

Imaginative and Fictionality Failure: A Normative Approach

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I. Introduction: Two Puzzles

In Goethe's *Faust* it is true in the fiction — or *fictional*¹ — that the Devil makes a bet with God and transforms into a poodle. Readers have no trouble imagining this state of affairs. Generally, we cooperate imaginatively with written fictions, and what their authors² describe as being the case in their stories becomes fictional. But suppose you encounter the following line in a novel:

Giselda

In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; *after all, it was a girl.* (Walton 1994, p. 37)

Or consider the following story:

Death

Jack and Jill were arguing again. This was not in itself unusual, but this time they were standing in the fast lane of I-95 having their argument. This was causing traffic to bank up a bit. It wasn't significantly worse than normally happened around Providence, not that you could have told that from the reactions of passing motorists. They were convinced that Jack and Jill, and not the volume of traffic, were the primary causes of the slowdown. They all forgot how bad traffic normally is along there. When Craig saw that the cause of the bankup [sic] had been

1. What does it mean for *p* to be "fictional"? I follow the most influential theory of fiction in aesthetics outlined in Kendall Walton's (1990), according to which, for *p* to be fictional in a work *w* means, roughly, that *p* is to be imagined by appreciators of *w*, and that when such appreciators state '*p*', ordinarily (a) they express a proposition with the logical syntax, 'fictionally, *p*'; and (b) fictionally, they say something true. For more details of this view, see Walton (1990) and (2015). For a quick (though imperfect) gloss of how the theory works, see (Stear 2009, pp. 24–28).
2. I will mostly ignore narratological subtleties as to whether we should understand this authorship as actual or implied. For those interested, (Booth 1961) and (Nehamas 1981) offer classic accounts of "implied", or "postulated", authorship.

Jack and Jill, he took his gun out of the glovebox and shot them. People then started driving over their bodies, and while the new speed hump caused some people to slow down a bit, mostly traffic returned to its normal speed. So Craig did the right thing, because Jack and Jill should have taken their argument somewhere else where they wouldn't get in anyone's way. (Weatherson 2004, p. 1)

Passages like these, which I will call "puzzle cases", are widely thought to give rise to two failures. First, appreciators fail to imagine a proposition they express. Call this phenomenon *imaginative failure*. Second, they fail to make a proposition they express fictional; it is not true in the stories that Giselda or Craig did the right thing. Call this *fictionality failure*. These phenomena give rise to two corresponding puzzles:³

The Imaginative Puzzle

Why do puzzle cases induce imaginative failure?

*The Fictionality Puzzle*⁴

Why do puzzle cases induce fictionality failure?

3. Kendall Walton first noticed these puzzles (Walton 1990, pp. 154–155), though he credits Hume with observing something similar (Hume 1757/2007, p. 253). Twenty-five years on, a lively literature has emerged that occasionally bundles the two phenomena together as "imaginative resistance", a name introduced by Richard Moran (1994, p. 95), becoming the official *Kunstbegriff* with (Gendler 2000). The catch-all name is unfortunate, since while both phenomena may share an explanation — indeed, I will argue they do — we should not presume this. Moreover, as others have noted, to characterize imaginative failure as "resistance" is tendentious, since whether it results from unwillingness or inability (or anything else) is disputed. Finally, the name suggests both phenomena implicate the imagination, which fictionality failure need not.
4. This is the same as Brian Weatherson's "alethic puzzle", unless we take the potential scope of the puzzle to extend beyond fiction and include (literary) representations generally — see (Weatherson 2004), (Matravers 2014).

To generate these puzzles, it is not enough that a text include some proposition p resulting in something like our two failures. After all, a work may express p intradiegetically — in the voice of an unreliable narrator or a character, for instance. Alternatively, a work may express p non-assertorically — ironically, perhaps. Nor does temporarily stumping a reader suffice. Many fictions deliberately puzzle readers in order to induce "hermeneutic recalibration", whereby appreciators resolve their difficulty by settling on a new stable interpretation (Liao 2011, pp. 27, 27n., 98–99), (Liao 2013, pp. 275–276). Puzzle cases, therefore, are those in which, on the best interpretation(s), a work attempts to prescribe p by expressing it explicitly, but appreciators fail to imagine p and/or p fails to be fictional, where these failures persist through proper and complete appreciation of the work. Such cases may become conspicuous by simply stumping a reader permanently. Alternatively, they may do so by forcing readers into an unstable interpretative strategy, as when the previously effaced narrator seems to become an unreliable one, moving from extradiegetic to intradiegetic narration.⁵

Recently some have denied that the phenomena are puzzling.⁶ I begin in §2, therefore, by explicating and criticizing the most sophisticated defence of this denial. In §3, I switch gears and examine the best extant attempt to solve the puzzles, showing where *it* falls short. In §4, I propose an alternative solution, tease out some subtleties not given their due in the existing literature, and motivate the proposal by showing how it avoids a tricky objection that superficially similar proposals do not.

I should note before proceeding that I am sympathetic to much of what the authors I go on to criticize have written. My arguments owe a great debt to theirs.

