all but three loyal friends, to continue to behave in the same way is a moral triumph, and despite a few natural setbacks, Sara does triumph. Her constant mantra through her trial is this:

> 'Whatever comes,' she said, 'cannot alter one thing. If I am a princess in rags and tatters, I can be a princess inside. It would be easy to be a princess if I were dressed in cloth of gold, but it is a great deal more of a triumph to be one all the time when no one knows it.'[28]

Sara's behaviour - as part of the moral content *in* the story - serves as a moral example for the child reader, and because Sara is portrayed in a positive light throughout the story, this example is reinforced by the moral content *of* the story as well.

Stories are also a powerful source of education about social values. The stories that a society tells its children are one of the most powerful ways of teaching a child about its values, and its social and legal structure. The way that a story portrays a character - as a hero or as a villain - or its events, in varying degrees of subtlety, directs the reader to make certain moral judgments about that characters or event. In a typical fairy tale, for example, hero and villain are distinguished not only by their actions, but by the outcome of the story. The hero is rewarded, the villain punished, and so the child reader learns the difference between good and bad action as well as the possible consequences of both. In this way the child learns to recognise those character traits and actions that a society values or disvalues.

Stories are not the only way that children learn this however, and there are many different sources of these moral examples. This contribution is not therefore unique to literature. Furthermore, it is not my intention to argue in favour of any particular kind of moral content, and so my concern is not with any particular kind of moral example that forms

[27] Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*, 70-71
[28] Hodgson Burnett, 164

the moral content *in* a story. My interest is rather in the development of critical reasoning skills and moral responsiveness, and the moral content *of* stories will play an important role here.

Critical Assessment

The development of critical reasoning skills is one area of moral education for which an engagement with literature alone will not be sufficient. To be effective, it must be combined with instruction on the principles of critical reasoning. However, literature provides us with the opportunity to practice our critical reasoning skills, by giving us many different examples of characters and actions, as well as moral rules and systems, to assess.

Literature creates fictional worlds into which the reader enters for the duration of the reading. The fictional world that a text creates can be as alike or as different to our world as the writer chooses to make it. It could be identical to the world that the reader knows it every aspect, with only the characters being an unknown, or it could be modelled on the world that the reader knows but with slight differences, or it could be all the way on the other end of the spectrum as a world completely different to the one that the reader knows.

Fiction gives us experience of new worlds and societies, either actual societies of which we may have little or no knowledge, or imagined societies such as those portrayed in fantasy and science fiction stories. In addition to features such as geography, history and culture, these societies will have moral rules and systems, some of which will be similar to our own, and others completely different. Literature introduces us to alternate moral realities, and does in in a way that, say, philosophy cannot, by allowing us to 'live' in those realities for the duration of the story, and to experience their effects through the characters of the stories.

Exposure to different moral systems (even fictional ones) makes us aware that there are alternatives to the moral system to which we are accustomed, and the progression of the stories is likely to create awareness that these systems have both good and bad points. As the story progresses, the characters will have to navigate the fictional world and in doing so will work either within its moral and legal systems, or against them, or in some cases a combination of the two.

In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, for example, Huck is presented with a difficult moral choice. Believing that it is his duty to turn in the runaway slave, Jim, with whom he has been travelling, Huck writes a letter to Jim's owner, giving Jim's location. Having written the letter however, he finds himself unable to send it. He is aware of the social, legal and moral system of his society and knows what it requires of him with regards

to Jim. He even believes that he ought to conform to it, but his friendship with Jim presents him with a conflicting conception of what it would be right to do. His account of the moment states

> I … got to thinking over our trip down the river, and I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day and in the night time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch against his'n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping, and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog, and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was - and suchlike times - and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was, and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now, and then I happened to look around, and see that paper.
>
> It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, for ever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: "All right, then, I'll go to hell" - and tore it up.[29]

Huck's decision to help Jim, despite his belief that doing so will mean that he himself will be sent to hell, challenges the rightness of the moral beliefs of the society in which he lives, and the progression of the story supports and reinforces his choice. In other words, the moral content *in* the story consists of a conflict between two possible moral choices, but the moral content *of* the story portrays this conflict in such a way as to support only one of these choices.

As I stated in Chapter One, the critical assessment of moral rules and systems can take two forms: first, the assessment of a moral system on its own terms, which involves the ability to recognise inconsistencies and to assess moral rules in terms of the central principles upon which the system is based, and second, the assessment of a moral system as a whole, in comparison with other systems and in terms of metaethical principles. Stories give us the opportunity to practice both of these skills. Each individual story gives us the opportunity to assess a particular moral system on its own terms, through engaging with the point of view of a character (or characters) living within that moral system. The progression of the story will usually require the character to make moral decisions, and the reader is often given insight into the reasoning that goes into making such decisions, as well as their consequences. In the example described above, the reader is given access to Huck's dilemma, as well as into the

[29] Twain, 182-183

reasoning that goes into his decision. The dilemma is the result of a conflict between the demands of the moral system he has been taught - which is rooted in a racist class system and a belief that to go against that system is immoral (will, in fact, result in the transgressor being sent to hell) - and the moral demands of the friendship that develops between he and Jim. Huck is developing his own moral system, of which friendship is a central moral ideal, and in this case, to obey the moral rules of his society would go against this ideal.

An engagement with many different stories will mean exposure to many different moral systems and characters, which gives the reader the opportunity to compare them with each other, and with her own moral system. This practice will contribute to the development of our critical reasoning skills. Also, by assessing fictional moral realities and comparing them with one another we can learn to assess our own moral systems and actions, as well as those of the people we encounter in reality.

Moral Responsiveness

In the first section of this chapter I mentioned two separate roles that the imagination will play in the development and exercise of moral agency. First, one of the ways that we learn is through the imagination. Specifically, moral learning requires not only factual knowledge, but also knowledge of "how to act and how to feel",[30] and we acquire this through experiential imagining. Second, imagination will play an active role in moral agency, specifically in moral responsiveness. It is an essential component of empathy, as well as of choosing the right course of action in each set of circumstances.

Imaginative engagement with fiction entails more than simply imagining that certain things are true in a fictional world. Ward Jones argues that a story invites us to take up an attitude towards the events, situations and people that it portrays, and it does this through the choices made by the author. These choices include the point of view from which the story is told, the atmosphere created around events or characters, and the kinds of emotions the story invites us to take towards its characters. In making these choices the author directs our attention towards the important or relevant features of what is portrayed, and so guides our reaction to the text. This is what makes up the moral content *of* the story.

This reaction will be an emotional, as well as an intellectual, one. Attitudes are, among other things, affective states: to take up an attitude towards someone is to be

[30] Gaut, 157

> disposed to feel certain *emotions* towards [them], disposed to certain *beliefs* about [them], disposed to *praise or blame* [them] in certain circumstances, and disposed to *act* in certain ways towards [them].[31]

In engaging with a story, therefore, the reader's imagination involves her emotional capacities. Doing so will develop her capacity for moral responsiveness: the ability to recognise and respond to the particulars of a situation, making use of our emotional responses and intuitions in order to act rightly.

Moral responsiveness, like practical wisdom, is something that we learn by practising it. Given that our own experience is limited, especially in childhood, we can use stories to expand our experience of the world - as a platform for experiential imagining - and to give us an opportunity to practise our moral skills.

Martha Nussbaum argues that the moral value of fiction lies in its ability to present the reader with a particular conception of the world, which embodies a moral point of view. She claims that

> life is never simply presented by a text; it is always represented as something. This "as" can, and must, be seen not only in the paraphrasable content, but also in the style, which itself expresses choices and selections, and sets up, in the reader, certain activities and transactions rather than others.[32]

Among the "activities and transactions" set up in a text will be emotional ones. The reader will be directed, through engagement with a fictional character, or with a narrator, to experience certain emotional reactions to events. In telling a story, an author not only constructs a series of events in a particular pattern, but also expresses a set of thoughts and judgments about the content of the story. In doing so the author presents "a perspective, a character, and a set of judgements which delimit each".[33] In reading a story we confront this perspective, and are able to "try that perspective on for size".[34]

A story therefore presents the reader not only with a representation of life but also with a moral perspective embodied in that representation. The story invites the reader to take up this perspective, and gives her the opportunity to assess it. Nussbaum argues that stories are particularly appropriate for what she calls the exercise of our moral capacities, because they are more open-ended than philosophical texts or ethical examples. Through engaging

[31] Jones, 4
[32] Nussbaum, 5
[33] Tirrell, 116
[34] Tirrell, 116

with a story the reader learns "what it is to search for the appropriate description and why the search matters".[35]

In order to establish the importance of our engagement with stories for the development of moral agency, I need to answer two questions. First, do the kinds of emotional responses that we have to fictional characters or situations have any relevance to our experience of the real world? Second, given the importance of a capacity for empathy, are stories particularly suited to the development of this capacity?

The first question is a concern about the object of our emotions. One possible objection to my position is that our emotional responses to fiction cannot have relevance to the real world simply because these emotions have as their object something that is not real (something that is imagined or fictional). It might seem that only emotions towards what is real could have any bearing on our emotions, or rather that we should not allow emotions with fictional or imagined objects to play any part in our decisions or actions.

However, this implied contrast between what is fictional (imagined) and what is real is actually a mistaken one. By examining some of our common emotional responses, Richard Moran shows that there is no clear distinction between emotional responses to what is real and responses to what is imagined. It is in fact common for us to feel emotions about various counterfactuals; "things that might have happened to us but didn't, things we might have done, how things might have turned out differently",[36] etc. All of these things are fictional, in the sense that they are not actually present in the here and now. Any emotions that we have towards them therefore have as their object something that does not exist in the real world. We also commonly have spontaneous empathetic reactions, such as wincing in sympathy when someone else gets hurt, even when there is no possibility of our being hurt. As such, Moran argues that most of our emotional attention does not concern objects that are actually present to us. It seems then that many of our emotional responses, even in real life, are responses to fictional or imagined states of events.

The imagination therefore plays an active role in our everyday lives, and emotional responses to imagined situations will play a role in the decisions we make. If I imagine someone that I love being hurt by something that I do, for example, I will feel pain at the thought, and fear that what I imagine might actually come about. This pain and fear, despite being an emotional response to something that is only imagined, will influence my actions. I

[35] Nussbaum, 47
[36] Moran, 78

make a connection between those negative emotions and the imagined state of affairs, and so I tend to avoid taking courses of action that might make what I have imagined into a reality.

Stories create and reinforce these connections and tendencies. In engaging with a story we imagine events and respond emotionally to that imagining. In cases where we engage with a fictional character, part of that engagement will involve experiencing the emotional responses of that character. In the same way that I feel pain when I imagine a loved one in pain, I feel the pain of that character when he or she has a similar imagining, or perhaps at the event itself. This can help to create or reinforce the idea that actions likely to lead to that outcome should be avoided.

Fiction presents the reader with new emotional possibilities, which brings me to my second question - whether stories are particularly suited to the development of a capacity for empathy - and partially answers it. Fiction is uniquely suitable for the development of empathy because of the emotional dimension of reading. Stories give us the opportunity for empathy, and make it easier for us to empathise with people than we might otherwise find it in real life. Stories give us a privileged access to the thoughts and emotions of fictional characters. We do not have this kind of access to real people, and children especially will require some extra information or guidance in order to empathise with others. Stories give us this extra inside information, and so provide us with the opportunity to exercise and develop our capacity for empathy.

In Joanna Spyri's *Heidi*, the emotional crisis of the story comes when Heidi learns that she will not be allowed to leave Frankfurt, where she has been living as a companion to the invalid Clara Sesemann, to return home to her grandfather. The housekeeper, Fraulein Rottenmeier, who dislikes Heidi, catches her attempting to leave the house and makes it very clear that she is not allowed to leave. Afraid of hurting the Sesemann family, who have been very kind to her, Heidi is unable to explain how homesick she is. As a result, although they notice how thin and withdrawn she has become, the Sesemanns do not know the reason. The reader is given more insight:

> From the day Heidi had tried to go home and Fraulein Rottenmeier had scolded her for being so wicked and ungrateful, a change had come over the child. She knew now that she could not go home whenever she liked, as Aunt Dete had told her, but that she had to stay in Frankfurt for a long time, maybe forever. She also understood that Herr Sesemann would think her very ungrateful, and Clara and the grandmother, too, if she ever again showed signs of wanting to leave. So there was nobody to whom she

> could reveal how homesick she was for she could not face giving the grandmother, who was so kind to her, cause to be angry as Fraulein Rottenmeier had been.[37]

The Sesemann family have no knowledge of the lie that Heidi's aunt, Dete, told her in order to convince her to leave the Swiss Alps for Frankfurt; that she would be allowed to return whenever she liked with gifts for her loved ones. Since Heidi has been made to believe that she will be thought ungrateful if she expresses a wish to leave, she keeps quiet, and the reason for the changes in her remains unknown until she becomes ill as a result of homesickness. The reader however, is given access to Heidi's thoughts and emotions, and so is able to empathise with her in a way that Clara, who knows nothing of Heidi's misery, cannot.

In addition to this access to the thoughts and emotions of fictional characters, stories are also uniquely suited for the development of the emotional connections mentioned above. This is because of the techniques that are used in telling a story. Moran argues that our emotional responses to fiction are often strengthened by theatrical effects such as music or lighting in the case of film, or in the case of literature by descriptions. Although these effects generally detract from the realism of the situation that is being depicted, Moran claims that

> it would appear to be the very features of the work that do indeed detract from the realistic presentation of the fictional world that actually enhance, and don't inhibit, the intensity and richness of one's emotional involvement with it.[38]

In this passage from Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little Town on the Prairie*, for example, Laura's description of a revival meeting at the church makes use of theatrical effects to emphasise her reaction to the situation:

> Chills ran up Laura's spine and over her scalp. She seemed to feel something rising from all those people, something dark and frightening that grew and grew under that thrashing voice. The words no longer made sense, they were not sentences, they were only dreadful words. For one horrible instant Laura imagined that Reverend Brown was the Devil. His eyes had fires in them … She looked at Pa and Ma. They were quietly standing and quietly singing, while the dark, wild thing that she had felt was roaring all around them like a blizzard.[39]

The use of this imagery of blizzards and the devil draws on the imaginative associations that Laura makes, and invites the reader to make use of those same associations to enhance the experience of engaging with the text. Moran defines imagination as having

[37] Spyri, 74-75
[38] Moran, 86
[39] Ingalls Wilder, 203

> less to do with simply imagining something to be the case, or imagining doing or feeling something, and more to do with what we ordinarily think of as "imaginativeness". This concerns the ability to make connections between various things, to notice and respond to the network of associations that make up the mood or emotional tone of a work.[40]

Fiction draws on this "network of associations" in order to create emotional responses in the reader, but it also plays a role in creating the network itself, by creating the connections between events and emotions that I described above. This imaginativeness will play an important role in experiential imagining, and therefore in moral responsiveness as well.

Concerns about Negative Effects of Literature

Thus far I have focused on the positive contribution that literature could make towards moral development, but it is by no means certain that the effects of literature will always be positive. An encounter with the wrong kind of literature, as with the wrong kind of person, could have a negative rather than a positive effect.

I stated earlier that I do not intend to focus on the development of any particular kind of moral content. This point requires some further explanation. Lynne Tirrell makes a distinction between two moral functions of literature. The first of these is based in the moral content *of* a story - an author depicts a moral view of the world and by engaging with the story the reader learns to recognise certain events, characters and actions as good or bad. This recognition will contribute to the development of moral content. The second function involves engaging with the practice of storytelling as a means of developing moral responsiveness. Both Tirrell and Nussbaum argue that this function is the more important of the two and, consequently, that engaging with fiction can have a positive effect on the reader regardless of the content of the story, because in doing so the reader is developing as a moral agent. If this is the case then

> a morally corrupt narrator may make as positive a contribution to a reader's subsequent standing as a moral agent as may a morally good narrator.[41]

This is because if the reader recognises the narrator - or the moral content *of* the story - as morally corrupt, and so rejects the invitation to engage with that point of view, the reader reinforces her own moral content, exercising her moral capacities in doing so.

[40] Moran, 86
[41] Tirrell, 118

While I do not disagree with this view, there are still some considerations that we need to take into account. The likely effect of a story will depend on the character of the reader. An adult reader who is already a fully developed moral agent with a strongly supported moral system on which to base her reaction to the story may be unaffected, or only affected in a positive way, by a morally corrupt narrator or perspective. A child reader on the other hand, who is still in the process of developing as a moral agent, may well be affected in a negative way by the same story. In order to identify a narrator as morally corrupt a reader must already have moral content that she fully understands and can therefore justify. A child who does not yet have this kind of moral content in place might not recognise moral corruption, and engaging with the story could result in her forming moral content that mirrors either that of the narrator (the moral content *of* the story) or one of the characters (the moral content *in* the story).

My focus in this project is on the development of moral skills, rather than on moral content, but this does not mean that the content of moral education is unimportant. On the contrary, the ability to renegotiate moral rules is logically dependent on there being an existing set of rules to negotiate. A child is not yet a fully developed moral agent, and is therefore often relying on content learned through imitation without a full understanding of the reasons for the rules. Concerns about the content of fiction are therefore still appropriate with regard to child readers.

There are two ways of viewing the moral content of a story. One way is to look at the moral content *in* the story and question whether it is something to which children should be exposed. Stories depicting violence or containing explicit sexual content, for example, are usually considered inappropriate for children, regardless of the attitude that the story invites us to take up towards these acts. The reasoning behind this is that children are simply not mature enough to deal with exposure to certain things. This concern is connected to age and levels of understanding, but it can have a moral dimension to it as well. This moral dimension is connected to the second way of viewing the moral content of a story, which involves looking at the story in terms of the moral perspective that the story presents, or the attitudes towards its events that it invites the reader to take up (the moral content *of* the story). Stories that depict violence as acceptable behaviour, for example, could easily result in a child reader forming a similar point of view, particularly in the absence of contradictory examples. The concern here is not that the child is exposed to violence, but that the child is exposed to violence in such a way as to make it seem acceptable, or even desirable.

If it is the case that all our engagements with fiction strengthen our moral capacities and will therefore always have a positive effect, then only a lack of engagement - a failure to exercise our moral capacities - could have a negative effect. However, this position is based on a conception of imaginative engagement with fiction as a conscious and deliberate process. If this view is correct, then if the intentions of the reader are good then the outcome of the engagement will also be good. In other words, a virtuous reader will not take up the invitation to engage with a non-virtuous character, but will resist the invitation, thereby preventing herself from taking on any perspectives that might have a negative effect on her morality.[42] In this way, even a morally corrupt character or narrator will have a positive effect of the morality of the reader, because in refusing to engage with such a character, the reader exercises and strengthens her moral capacities.

There are two problems with this view. First, this kind of view presupposes that the reader is already a fully developed moral agent, capable of both recognising and rejecting an invitation to engage with a morally corrupt point of view. Second, as James Harold argues, our responses to fiction might not be as much in our control as the above view suggests. In most cases, he claims, imaginative engagement with a fictional character or point of view is not a deliberate decision on the part of the reader, but is instead a natural and unconscious response to the text itself.

Murray Smith argues that there are three different levels of imaginative engagement with fictional characters: recognition, alignment and allegiance. The most basic level is the recognition of the character, which functions in the same way as recognition of a real person would, and is therefore not unique to fiction. Alignment is a kind of tracking of a fictional character, taking on his point of view. This will include engaging with his emotional responses and his attitudes to the people and situations that he encounters in the story. Alignment is a necessary component of engaging with fiction; it is what allows the reader to enter into the story. Allegiance involves an evaluation of a fictional character based on the values that the character embodies, and subsequently the formation of "more-or-less sympathetic or antipathetic allegiances"[43] with the character.

If it were possible for the reader to align herself with a character without forming an allegiance either for or against him, then this separation of the two kinds of engagement could serve as a kind of moral safeguard for the reader, allowing her to engage with fictional characters without being negatively affected by this engagement. Harold however, argues that

[42] Harold, 179
[43] Smith, 35

the distinction between alignment and allegiance is not so clean cut. The process of alignment with a fictional character is an automatic response to the presentation of that character's point of view. As such, this alignment is largely determined by the fiction itself, and not by any conscious effort on the part of the reader. The more time that the text gives to the point of view of a character, the easier and stronger the alignment will be. This alignment will also be quicker and easier when the emotional states and values of the character correspond with those of the reader. It is far easier to engage with a character if we have something in common with him. Even similarities that have no connection to the moral attitudes of the character - perhaps a similarity in musical tastes or sense of humour - could make alignment easier, and might make it easier to align ourselves with other aspects of that character, including emotions and attitudes. From there, it is a fairly easy step to forming a positive allegiance with that character, which involves something more like an endorsement of the attitudes and values of that character.[44] Negative allegiance - an antipathy - towards a character is similarly easy to form when the character or point of view that the reader is required to align herself with is completely dissimilar to the reader herself or one that the reader finds repugnant in one way or another. Either way, having spent so much time in alignment with a character, it is a very easy step from there to allegiance, especially if the moral content *of* the story encourages this allegiance.