5. A phenomenon sometimes referred to as "pop-out", following (Gendler 2006).
6. See, for instance, (Stokes 2006, pp. 402–405), (Millgram unpublished manuscript), and (Todd 2009), a paper that I discuss here at length. (Nanay 2010, p. 587) is also a candidate. A name has even emerged for this denial: imaginative resistance *eliminativism* (Liao & Gendler forthcoming).

II. Is There a Genuine Puzzle?

In (Todd 2009), Cain Todd argues as follows that puzzle cases are not genuinely puzzling:

1. Imaginative failure is real, but not genuinely puzzling (p. 188).
2. (from 1) If there is a genuinely puzzling phenomenon among the two described, it is fictionality failure.
3. Our only reason for positing fictionality failure is by inferring it from cases of imaginative failure (enthymeme).
4. We are not warranted in inferring fictionality failure from cases of imaginative failure (pp. 199–203).
5. (from 3, 4) There is no fictionality failure.
6. (from 2, 5) There is no genuinely puzzling phenomenon.

(1) and (4) are the controversial claims Todd must defend.⁷ Todd supports (1) by arguing that imaginative failure results from appreciators' differing theoretical commitments. He supports (4) by arguing that what we are able to imagine does not constrain what can be fictional. I lay out these arguments now after introducing what I call "qualifying contexts".

2.1 Reinstating the Imaginative Puzzle

Interestingly, authors can avoid puzzle cases by supplying contexts that vindicate the otherwise problematic claim. Suppose *Giselda* continued in the following way:

*Giselda**

In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; *after all, it was a girl*. Since the Patriarchy Party had seized power, all

7. Is (3) controversial, too? Not if we take it as merely restricting the scope of inquiry to puzzle cases, rather than ruling out other possible reasons for inferring fictionality failure.

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girls faced horrific lives of state-sponsored sexual slavery. Giselda felt nauseous killing her child; doing what's right isn't always easy.

I take it that any imaginative difficulty *Giselda* induces, *Giselda** does not. We have no trouble imagining Giselda's actions are right, albeit awful, in *Giselda**. Addressing herself to the imaginative puzzle, Kathleen Stock makes just this point. Shy of conceptual impossibilities, she says, authors can render any claim imaginable using a qualifying context (Stock 2005).⁸ In fact, her claim is stronger: Not only may authors write in qualifying contexts, but *readers* may supply them in imagination. This suggests a natural solution to the imaginative puzzle: imaginative failure results from a reader's contingent failure to think up a qualifying context (Stock 2005, pp. 619–620).

A conclusion Todd draws from Stock's discussion is that, if she is right, imaginative failure "is not as puzzling with respect to authorial authority as first thought" (Todd 2009, p. 192). One way to understand this is as follows: Initially, we thought puzzle cases denied authors the power to make certain claims fictional. However, if authors need only add qualifying contexts to remedy such cases, they are hardly impotent; nothing prevents them from doing so. Indeed, if—per Stock's stronger claim—the *imaginee's* inadequacy causes imaginative failure, authorial authority remains untouched. The author is no more impotent before our feeble imaginations than a musician is before a deaf audience.

Todd is skeptical that things are so straightforward, and denies that we can supply qualifying contexts for *any* puzzle case and *any* imaginee. Some puzzle cases, he thinks, will consist in attempted prescriptions to imagine that contradict exceptionless theoretical commitments, such as an appreciator's conceptual commitments, particularly involving thicker moral concepts subject to strong descriptive and

8. Gendler acknowledges similar mechanisms for causing puzzlement to "evaporate" in her discussion of distorting and non-distorting fictions (Gendler 2000, pp. 75–81).

evaluative conditions.⁹ Todd's idea here is straightforward. Objects and events fall under concepts. Deliberately killing someone against her will (and not in self-defence), for instance, falls under the concept *murder*. Now suppose Persons A and B differ as follows: For A, *murder* is an essentially negatively valenced thick concept (unlike *euthanasia*, say), while it is not for B. A will deem a "good murder" conceptually incoherent; no context could render a murder good as such. For B, meanwhile, good murders (perhaps where victims are superlatively nasty) are a coherent possibility and pose no problem — at least, no *conceptual* problem. Therefore, a story describing a murder as good, *even within a qualifying context C*, will induce imaginative failure in A but not B. To put it differently: *C* will count as a qualifying context for B but not A. Todd thinks this holds generally. People with less flexible theoretical commitments will be more prone to experiencing imaginative failure.¹⁰

Put puzzle cases involving inflexible theoretical commitments to one side for now. Todd accepts that the possibility of qualifying contexts dissolves the imaginative puzzle. According to Stock, either authors or appreciators can supply a qualifying context, the former by writing it into the story, the latter by imagining it. However, that authors can supply qualifying contexts, useful though this insight is, does not satisfactorily dissolve the imaginative puzzle. The imaginative puzzle asks why we cannot imagine some proposition(s) a work attempts to prescribe, particularly since authors get us to imagine myriad claims, even bizarre ones, without relying upon any special context. Pointing