Another factor that contributes to the blurring of the distinction between the two is that our engagement with fiction is "affectively charged".[45] When we engage with a fictional character this engagement occurs on an emotional as well as an intellectual level, and so any thoughts about moral issues that might result from the engagement will take the form of an emotional reaction towards the character or events in the story. Harold argues that these affectively charged thoughts are more likely to remain with us and therefore to influence our morality than neutral thoughts. It may be that the only influence that results is that the reader is likely to align more easily with a similar character in another fiction, but the cumulative effects of these influences could quite conceivably lead to a change in the reader's behaviour. It is possible that this automatic response could affect and change our moral consciousness in ways that are impossible to detect at first. Alignment may lead to allegiance, especially over long periods of time and repeated engagement with similar stories and characters, and the shift may be so subtle that we are not aware that it is happening.

[44] Harold, 182
[45] Harold, 183

As an example, consider C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. One of the chief personality conflicts in the book is between Reepicheep, a one-foot-tall talking Mouse and Knight of Narnia, and the unfortunately named Eustace Scrubb, a newcomer to Narnia and a supremely unpleasant person. A magical painting has drawn Eustace into the world of Narnia, along with his cousins Lucy and Edmund, who have visited Narnia before. They find themselves on board a ship captained by King Caspian of Narnia, an old friend of Lucy and Edmund. Eustace is an irritating, spoiled, selfish, cowardly little idiot, who spend all of his time complaining about, and to, his companions, and who foolishly provokes the Mouse by making fun of him. Reepicheep, on the other hand, is chivalry personified, and highly regarded by everyone except Eustace. The two characters are set up in opposition to each other by the narrator, with an obvious bias in favour of Reepicheep.

The narrator gives the reader access to Eustace's point of view during the early days of his time in Narnia, through extracts from his diary. Since this point of view is extremely objectionable, the only allegiance that could possibly come out of this alignment with Eustace is a negative one, and by extension, a positive one with Reepicheep. This would not be a problem if it were not for the fact that, mixed in with the rest of Eustace's complaints and wrong-headed ideas can be found brief mentions of two things - the feminist idea that girls are not weaker than boys and should not be treated differently, and the pacifist belief that fighting for the sake of fighting should be avoided. Among the complaints in Eustace's diary is this one, referring to the fact that King Caspian has given up his own cabin to Lucy, proposing that he, Edmund and Eustace should sleep in the ship's main cabin with the rest of the crew:

> Needless to say I've been put in the worst cabin of the boat, a perfect dungeon, and Lucy has been given a whole room on deck to herself, almost a nice room compared with the rest of this place. [Caspian] says that's because she's a girl. I tried to make him see what [mother] says, that all that sort of thing is really lowering girls but he was too dense.[46]

And later, after Eustace has offended Reepicheep, the following confrontation occurs:

> 'Why do you not draw your own sword, poltroon!' cheeped the Mouse. 'Draw and fight or I'll beat you black and blue with the flat.'
>
> 'I haven't got one,' said Eustace. 'I'm a pacifist. I don't believe in fighting.'[47]

Admittedly, the mention of both issues is extremely brief, and is not revisited directly in the book. Also, given that Lewis wrote the story during WWII, the attitude towards women as

[46] Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 28
[47] Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 30

well as the implied connection between pacifism and cowardice is understandable. That, however, is a matter for the literary biographers, and does not allay my concerns. Lewis's books are still being read today, usually by children who are unlikely to have knowledge of the historical context behind Lewis's attitudes. The child reader will see only what is presented in the text - the moral content *in* the story (Eustace's stated belief in feminism and pacifism) and the moral content *of* the story (the attitude that the narrator invites us to take up towards those beliefs) - and unfortunately what is presented includes at least two arguably admirable ideas labelled as foolish, or worse, cowardly, simply because they are presented by a character whom the reader is set up to dislike intensely. Reepicheep, on the other hand, is portrayed only in a favourable light, which portrayal is only strengthened by comparison with Eustace. In fact, Reepicheep is not as attractive a character as Lewis obviously intended him to be. He is overly concerned with his honour, quick to take offence, and entirely too keen on rushing into every fight that presents itself, dragging his companions with him, often against their better judgment. The negative allegiance with Eustace however, has its natural counterpart in a positive one with Reepicheep, making it likely that the reader will value what he values because of that allegiance, which is reinforced by the moral content *of* the story.

Selecting Books for Children

Fiction can have an effect on children, both positive and negative. These effects can occur both through the presentation of moral examples in fiction, and through our imaginative engagement with fiction. We need to bear both of these possibilities in mind when selecting books for child to read. A simple solution would be to limit our selection to only those stories that provide moral examples (the content *in* a story) and perspectives (the content *of* a story) of which we approve. This solution however, seems to run counter to the aims of moral education. To limit our selection of books in this way means that we limit the child reader to a certain moral perspective, which could prevent her from developing the moral skills necessary for full moral agency, namely the ability to critically assess moral rules and systems, and moral responsiveness (which includes empathy).

In the case of the example above, if we disapprove of the attitudes towards women and fighting that are expressed in the story, a simple solution would be to prevent children from reading C.S. Lewis's stories, and provide them instead only with stories that endorse feminism and disapprove of fighting. Not only would this be almost impossible to do however, it runs counter to the aims of moral education. It is not enough to simply prevent

children from encountering, say, stories that promote violence as a means of solving every problem. The aim of moral education is to teach children the skills necessary in order for them to recognise, for themselves, that violence is undesirable. Of course, we take the risk that the child will reach the opposite conclusion, but I think that this risk is worth taking for the sake of moral development.

While it may be possible to develop these skills from even a limited exposure to moral perspectives through fiction, it seems plausible that the wider the selection of stories and perspectives, the more likely it is that the reader will develop more fully as a moral agent. In the case of critical assessment, one of the main contributions that literature can make is to expose us to moral differences between ourselves and others. Encountering many different moral perspectives gives us the means - if not the skills - to compare them either with each other or with our own. In the case of empathy, what is required is practice. To empathise implies taking on a perspective that is not our own, and since the aim here is to develop moral agency, what is needed is an encounter with moral perspectives that differ from our own; or in the case of the child reader who does not yet have a fully developed moral perspective, encounters with many different moral perspectives.

This idea seems very similar to Tirrell's view that even an encounter with a morally corrupt narrator could have a positive effect on moral development, because it will require the reader to exercise her moral capacities (in rejecting the invitation to engage with that perspective). However, as I have discussed above, there is still a need to take the moral content *of* a story - the attitude that it invites the reader to take up towards the events, characters and actions that it portrays - into account when selecting books for children. This leaves us with something of a paradox. In choosing books for children to read we need to protect them from literature that could have a negative moral effect until such time as they become fully developed moral agents, who are more capable of protecting themselves from any negative effects of what they read. However, part of the process of developing moral agency requires that we engage with moral perspectives that differ from our own, and which could have an effect, either positive or negative, on our morality.

A Possible Solution

An alternative to the simple solution of limiting our selection of books to those that contain moral examples and perspectives of which we approve, lies in teaching children to approach literature in a particular way. Rather than focusing on the kinds of stories that we give children to read, we need to focus on the way in which children approach stories. In Chapter

Three I will offer an account of a particular way of reading that I think will provide children with some protection against the possible negative effects of fiction, while still allowing them to benefit from the exposure to alternate moral perspectives.

Chapter Three: Two Ways of Reading

In Chapter Two I argued that we cannot simply accept the claim that our imaginative engagement with literature can have only a positive effect on the morality of the child reader. The effects of an engagement with a fictional character or narrator could as easily be negative as positive, especially in the case of the child reader who does not yet have the strongly supported amalgam of moral content that is required in order to recognise a morally corrupt character, and to refuse the invitation to align with that character. Through aligning with such a character and becoming, in the process, familiar with and possibly comfortable with, the moral attitudes and actions of that character, the child reader could come to view such actions as morally acceptable, even morally desirable. At the same time however, I argued that we ought not to limit our selection of books to those that provide only moral examples and attitudes of which we approve. This is because doing so limits the child reader to engagements with a particular moral perspective, which could hinder her development as a moral agent. In particular, I argued that the development of empathy will require an exposure to many different moral perspectives, and that this exposure to difference is one of the main contributions that literature can make to moral development.

There are two concerns to be answered here. The first is that the child reader will be influenced in a negative way by the moral content *in* the story, because she fails to understand that the moral content *of* the story portrays that content as morally bad. The second is that the moral content *of* the story could be morally bad, in which case understanding it will not prevent the child from being negatively affected. In order to answer the first concern I will argue that we need to teach children to approach stories in such a way as to enable them to develop the moral skills necessary for moral agency, while still providing some protection from harmful influences. Moral education will therefore involve teaching children to read in a particular way. I will argue in favour of what I will call *disinterested immersed reading* and make two claims about the benefits of this kind of reading: first, that it will enable the development of both critical reasoning skills and moral responsiveness, and second, that it will provide *some* protection from negative influences. This solution will provide an answer to the first concern mentioned above. I will deal with the second concern in Chapter Four.

Two Ways of Reading

J.H. Miller makes a distinction between two ways of reading. The first is "an innocent, childlike abandonment to the act of reading, without suspicion, reservation or interrogation". The reader makes a "willing suspension of disbelief" to such an extent that she is completely drawn into the story, at which point the suspension becomes "spontaneous, without forethought".[48] What this means is that the reader accepts as real or true (for the duration of the story) the content - including the moral content - that is portrayed *in* the story. In this chapter I will refer to this kind of reading as *immersed* reading. The second is a sophisticated, suspicious way of reading that pays attention not just to what the story is about but how it is told and through which literary devices the telling is made effective. In this chapter I will refer to this kind of reading as *critical* reading.

In most cases, when we read for pleasure it is immersed reading that is our goal. This kind of reading is also referred to as "ludic reading" or "reading trance", which brings about a change in the consciousness of the reader.[49] This change in consciousness means that the reader is completely absorbed in the story, to the extent that she is only partially aware of the words printed on the page. Her eyes take in the words almost without her noticing them, and transform them into something else - the world of the story. For the duration of the reading the reader is, while still peripherally aware of her surroundings, effectively in another world, conscious of happenings not visible to anyone else.

Miller describes works of fiction as virtual realities or worlds into which the reader enters as an observer for the duration of the reading. It is this quality of fiction - that it gives us access to realities other than our own - that makes it so appealing. As a general rule, when ludic reading is our goal, we count as successful those works of fiction that enable us to enter into this virtual reality to such an extent that for a time we lose track or our own world and experience the fictional world of the story. For the duration of the reading we 'forget' that this virtual reality is fictional and experience it as if it were real. Of course, there are works of fiction that deliberately draw attention to their own fictionality, which would prevent the reader from suspending disbelief in this manner. This does not mean that such works cannot be successful, only that if they succeed it is in achieving a different goal to the creation of the kind of virtual reality described above.

[48] Miller, 119
[49] Nell, 2

In the case of the child reader in particular, the goal of reading for pleasure is to experience this kind of reading trance. Children naturally read in a childlike way, and most, if not all, of the pleasure of reading comes from the experience of the story, and not from literary criticism of the story. As a general rule however, the greater part of literary education in schools - once children are able to read independently - focuses on teaching at least the beginnings of literary criticism. In what follows, I will argue that, while still valuable for other purposes, this focus on literary analysis and criticism means that the contribution that literature could make to moral development is ignored, or even thwarted, and that a new approach is needed.

These two ways of reading, the immersed and the critical, go counter to each other, and cannot exist simultaneously in a single reading of a text. In considering a literary device and understanding the effect that it creates, the reader is not at that moment susceptible to that effect. While the reader is paying attention to the text itself - to the words on the page - her focus shifts, and she is no longer immersed in the story.

The critical reading is the one common to literary criticism, as well as much of literary philosophy. One of the main reasons to read in the critical manner is a kind of scientific or linguistic curiousity, a desire to find out how literature works and understand why it has the effect that it does. Another reason for reading critically is what Miller describes as "apotropaic", meaning having the power to prevent evil. He argues that

> people have a healthy fear of the power literary works have to instil what may be dangerous or unjust assumptions about race, gender or class. Both cultural studies and rhetorical reading, the latter especially in its deconstructive mode, have this hygienic or defensive purpose.[50]

It is this quality of critical reading, that it makes it impossible (in any one act of reading) for us to be drawn into the story as we would be in an immersed reading, that makes it apotropaic. When we are focused on how a particular effect is created, that effect cannot work on us as it would were we unaware of it. When the effect in question is to influence our responses to something, in becoming aware that we are being influenced we are placed in a position that allows us to either acquiesce or to refuse to respond in that way. A critical reading offers protection from the content *of* the story; from the attitude that it invites the reader to take towards what it portrays. In cases where literary works contain “dangerous or unjust assumptions” that the immersed, innocent way of reading will not necessarily question, a critical reading of the text might prevent these assumptions from taking hold in the mind of

[50] Miller, 125

the reader. Reading in this way however, will also prevent the reader from learning from (through engaging with and experiencing) the moral content *of* the story, which is what teaches the child reader how to evaluate the moral content *in* the story.

The Ideal Reader

This brings us back to the question of what kind of reader we should teach children to be. There are two ways to conceive of the ideal reader. On one conception, the ideal reader is the sophisticated, educated adult reader, who is capable of recognising literary devices and therefore able to resist being completely 'taken in' by the moral content *of* the story. On another, the ideal reader is the naïve, childlike reader, who willingly suspends disbelief and enters completely into the world of the story. This suspension of disbelief extends to both the content *in* the story (the reader suspends disbelief in the events and characters in the story) and the content *of* the story (the reader accepts the invitation to engage with a particular perspective or attitude towards those events and characters).

Like Miller, Wayne Booth defines the ideal reader in terms of protection against the possible harm that a fiction could do. A reader who is unable to read "properly" could be negatively affected by a story because she is unable to place ideas and images in context, resulting in an effect that comes from the story as it is read, which is not the same thing as the intentions of the author, or the meaning of the work as a whole, fully understood.[51] One way to prevent this harm is to perform a "full" reading of the text, or a critical reading. He argues that the reader who can do this is the ideal reader, able to discern how the text creates the fictional world and thus avoid any potential harmful effects. Most readers however, will not be ideal readers in this sense. Children, especially, will not be capable of this kind of critical reading. Nor, I think, should we encourage them to become only this kind of reader.

Each of these kinds of reading will benefit the reader in different ways. A critical reading could serve as safeguard against possible negative effects. An immersed reading will, if nothing else, give the reader the enjoyment that is one of the primary functions of literature, and which is only possible through imaginative engagement with the story - the willing suspension of disbelief. This enjoyment is valuable from a moral point of view simply because it will create and nurture the desire for more such experiences. An unfortunate effect of the kind of critical reading taught in schools is the curtailment of this enjoyment in many children, often resulting in an indifference to, if not a dislike of, reading. The moral benefits

[51] Booth, 10

of immersed reading however, go beyond simple enjoyment. Among other things, a *disinterested* immersed reading will provide some protection from the moral content *in* the story. In what follows I will outline an alternative account that defines the ideal reader as one who reads in such a way as to take full advantage of the contribution that literature can make to moral development - namely, a reader who immerses herself in the story. I will focus first on the contribution that this kind of reading can make to the development of moral skills - specifically moral responsiveness - and second, on the way in which it can provide a measure of protection against negative effects (from the moral content *in* the story).

The Development of Moral Responsiveness

In this section I will make two claims. First, that in order to fully understand a story we have to engage with it as fully as possible, and this will necessarily involve an emotional response to it. A full understanding of a text therefore requires an immersed reading, rather than a critical one. Second, because immersed reading necessarily involves emotion, it is well suited for the development of empathy (unlike critical reading, which distances the reader from the emotional import of the story).

As I discussed in Chapter Two, imaginative engagement with a story entails more than simply imagining that certain fictional states of affairs are true. Engaging with a fictional world entails taking up certain attitudes towards it[52] - whether these attitudes are directly prescribed by the text or simply result from our engagement with it - and these attitudes involve a tendency to feel certain emotions towards the circumstances, events and characters that the story portrays.

David Novitz takes this idea a step further, claiming that a proper reading of a text requires the kind of imaginative engagement that includes and elicits emotional responses to fictional characters and events. Jenefer Robinson makes a similar claim, arguing that it is our emotional responses to stories that help us "to understand characters and grasp the significance of events in the plot".[53] This kind of reading - immersed reading - is essential to a full understanding of a text, and is in fact a prior condition for a critical reading, which in Robinson's view amounts to a "a reflection upon one's emotional experience of the work".[54] Contrary to Booth's conception of the ideal reader as one who will read critically, paying

[52] Jones, 4
[53] Robinson, 105
[54] Robinson, 124

attention to the manner in which the story is told, and so avoid being unduly influenced by it, Novitz argues that

> far from an emotional response to fiction precluding a proper understanding of it, one can only properly understand fiction if one is in a position to be appropriately moved by the fortunes or misfortunes of its characters. A condition of being appropriately moved by, and so understanding, fiction is that one should respond imaginatively to it.[55]

In order to properly understand a work of fiction therefore, the reader must imagine along with the author. She must "make-believe by thinking [her] way into the author's imaginary world"[56]. Once the reader has done this, she will be able to respond to fictional characters - both intellectually and emotionally - as if they were real people. This claim, that a proper understanding of fiction requires imaginative engagement, gives us a new picture of the ideal reader. Reading properly in this sense no longer means a critical reading, but an immersed reading. This does not mean that a reader cannot gain additional knowledge of a text by reading critically, but only that a critical reading alone will not be enough for a full understanding of a text.

This brings me to my second claim, that because immersed reading necessarily involves an emotional engagement with a story, it is better suited for the development of a capacity for empathy than a critical reading would be. Immersed reading - or the reading trance - involves a temporary 'forgetting' of the real world, and by extension, ourselves. This 'forgetting' of ourselves means that we, as readers, are better able to empathise with characters in the fictional world. By setting aside, as far as possible, our own concerns and thoughts about ourselves and the real world, and taking on the perspective of a fictional character or narrator, we practise the moral skills that are involved in empathising with other people in the real world. Stories give us the opportunity for empathy, and make it easier for us to take up that opportunity by providing us with access to the experience - the thoughts and emotions - of a fictional character. An immersed reading allows us to take full advantage of what the story offers.

I would like to return here to Robinson's claim that an emotional engagement with a story - an immersed reading - is prior to, and necessary for, a critical reading of a text. This implies, I think correctly, that a full critical reading of a text can only take place after an initial, immersed reading. If this is the case, then my concern that a focus on critical reading

[55] Novitz, 279
[56] Novitz, 282

will limit the moral benefits of reading seems unfounded, since the reader would already have gained these moral benefits from the initial immersed reading, leaving her free to pursue additional understanding through literary criticism. However, the distinction between a child reader and an adult reader is crucial here. The sophisticated critical reader that Miller describes is the adult reader, with not only the necessary knowledge and skill to perform a critical reading, but also presumably enough of an interest in stories to take the time for a second, critical reading. More importantly for my purposes, the adult reader will already be a more or less fully developed moral agent. The case of the child reader is different, as she is still in the process of developing as a moral agent. An exclusive focus on critical reading - in the classroom, for example, where children are generally required to make their first reading of a text a critical one - will come at the cost of immersed reading, and by extension, at the cost of the benefits of immersed reading, among them not only an enjoyment of reading, but also the development of the child's moral capacities.

As an example, consider the following passage from Francis Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*:

> The first night she spent in her attic was a thing Sara never forgot. During its passing, she lived through a wild, unchildlike woe of which she never spoke to anyone about her. There was no one who would have understood. It was, indeed, well for her that as she lay awake in the darkness her mind was forcibly distracted, now and then, by the strangeness of her surroundings. It was, perhaps, well for her that she was reminded by her small body of material things. If this had not been so, the anguish of her young mind might have been too great for a child to bear. But, really, while the night was passing she scarcely knew that she had a body at all, or remembered any other thing than one.
>
> 'My papa is dead!' she kept whispering to herself. 'My papa is dead!'
>
> It was not until long afterward that she realised that her bed had been so hard that she turned over and over in it to find a place to rest, that the darkness seemed more intense than any she had ever known, and that the wind howled over the roof among the chimneys like something which wailed aloud. Then there was something worse. This was certain scufflings and scratches and sqeakings in the walls and behind the skirting boards. She knew what they meant, because Becky had described them. They meant rats and mice who were either fighting with each other or playing together. Once or twice she even heard sharp-toed feet scurrying across the floor, and she remembered in those after days, when she recalled things, that when first she heard them she started up in bed and sat trembling, and when she lay down again covered her head with the bedclothes.

> The change in her life did not come about gradually, but was made all at once.[57]

A typical classroom scenario for this passage would be a lesson on imagery. The darkness of the attic, which "seemed more intense than any she had ever known", mirrors this extremely dark time in Sara's life, the first night she spends with the knowledge of her father's death. The wind, which "howled over the roof among the chimneys like something which wailed aloud", might represent the tears that Sara herself does not shed. As a means of illustrating how such imagery works this would be an effective lesson, but it does nothing to further an understanding of the story. In order to get the full impact of Sara's emotional state in this passage we have to engage with it - to feel it - rather than pull it apart. To understand the horrifying sadness of this part of the story does not require a literary analysis, but rather an emotional engagement with it - an immersed reading. Further, the kind of understanding that come from an immersed reading is an emotional understanding. Through engaging with this passage the reader comes to empathise with Sara - to feel along with her the terrible sadness and emptiness of her loss.

I do not want to argue that knowledge of literary techniques is not valuable. My concern is that an exclusive focus on the teaching of literary criticism moves the child reader away from the kind of reading that will be of the most benefit in terms of moral development. Literary criticism teaches children about stories and storytelling, but in doing so often gets in the way of the skills that children could learn from stories. If moral education is our aim, then we need to encourage children to immerse themselves in stories - to learn *from* them, rather than just *about* them.

Protection from Negative Effects: Critical Assessment

If we accept that immersed reading and critical reading are mutually exclusive, at least in a single reading of a text, then the concept of the ideal reader as one who immerses herself in a story does nothing to answer concerns about the possible negative effects of an imaginative engagement with fiction. On Miller's conception, it is the critical reading of a text that is apotropaic, and so protection from possible negative effect would require that the reader pay attention to the literary devices that are used in the text, which in turn would prevent immersed reading. In order to protect the child reader from negative effects of the moral

[57] Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*, 108-109

content *of* stories therefore, it still seems like our only option is to teach the child to read critically right from the start.

In this section I will offer an alternative solution. Rather than abandoning immersed reading, what is needed is the addition of a new component to my account of the ideal reader. Miller's distinction between immersed reading (which he refers to as a naïve reading) and critical reading (meaning literary criticism) implies that the immersed or naïve reading is *uncritical*. In other words, that an immersed reading will mean that the reader uncritically accepts the moral content *in* the story. I think that this need not be the case. Immersed reading need not be uncritical, but the kind of criticism I have in mind is not literary criticism but ethical criticism. By ethical criticism I do not mean that we should evaluate stories in terms of our own moral codes, but rather that we should evaluate them in terms of their own. In doing so, the reader is open to learning from the moral content *of* stories, but protected from the effects of the moral content *in* stories. This kind of ethical criticism be compatible with an immersed reading.

In what follows I will develop an account of a specific kind of immersed reading; a *distinterested immersed reading*. It is this quality of disinterestedness that will provide some measure of protection against negative influences. It is important to note however, that this protection will *not* be a total protection against every possible negative influence, but only a partial one. This kind of reading will not prevent the child reader from being affected and influenced by the moral perspectives that she encounters in the story. What it will do is prevent her from taking these perspectives - and any moral claims or rules they endorse - out of context. I will discuss this in more detail later on.

Thus far I have argued that the ideal reader must immerse herself in the story, engaging with it on an emotional as well as an intellectual level. Now I add a second component. The ideal reader must be capable of evaluating the moral reality of the story *on its own terms*. This second component will be beneficial to moral development not only in terms of protection, but also because it will require - and so provide the child reader with the opportunity to exercise and develop - the critical reasoning skills are crucial to moral agency.

In Chapter One I argued that the ability to assess a moral system on its own terms, as well as in comparison with other moral systems, is an essential component of moral agency, and in Chapter Two I argued that literature gives us the opportunity to exercise and develop this ability. Each story that we read presents us with a fictional world, complete with characters with different moral commitments, and with a fictional moral system (a set of moral rules or patterns of behaviour that are considered acceptable or right in that particular

fictional world). This makes up the content *in* the story. Assessing this moral system in comparison with others will not be possible in an immersed reading, since that would require the reader to step out of the fictional world. To assess it on its own terms however, is compatible with immersed reading, and will be a necessary part of the kind of immersed reading that I am advocating.

In order to show why this kind of assessment is important for immersed reading, and for moral development, I will distinguish between two kinds of immersed reading. In *An Experiment in Criticism*, C.S. Lewis discusses the value of different kinds of imagination. He begins by giving a series of definitions to clear up the confusion that is common in discussing the terms 'imagination' and 'fantasy'. The term 'fantasy' has both literary and psychological meanings. As a literary term, the word fantasy denotes any story that deals with "impossibles and preternaturals".[58] In other words, fantasy stories deal with things such as magic, or occurrences that cannot be explained in terms of science and logic. This is not the sense of the word that is relevant here.

As a psychological term 'fantasy' has two meanings: first, a delusion, meaning an imaginative construction that is mistaken for reality; second, it is a daydream, meaning "a pleasing imaginative construction"[59] that is entertained without the delusion that it is reality. In some cases, Lewis argues, daydreaming can be harmful to the dreamer. If a daydream is entertained constantly, reality may become unsatisfactory, and the dreamer may indulge to such an extent that she becomes unable or unwilling to take the effort needed to achieve happiness outside of the daydream. In most cases however, daydreaming is "indulged in moderately and briefly as a temporary holiday or recreation, duly subordinated to more effective and outgoing activities".[60] This activity, which Lewis terms "castle-building"[61] is common to all of us, and need not be harmful. In some cases it becomes productive, resulting in artistic endeavours that mirror the world of the daydream.

This castle-building can be further divided into two kinds of activity: the egoistic and the disinterested.[62] In the egoistic daydream, it is the dreamer herself who is the centre of the dream; she is the heroine and everything is seen through her eyes. In the disinterested daydream, the dreamer is not the heroine or even the focus of the dream, and may not be present at all. This can be taken a step further, to the creation of whole worlds and people in

[58] Lewis, 50
[59] Lewis, 51
[60] Lewis, 51
[61] Lewis, 52
[62] Lewis, 52

them. At this point the creation becomes more than just a daydream; it becomes a "construction, invention … [or a] fiction".[63]

These two kinds of imagination - egoistic castle-building and disinterested castle-building - will be the driving force behind the two kinds of immersed reading. I argued above that an immersed reading, in which we temporarily 'forget' the existence of the real world, will make it much easier to empathise with fictional characters, or with the perspective or attitude presented by a story. In order for this to work however, what is needed is the kind of disinterested imagination that Lewis describes. The kind of imagination used to enter fully into a story cannot be focused on the reader; it must be focused on the story.

A reader who tends towards egoistic castle-building - the kind of reader that Lewis terms 'unliterary' - makes use of stories for her own purposes. The motivation behind engaging with stories is largely to glean new material for egoistic daydreams, which centre on the dreamer, or the reader. This kind of egoistic reading is not likely to contribute to the development of empathy, because the focus of the reader is on herself, and not on the story or the fictional characters it portrays. In addition to this, and critically important for the purposes of this discussion, any assessment that such a reader makes of a story - either literary or ethical - is likely to be similarly focused on the reader. This will mean that any evaluation of the moral reality of the story, or of the moral codes of any of the fictional characters, will be done in terms of the moral code of the reader, which in turn will limit what the reader can learn from the engagement.

Also of concern with this kind of reading is the use of stories for the purposes of egoistic daydreams. Lewis argues that this kind of reading is harmful to the reader, creating unrealistic expectations and causing a corresponding dissatisfaction with reality. The reader who seeks out stories in which, for example, the schoolgirl heroine wins acclaim by rescuing another girl from a fire by scaling a drainpipe up the side of a burning building,[64] or riding a borrowed circus horse bareback across the countryside in the middle of the night in order to rescue a kidnapped heiress[65] is likely to feel some dissatisfaction with the more ordinary sort of school achievements. This concern is closely connected to concerns about the content *in* stories, which I will discuss further in Chapter Four. There is one element however, that is important for the present discussion.

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[63] Lewis, 53
[64] Enid Blyton, *The O'Sullivan Twins*, 134
[65] Enid Blyton, *Summer Term at St. Clare's*, 122

The unrealistic expectations of the real world that are generated by this kind of reading seem closely tied to confusion about what is real, or possible, or likely. The reader who becomes dissatisfied with her own experience of school, for example, as a result of stories which portray school life as filled with such events as fires and kidnappings, is confused not only about what the reality of school life is generally like, but also about the overall desirability - or lack thereof - of fires and kidnappings.

I think that this confusion could extend to moral issues. In the same way that a reader could become confused or unrealistic about what is possible in the real world, she could also become confused about what is morally right or appropriate in the real world. She might take moral claims made in a story out of context, accepting such claims uncritically and applying them inappropriately in the real world. In the same way that the schoolgirl is confused by a story about the kinds of events that are likely or possible in school life, she could be confused into thinking that certain acts are appropriate in reality because they are accepted, or even praised, in stories. Although it is natural, I think, that we are willing to accept a broader range of actions in fiction than in reality, it is important that we are able to distinguish between those actions or behaviours that would be appropriate in the real world, and those which are better confined to stories. A very common concern about children's stories, for example, is that they portray violent acts as, if not acceptable, at least without serious consequences. A child reader who engages with such stories - importantly, through the kind of egoistic reading described above - could come to believe that similar acts are equally acceptable in the real world. In effect, the child takes a moral claim or position from the moral content *in* the story *out of context*, and applies it to the real world.

Since the aim of moral education is to avoid this kind of confusion by developing moral responsiveness, this kind of reading will be detrimental to moral development. A fully developed moral agent is a person who will be capable of recognising that what is acceptable within the moral reality of a particular story will not necessarily be acceptable in reality. The child reader will not yet be this kind of moral agent, but since it is our aim to help her to reach this point, we need to encourage her to read in such a way as to avoid this kind of confusion. The solution is to encourage children to read in a disinterested manner, rather than an egoistic one.

A reader who tends towards disinterested castle-building will engage with each story on its own terms, entering into the fictional world and leaving herself behind. Such a reader will be far less likely to become confused about the real world, or to take moral claims out of context. The reason for this is that engaging with a story as an individual, and separate,

fictional reality (and by extension, a fictional moral reality), means that there is a distance between the reader's experience of the story and her experience of the real world. This may seem obvious, but the comparison I am making here is with an egoistic reading, in which the distinction between fiction and reality is blurred by the reader's focus on herself and on her own egoistic daydreams, meaning that her interest is only in the moral content *in* the story and how it might apply to her. By contrast, in a disinterested reading, the focus is on the story rather than on the reader, meaning that the reader is open to learning from the moral content *of* the story.

The benefit that disinterested reading has for moral development is that it allows the child reader to learn how to assess fictional moral realities in terms of internal consistency first, and external considerations second (and after the initial reading). Instead of assessing fictional moral realities - or individual moral claims or perspectives presented in a story - in terms of how they relate to her own conception of the world, which would limit what the reader could learn from the story, a disinterested reading allows the child reader to engage with moral alternatives, and gives her the opportunity to develop her ability to critically assess such alternatives.

At this point, let us return to my account of the ideal reader. The ideal reader is one who, a) immerses herself in the story and, b) does so in a disinterested way, which allows her to assess each fictional moral reality *on its own terms*. This kind of assessment involves looking for internal consistency, and assessing individual moral rules or claims presented in the story in terms of the overall moral reality that the story portrays. As an illustration of exactly what I mean by this, consider this passage from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*:

> It would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom, and if I was ever to see anybody from that town again, I'd be ready to get down and lick his boots for shame. That's just the way: a person does a lowdown thing, and then he don't want to take no consequences of it. Thinks as long as he can hide it, it ain't no disgrace. That was my fix exactly. The more I studied about this, the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and lowdown and ornery I got to feeling. And at last, when it hit me all of a sudden that here was the plain hand of Providence slapping me in the face and letting me know my wickedness was being watched all the time from up there in heaven, whilst I was stealing a poor old woman's nigger that hadn't ever done me no harm, and now was showing me there's One that's always on the lookout, and it ain't a-going to allow no such miserable doings to go only just so fur and no further, I most dropped in my tracks, I was so scared. Well, I tried the best I could to kinder soften it up somehow for myself, by saying I was brung up wicked, and so I warn't so much to blame, but something inside me kept saying, "There was

> the Sunday school, you could a gone to it, and if you'd a done it they'd a learnt you there that people that acts as I'd been acting about that nigger goes to everlasting fire."[66]

The moral rule or claim that is implied by Huck's agonising in this passage is that to help a slave run away from his owner is a mortal sin, punishable by eternal damnation and hellfire. There are two ways that a reader could respond to this claim. One way is to respond in terms of her own moral code. In that case, the result is almost certain to be a rejection of the moral claim that is being made here, except in the unlikely case of a reader who endorses slavery, in which case the result would be an endorsement of the claim. For the purposes of argument however, let us assume that the response is the former - a rejection of the claim that slavery is morally right, and that to interfere with it is therefore morally wrong. This seems like a good thing. The reader has not been influenced by this wrenching account of Huck's moral agony to the extent that she comes to accept the moral rule with which he is struggling. I do not want to claim that there is anything wrong with this. The problem here is in terms of moral development. The reader has not really learned anything from her engagement with the text. All she has done is to allow the moral content *in* the story to confirm a moral ideal that she already holds.

The alternative is for the reader to set aside her own moral code, and assess the moral claim that this passage presents in terms of the moral reality presented by the story as a whole. The central moral ideal of this story is embodied by the friendship between Huck and Jim. Despite Huck's apparent belief to the contrary, every incident in the story serves to confirm that in helping Jim to escape, and in remaining loyal to his friend, Huck is doing the right thing. If Huck were to obey the moral rule that this passage discusses - if he were to do what he has been taught is the right thing to do - he would actually be doing the wrong thing, because such an action would go against the central moral ideal of the story.

Although the end result is the same - in both cases the reader comes to the conclusion that it would be wrong for Huck to betray Jim by returning him to slavery - the crucial difference is in the way that the reader reaches this conclusion. In the first case - the egoistic reading - the reader does not learn anything of significance from the story, because she simply uses it as a means of confirming what she already believes. The egoistic reader is only interested in the content *in* the story. In the second case - the disinterested reading - the reader has to follow a process of critical assessment in order to reach her conclusion. She has to assess the moral rule, and the action that it dictates, in terms of the moral reality within which

[66] Twain, 181

it is situated, and so come to the conclusion that to follow this particular rule would be an inappropriate response to the situation. This kind of disinterested reading means that the reader is able to learn from the content *of* the story. It allows her to be guided by the author in taking up a particular attitude towards the events and characters portrayed in the story. In this way she not only engages with the moral content of the story, learning from it, but also develops her moral skills through assessing it.

If a disinterested reading of a story opens the reader up to learn from the author, then we are still left with the possibility that the child reader could be negatively affected by what she learns. This kind of reading will not prevent her from being influenced by an immoral author. As I stated earlier, the protection that this kind of reading provides is a very minimal one. All that it can do is to prevent the child reader from taking the moral perspectives and claims she encounters in a story out of context. I have emphasised throughout this project that an engagement with literature alone will not be sufficient for the development of moral agency. Teaching children to read in this way - a disinterested, immersed reading - is only the first step, and needs to be combined with both the development of critical reasoning skills and knowledge of the real world.

Teaching a child to read stories in a disinterested manner will teach her to approach each fictional world as a separate entity, complete with a separate moral reality, which in turn will encourage her to recognise the differences between fictional worlds, and between fictional worlds and reality. This recognition is an important one for two reasons. The first is the one mentioned above, that recognising that the fictional world of the story is different to, and separate from, reality will prevent the child reader from taking any moral claims made in the story out of context, and so to recognise that the moral system portrayed in a story will not necessarily be either possible or desirable in reality. This prompts further consideration before the child incorporates anything that she learns through stories into her actions in the real world. The second reason is that this ability will have another important real world application. This kind of awareness that the fictional world is separate from reality - which makes the reader less likely to take any moral claims made in the story at face value - can be extended to the real world, to the awareness that what is morally acceptable or right in one set of circumstances will not necessarily be so in another.

In addition, this awareness will make the child reader less likely to take moral claims from other sources - such as other people - at face value. To illustrate this point, consider this parallel between Huck's position in the above passage, and the position of a child in our real world who has been taught a moral rule by her society.

The moral rule that Huck is struggling with is something that he has been taught by his society. He has learned it by rote almost from infancy, and it is reinforced by the behaviour of the adults around him. He cannot give any reason in support of the rule except that it is what he has always been told is right. In struggling with it, and eventually rejecting it, Huck goes through a process of moral development. He searches for reasons to support this rule, but finds none. In fact, instead of finding reasons "to harden me against him"[67] he finds "only the other kind".[68] He finds only reasons to help Jim, and no reasons to turn him in. In making the decision to help Jim, Huck forms a new moral commitment, one that is supported by reasons rather than being simply the result of rote learning and fear. He comes to an awareness that he has to make a choice between two moral alternatives, and in the process learns not to accept the moral rules of his society uncritically.

In the same way, through her engagement with stories the child reader will come to an awareness that moral alternatives exist, and that they might therefore also exist in the real world. Instead of simply accepting the moral rules that she is given by her society - or even by stories - therefore, she will learn to search for reasons to support her choices and in doing so she will form her own set of moral rules to guide her actions

Conclusion

I have argued that in order to make the most of the contribution that literature can make to moral development we need to teach children to immerse themselves in stories. This kind of reading will contribute to the development of moral responsiveness, and particularly the development of a capacity for empathy. In addition, we need to encourage a particular kind of immersed reading - a disinterested reading - in which the child reader focuses on the story itself rather than on herself. This will contribute to the development of a capacity for the critical assessment of previously held moral content.

The minimal protection provided by a disinterested, immersed reading of a text might be sufficient in the case of the adult reader, but in the case of the child reader there is still reason for concern about the effects of an encounter with an immoral author. To some extent I think that this is a concern we will simply have to live with, but we can attempt to minimise possible negative effects by considering the moral content *in* the stories we give to children. If we are going to make use of literature as a part of moral education we cannot avoid the

[67] Twain,182
[68] Twain, 182

question of which books we should choose in order to further our goals. In Chapter Four I will discuss some of the possible criteria that could be used when choosing books for children to read.

Chapter Four: Choosing Books for Children

Thus far my focus has been on the benefits of a particular approach to literature, rather than on the benefits that might be derived from the moral content of individual stories or kinds of literature. In Chapter Three I argued that in order to make the most of the contribution that literature can make to moral development, we need to teach children to read in a *distinterested immersed* way. I also argued that this kind of reading could provide some measure of protection against the possible negative effects the moral content *in* a story, by being open to learning from the moral content *of* the story, which will prevent children from taking moral claims or perspectives made in stories out of context. This protection is only minimal however, and will not protect the child reader from an encounter with an immoral author. While I think that this is simply a risk that we will have to take, we can take some steps towards minimising possible negative effects by paying attention to the moral content *in* stories.

It is not my intention to argue that children should only be allowed to read certain kinds of stories. I argued in Chapter Two that limiting our selection of books to those that contain moral content of which we approve, because doing so will also limit the potential contribution that literature could make to moral development. However, I do want to argue that there are certain kinds of stories that will make a greater contribution to moral development than others, not because of their content, but because of the way in which this content is presented; the literary quality of the texts themselves.

I have argued that it is important to encourage children to immerse themselves in stories, rather than focusing exclusively on literary criticism. This is not to say however, that the adults who choose books for children to read should not make use of literary criticism as a means of guiding their selection. Children's books are, after all, almost exclusively selected by adults - authors, publishers, librarians, parents and teachers. The choice of the individual child reader only comes right at the end of this process. It is therefore the responsibility of these adults to ensure that the child reader is presented with the best possible books from which to choose, and the various elements of literary criticism will, and should, play a role here. In this chapter I will discuss some possible criteria that could be used in making our selection.

In his discussion on selecting books for children, Edward Rosenheim states that we should ask a series of questions:

> Will this book call into play my child's imagination? Will it invite the exercise of genuine compassion or humour or even irony? Will it exploit his capacity for being curious? Will its language challenge his awareness of rhythms and structures? Will its characters and events call for - and even strengthen - his understanding of human motives and circumstances, of causes and effects? And will it provide him with a joy that is in some part the joy of achievement, of understanding, of triumphant encounter with the new?[69]

In order to discuss these questions I will focus on two closely related issues: the question of whether we should privilege realist literature over fantasy literature or vice versa and the quality of portrayals of characters and situations, which is a key component in determining the literary quality of a text.

Fantasy Literature vs. Realist Literature

A basic approach to the question of content is to ask whether the events and situations portrayed in a story are appropriate for children. Although theories about the application of this approach differ, the general aim is the same in all cases: to protect children from material which could be upsetting or frightening to them, or which they are still too young to comprehend. This is relatively uncontroversial however, and will play an obvious role in the selection of books for children. More interesting is the debate about the suitability, for the child reader, of whole genres of literature.

The content in any one story will fall into one of two very broad categories: realist fiction or fantasy literature. Within these categories are many different subgenres. Examples of realist fiction include historical fiction, mystery stories, adventure stories, family stories, and any number of other variations. The distinguishing feature of realist fiction is that the events it describes are, although not actually true as they are described, at least *possible* in the world as we know it. In many cases realist fiction includes events, people and places that are real, thereby increasing the realism of the story. Examples of fantasy literature include fairy tales, stories about other worlds (such as J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, or C.S. Lewis's Narnia), and stories that contain magic or other supernatural elements. Science fiction is generally included in this category, although certain kinds of science fiction stories could actually fit into the realist category, since they deal with events and technologies that are *possible*, although not yet actualised. The distinguishing feature of fantasy literature is that it

[69] Rosenheim, 20

portrays events that cannot be explained by the laws of science or logic as we understand them, such as magic.

There survives today a perceived trend in thought that views fantasy literature as unhealthy for children (and even adults) to read, and that instead they should be given only realist literature. The reasons for this are varied, but the most common include the view that fantasy literature is 'escapism', and the view that it will lead to the reader becoming confused about the nature of reality. Interestingly, when I searched for references to prove that this anti-fantasy trend is still alive and well, I found any number of articles, papers and books written in defence of fantasy, but none that specifically attacked fantasy. That said, the motivating force behind all of what I did find seems to be a response to such an attack. Nearly every paper involves an explanation of why 'they' are wrong when 'they' claim that children should not be allowed to read fantasy.[70] That so many people - authors, literary scholars and readers - should feel the need to defend fantasy literature against it is evidence enough that this view still survives.

In what follows I will defend fantasy literature against the two concerns mentioned above: that fantasy literature is 'escapism', and that it creates confusion in the reader about the nature of reality. I would like to stress however, that in defending fantasy literature I am not arguing against realist literature. Both kinds of literature are valuable and can contribute to moral development. However, I feel that it is important to make a reply to the strongly felt opposition to fantasy literature.

Escapism is defined as “the tendency to seek distraction and relief from unpleasant realities, especially by seeking entertainment or engaging in fantasy”.[71] Fantasy, in this context, refers more to daydreaming, or castle-building, than to literary fantasy. Generally contrasted with realism, the term carries negative connotations suggesting that 'escapists' are unable or unwilling to cope with reality, as well as connecting escapism (and more specifically daydreaming) with laziness. As a descriptive term the word is used in many different ways. Film reviews often contain the words “pure escapism”, which could easily be replaced with “pure entertainment”, meaning that the film has minimal subtlety and very little depth or meaning. In a literary context, the term 'escapism' is most commonly used to refer to fairy tales, fantasy and science fiction. Such stories are contrasted with realist literature, in which subjects are depicted as they appear in everyday life. Literary realism refers to

[70] Pratchett, *When the Children Read Fantasy*, Lewis, *Sometimes Fairy Stories*, Tolkien, *On Fairy Stories* and Le Guin, *Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?*
[71] Oxford English Dictionary

depictions of contemporary life and society that focus on everyday activities and experiences. The negative connotations associated with the word 'escapism' mean than many people have considered fantasy literature to be not only less valuable than realist literature, but possibly harmful to the reader, in whom it might promote 'escapist tendencies'.

Ursula Le Guin[72] argues that this general "anti-fiction" and specifically "anti-fantasy" trend of thought is closely connected to the typically Western association of pleasure with indulgence. She claims that the rejection of fiction and fantasy in highly technological societies is so strong that it could only stem from fear, and that this fear is connected to a particular work ethic and an orientation towards profit. What cannot be justified as educational, self-improving or profitable can only be self-indulgence, or in other words, escapism. Reading fiction is not work, it is something that we do for pleasure, and pleasure for its own sake is regarded as indulgence, if not outright sin. Fiction and fantasy are classed as childish or womanish or a waste of time because they do not result in any material gain. J.R.R. Tolkien makes a similar claim, arguing that in condemning escapism the critic of fantasy is confusing "the Escape of the Prisoner with the Flight of the Deserter".[73] He argues that escape is often necessary - he equates modern life with a prison, from which fantasy stories are our only, and essential escape - and even heroic, and that it should not be confused with the tendency to run away from reality.

Le Guin argues that to equate fantasy with escapism (in the negative sense of the word) because it is 'not real', or because it has no relevance for real life, is mistaken. On the contrary, she claims that fiction and fantasy play an essential role in the development and training of the imagination, which in turn are absolutely essential to human nature and to the reality of our lives. Imagination, which she defines as "the free play of the mind, both intellectual and sensory [which results in] recreation, re-creation and recombination of what is known into what is new",[74] is essential for both art and science. The imagination however, requires discipline if we are to avoid its use becoming little more than egocentric daydreaming or wishful thinking. And one of the best ways to acquire the necessary discipline is by engaging with stories, and particularly with fantasy.

C.S. Lewis offers a different defence of fantasy literature. He argues that the true 'escapist' literature is not fantasy at all, but rather some varieties of what is called realist literature. In Chapter Three I discussed Lewis's concept of the 'unliterary', or egoistic reader,

[72] Le Guin, 31-33
[73] Tolkien, 20
[74] Le Guin, 33

who reads stories in order to gain material for egoistic daydreams. This kind of reader is seeking a form of escapism (in the negative sense). Because this kind of castle-building is so close to fantasy (in the psychological sense of the term) it is sometimes assumed that this kind of reader would like literary fantasies, and this leads to the fairly common assumption that literary fantasy is unhealthy for the reader. Lewis argues that this is not the case. On the contrary, the egoistic reader generally does not see the point in reading about "things that could never really happen".[75] These readers require that the setting of stories be as similar as possible to the real world with which they are familiar. This is due in part to an inertia in the imagination, which makes it possible to render real "only what they have read of a thousand times and seen a hundred times before",[76] and in part a desire to feel that the daydream, while unlikely, is still – at least in principle – possible.

This brings me to the second concern that is expressed about fantasy literature; that it will confuse the reader by giving her an unrealistic view of the world. Lewis notes that

> there are earnest people who recommend realistic reading for everyone because, they say, it prepares us for real life, and who would, if they could, forbid fairy tales for children and romances for adults because these 'give a false picture of life' - in other words, deceive their readers.[77]

However, Lewis argues that, instead of fantasy, it is those stories that have a "superficial or apparent realism of content"[78] that are more likely to deceive their readers. Lewis argues that certain kinds of realist stories, while observing all natural laws and a "general ordinariness; the clothes, gadgets, food, houses, occupations and tone of the everyday world",[79] nevertheless contain all manner of improbabilities, including "monstrous psychology and preposterous coincidence".[80]

He includes in this category those school stories - such as those mentioned in Chapter Two - in which the hero or heroine achieves recognition through various unlikely events and coincidences, as well as - for adult readers - stories of sudden inheritance and unlikely success. The reader of such stories

> knows the daydream is unrealised; [yet] he demands that it should be, in principle, realisable … and the more completely a man's reading is a form of egoistic castle-

[75] Lewis, 55
[76] Lewis, 55
[77] Lewis, 67
[78] Lewis, 67
[79] Lewis, 55
[80] Lewis, 55

> building, the more he will demand a certain superficial realism, and the less he will like the fantastic.[81]

It is this kind of literature, Lewis argues, that gives the reader a mistaken impression of the world. The superficial realism of the setting makes it far easier for the reader to believe that other aspects of the story are not only possible, but also likely. In order to avoid creating the kind of unliterary reader described above, we should be careful to avoid selecting books that have only this superficial realism. Again, I would like to emphasise that this is not an argument against realist literature in general. Not all realist literature is deceptive, and certainly the ideal reader would not be deceived by the kind of books preferred by the egoistic reader. In making our selection of books for children to read however, we need to be aware of the potential for deception, and choose accordingly.

Rather than demanding realism of content, or on the contrary, no realism of content at all, Lewis makes another suggestion: that we should demand "that every book should have as much of this realism as it pretends to have".[82] By this he means that if a book claims to be representing the world as it is, then this is what it ought to do, but that if representation of the real world is not the goal of the book, then we should not condemn it for failing to do so.

The Portrayal of Characters and Situations

The implication of the position I have stated above is that the distinction between fantasy and realism is not what is morally important. Instead, it is the characters and their actions and interactions that are of moral importance. These are what make up the moral content *in* the story, but are also closely related to the moral content *of* the story. The question of realism is closely connected to the question of literary quality, since the representation of the world as it is (or as it is not) will be accomplished through the use of language and technique employed in the text. I have spoken thus far about *realism of content*, which involves probability or correspondence with the real world, stories with a recognisable 'real world' social, historical, political and everyday setting. Lewis distinguishes this from *realism of presentation*, which involves exact details given in descriptions; "the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail".[83] Realism of presentation is possible in any kind of literature, and a high level of such realism will contribute to the literary quality of a work.

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[81] Lewis, 56
[82] Lewis, 67
[83] Lewis, 57

This realism of presentation is important in two key areas: the creation of the fictional world of the story, and the portrayal of the fictional characters that inhabit it. In Chapter Two I argued that literature contributes to moral education by giving the child reader the opportunity to experience new worlds and societies, and that these experiences with what is different will contribute both to the awareness that moral and social alternatives exist, and to the ability to assess these alternatives by making comparisons between them. The stories that will provide the best means of developing this awareness and ability will be those that create a fictional world that is both detailed and internally consistent.

The importance of realism of presentation in the creation of a fictional world is connected to the development of critical reasoning skills. The range of possibility with regard to correspondence with the real world is significant. A fictional world may be identical to our own, its only fictional elements being the characters and actual events that it portrays, or it may be similar to our own, with only a few key differences (such as a difference in its legal, social or moral structures), or it may be entirely different from our own. Internal consistency is what is important here. A fictional world that is internally consistent is one in which social, historical and moral structures fit together as a coherent whole. A fictional world in which, as in our society, the various struggles for woman's suffrage were successful, cannot be consistent if its social and legal structures do not reflect that (if women do not have the right to vote in this particular fictional world, for example). In order for such a fictional world to be consistent, its history must differ from our own in all the relevant details. The greater the detail that is included in the portrayal of each fictional world, the clearer these differences and similarities will become, which in turn will make a critical assessment of it easier.

Also of great importance is realism of presentation of fictional characters. In Chapter Two I argued that stories contribute to moral development by giving us the opportunity for empathy, and further, that they make it easier for us to empathise with people than we would find it in real life, because they give us access to the thoughts and emotions of fictional characters. A higher degree of realism in the presentation of fictional characters will therefore mean that the experience of an emotional engagement with those characters will be richer and more beneficial than it would otherwise be. The more complex and detailed the portrayal of a fictional character, the easier it will be for the reader to empathise with that character, and the more she will learn from the engagement. In encountering texts that give a subtle, complex portrayal of characters and human interactions, the reader learns to notice the nuances that are necessary in making moral decisions.

If the reader encounters only flat or stereotypical characters, on the other hand, this will hinder the development of moral responsiveness. A flat, stereotypical portrayal of a character or a situation often encourages sentimentality, which is the enjoyment of an emotion for the sake of the emotion, rather than for the sake of its object. The general objection to sentimentality is that it misrepresents the world in order to allow us to indulge our emotions. This is similar to Lewis's objection to so-called realist stories that misrepresent reality in order to allow the reader to indulge in egoistic daydreaming.

Mary Midgley objects to sentimentality on the grounds that it "distorts expectations; it can make people unable to deal with the real world".[84] Sentimentality involves a kind of self-deception, which is bad because - as Lewis suggests - it may lead to an inability to react appropriately to the objects that are the proper focus of the emotion in question. Sentimentality, while still a part of the moral content *in* the story - because it will affect decisions about *what* is portrayed - also affects the moral content *of* the story in that it affects the way in which certain characters and actions are portrayed.

Mark Jefferson argues that sentimentality involves a specific kind of fiction, which focuses on "the sweetness … and vulnerability of the emotions' objects"[85]. This kind of emphasis almost always involves an oversimplification of the nature of the object. This has moral significance: an overly simplistic view of an object will impair our moral vision of it, and of objects related to it. What results is a "parody of moral appraisal"[86] in which an object or person is portrayed as entirely good and innocent. This is problematic because

> the unlikely creature and moral caricature that is someone unambiguously worthy of sympathetic response has its natural counterpart in a moral caricature of something unambiguously worthy of hated.[87]

In other words, something that is wholly good and innocent and vulnerable is likely to be viewed as always under threat, and those things that pose the threat are likely to be cast as wholly evil in a similarly simplistic manner. A sentimental reader who easily loves and pities the good will just as easily hate and vilify its opposition. A sentimental text will invite its readers to take up this kind of one-dimensional attitude towards certain characters. We need to avoid giving children books that will encourage this kind of simplistic emotional response to the world and other people.

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[84] Midgley, 385
[85] Jefferson, 526
[86] Jefferson, 527
[87] Jefferson, 527

A classic instance of sentimentality is what Humphrey Carpenter refers to as the "Beautiful Child",[88]of which Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is a good example. Cedric Errol is a young American boy who learns that he is the heir to a British earldom. His titled grandfather disapproves of Cedric's American mother, whom Cedric calls "Dearest", and Cedric must win over the hard-hearted Earl before she is allowed to join him at the ancestral home. This he does without difficulty. Cedric is the perfect child, and

> it seemed as if there never had been a more fortunate baby. In the first place, he was always well, and so he never gave any one trouble; in the second place, he had so sweet a temper and ways so charming that he was a pleasure to every one; and in the third place, he was so beautiful to look at that he was quite a picture. Instead of being a bald-headed baby, he started in life with a quantity of soft, fine, gold-colored hair, which curled up at the ends, and went into loose rings by the time he was six months old; he had big brown eyes and long eyelashes and a darling little face; he had so strong a back and such splendid sturdy legs, that at nine months he learned suddenly to walk; his manners were so good, for a baby, that it was delightful to make his acquaintance. He seemed to feel that everyone was his friend, and when any one spoke to him, when he was in his carriage in the street, he would give the stranger one sweet, serious look with the brown eyes, and then follow it with a lovely, friendly smile; and the consequence was, that there was not a person in the neighborhood of the quiet street where he lived—even to the groceryman at the corner, who was considered the crossest creature alive—who was not pleased to see him and speak to him. And every month of his life he grew handsomer and more interesting.[89]

This is a very pleasant picture, but the idea of childhood that it creates is a highly idealised and unrealistic one. If we compare this description to that of Mary Lennox, the heroine of Hodgson Burnett's later book, *The Secret Garden*, we find that they are on opposite ends of the spectrum:

> When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression. Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another. Her father had held a position under the English Government and had always been busy and ill himself, and her mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people. She had not wanted a little girl at all, and when Mary was born she handed her over to the care of an Ayah, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the Memsahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible. So when she was a sickly, fretful, ugly little baby she was kept out of the way, and when she became a sickly, fretful, toddling thing she was kept out of the

[88] Carpenter, 106
[89] Hodgson Burnett, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, 4-5

> way also. She never remembered seeing familiarly anything but the dark faces of her Ayah and the other native servants, and as they always obeyed her and gave her her own way in everything, because the Memsahib would be angry if she was disturbed by her crying, by the time she was six years old she was as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived. The young English governess who came to teach her to read and write disliked her so much that she gave up her place in three months, and when other governesses came to try to fill it they always went away in a shorter time than the first one. So if Mary had not chosen to really want to know how to read books she would never have learned her letters at all.[90]

These two descriptions are as different as the two children they portray. Unlike Cedric, who is born perfect and remains that way without any discernable influence from anyone or anything, Mary is the product of her surroundings. This passage not only describes Mary, but shows the reader why she is as she is, giving her depth and making her a highly realistic character.

Sentimentality lowers the literary quality of a text. There are certain aesthetic features of texts that are connected with sentimentality, such as trite phrases, stock metaphors, vagueness and a lack of substance. More importantly, when we judge a text to be sentimental it is usually because the characters, events or actions portrayed are idealised or implausible, making them somehow "shallow or insincere or dishonest".[91] This is an ethical judgement as well as an aesthetic one. Marcia Eaton argues that this is because a person who found such a description to be accurate "would not be likely to deal adequately or appropriately with persons who experience [the situation that is being portrayed]".[92] This is a reflection on both the writer and the reader who appreciates such a description. When we call a writer sentimental we generally mean that he is somehow shallow, self-indulgent, hypocritical or dishonest. In so saying we are not judging only his artistic merit, but his merit as an ethical being. Similarly, a sentimental reader will have only a shallow response to a text, and this shallow, easy response is likely to result in a similar response to actual ethical concerns.

Midgley argues that sentimentality could have an even stronger negative effect than the cultivation of simplistic emotions, because sentimentality is closely connected to brutality. Taking pleasure in softer, gentler emotions for their own sake could easily lead to taking pleasure in harsh, brutal ones as well. She connects sentimentality to a "flight from, and contempt of, real people by comparison with imaginary ones",[93] something just as likely

[90] Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, 7-8
[91] Eaton, 277
[92] Eaton, 277
[93] Midgley, 386

to occur in negative fictions as in positive ones. In the same way that a preference for stories that allow for egoistic daydreaming could result in dissatisfaction with the real world, a preference for stories that allow us to indulge our emotions for the sake of those emotions could result in a distortion of our emotional responses to reality.

In selecting books for children to read therefore, we need to choose books that are non-sentimental in nature. If the creation and enjoyment of sentimental stories is connected to a lack of moral depth and perception, or to ethical dishonesty, then there is likely to be a similar connection between non-sentimental stories and virtue. In encountering stories

> that present human experience subtly, we can learn to notice the very nuances that are often required if one is to make correct ethical assessments.[94]

Encounters with non-sentimental stories therefore, will be beneficial for the development of moral responsiveness. A complex, subtle portrayal of a fictional character will not only make it easier for the reader to empathise with that character because of the detail provided, but will also make the act of empathy itself a more valuable experience, because the complexities of the fictional character are the same kind of complexities that the reader will encounter in real people.

In conclusion, when making our selection of books for children, we need to keep in mind two criteria. First, instead of choosing realist literature rather than fantasy, or vice versa, we need to select stories that have "as much of this realism as [they] pretend to have",[95] and which will therefore not encourage the kind of egoistic reading that could lead to the child reader becoming confused about the nature of reality, or taking moral claims made in stories out of context. And second, we need to select stories that create fictional worlds and characters that are realistic, detailed and complex and in so doing, engage and develop the imagination of the child reader in such a way as to allow her to benefit from the experience.

[94] Eaton, 279-280
[95] Lewis, 67

Conclusion

The approach I have outlined in this project is not going to provide all the answers. There remains the question of how, exactly, we should go about teaching children to read in this manner. To answer that will require further study and empirical research into the effectiveness of different options, and this would have to be a long term project in order to study the effects on children as they grow up.

No method of teaching will provide a guarantee. In any programme of moral education, luck and chance play a significant role. Those children lucky enough to be born into families that value reading, as I was, will in all likelihood develop these moral skills as a natural by-product of reading and the creativity that it nurtures. But since not every child will be as fortunate, I think that an important first step will be to provide an environment that allows for this kind of engagement with stories. I think that while this is often provided during the early years of education, it tends to be gradually pushed aside in favour of other goals that are considered more important. What we need to do is preserve the space necessary for the exercise and development of the imagination, and maintain the awareness that this is connected to moral growth as well.

In Chapter Four I referred to Ursula Le Guin's claim that the imagination is essential to human nature, and that without the free play of the imagination, neither art nor science would be possible. She also claims that the imagination requires training; that "free" in this sense does not mean undisciplined. This play of the imagination, which is the source of not only our intellectual achievements, but also our moral capacities, requires not just the freedom to grow but also structure to support it. Stories provide us with this structure. Whatever the necessary details of a programme of moral education will be, we need to keep this goal in mind. We need to provide a space in which the imagination of the child can grow and develop freely, without being restricted by the view that imagination and stories are a childish indulgence and something to be outgrown. We need to preserve and encourage the capacity for creative responses to the world, and make use of this ability in morality. And we need to provide children with stories that will enable them to do all this, and which will, in Rosenheim's words, provide them with the "joy that is in some part the joy of achievement, of understanding, of triumphant encounter with the new"[96].

[96] Rosenheim, 20

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