9. Todd does not focus only on conceptual commitments — see (Todd 2009, p. 196). The arguments I go on to make cover the other commitments he considers as well.
10. Todd appears to think his view a departure from Stock's. If so, this is a mistake. As mentioned — indeed, as Todd himself notes (p. 192) — Stock does not take her solution to cover cases of conceptual impossibility (Stock 2005, p. 623). And since, as he also notes, the kind of failure he describes constitutes a kind of failure-by-conceptual-impossibility (Todd 2009, p. 196), it meshes nicely with the ambitions of Stock's solution. Todd's discussion of imaginer-relative conceptual dependencies echoes earlier ones in (Walton 1994) and (Weatherston 2004, p. 21).

out that imaginative failure vanishes from puzzle cases supplemented by qualifying contexts, therefore, side-steps the issue. Why some cases but not others require a qualifying context looks like a puzzle as difficult as the one with which we started.¹¹ And the claim that appreciators may supply their own qualifying contexts, at least in puzzle cases falling short of conceptual incoherence, is untenable. According to Stock, when *Giselda* induces imaginative failure in us, this is because we are unable to think up what could possibly make *Giselda*'s act of female infanticide right. But, on reflection, this is not terribly plausible. All but the most imaginatively stunted will be able to generate a qualifying context for cases like *Giselda*. One need simply imagine something worse that would occur were *Giselda* to refrain from infanticide (indeed, this is what *Giselda** prescribes).¹² One might object that thinking up qualifying contexts seems simpler than it is because I am drawing on years of philosophical practice. Philosophers are trained in many comparable imaginative tasks, such as finding counterexamples, constructing thought experiments, and reasoning counterfactually about normative matters. But non-philosophers may not find it so straightforward. Here I need only point out that imaginative failure is the brainchild of professional philosophers who experience it themselves. Were imagining a qualifying context all one

11. Todd might seem to acknowledge a similar point, citing Gendler's claim that "the issue is why making some sorts of propositions imaginable takes a different kind of effort than making other sorts of propositions imaginable" (Gendler 2006, p. 158n), (Todd 2009, p. 193). However, I take Todd (and Gendler) here to be stressing the difficulty with which we imagine puzzle cases in order to then motivate their ideas about what affects imaginability (in Todd's case, the effect of theoretical commitments; in Gendler's, the effect of ethical commitments). My point is not that puzzle cases are still puzzling because difficult to imagine, or that Stock misses this point (she does not). Rather, my point is that puzzle cases still pose a puzzle if, unlike non-puzzle cases, they require authorial intervention to render them unpuzzling.
12. Sethe, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, finds herself in a situation analogous to *Giselda*'s in which she kills her two-year-old daughter to save her from slavers. Many puzzled by cases like *Giselda* will already be familiar with Morrison's story and would have it to draw upon. I thank an anonymous referee for reminding me of this work.

needed to undo the failure, it would be mysterious why philosophers discuss puzzle cases at all.

In fact, Stock's suggestion seems appropriate for close cousins of puzzle cases, namely riddles. Consider this old chestnut:

A father and his son are in a car accident. The father dies instantly. The son, badly injured, is rushed to the nearest hospital. At the hospital, the surgeon enters the room and exclaims, "I can't operate on this boy."

"Why not?" the nurse asks.

"Because he's my son," the surgeon responds.

How can this be?

The riddle exploits pervasive gender associations embedded in our social schemata — in this case, maleness in our surgeon schema. The solution is that the surgeon is the boy's mother, and upon realizing this, any mystery evaporates, never to return. Puzzle cases are different. After reading *Giselda**, I am not relieved of any imaginative failure when returning to read the original, *Giselda*.¹³ Yet this is what Stock's solution predicts. Although after reading *Giselda** I now have a qualifying context in hand, *Giselda* still induces imaginative failure in me. Were Stock's solution right, this would not be the case.

How about the claim that imaginative failure is induced by an appreciator's inflexible theoretical commitments? Todd writes,

If one holds that certain, or even all, general moral principles are unconditionally and necessarily true, such that nothing could legitimate claims like 'murder is good', then perhaps one will be unable to imagine or will more readily resist imagining that murder *qua* murder could *ever*

13. I am simplifying matters a little here. I address complexities later in the paper.

be good or justified. [...] If, however, one holds certain expressivist positions, or is a subjectivist, or a relativist about moral truth, then there seems to be no reason why one should not find it possible to imagine a world or a context in which it is true that murder is good or can be good. (Todd 2009, p. 196)

The suggestion that imaginative failure is probably more likely for people with realist meta-ethical views is odd, since there is a difference between the *normative* (and modal) content of moral claims and their *cognitive* or *metaphysical* status; only the former seems relevant to the kinds of cases Todd considers. Meta-ethical relativism may be the exception insofar as we take it (perhaps wrongly) to entail a constraint for normative ethics: that purely moral facts differ in different places.¹⁴ In any case, the implication is that without such inflexible commitments, one will not experience imaginative failure to begin with (ignoring the improbable case where one cannot think up a qualifying context). But this thought leads to difficulty, since we *do* experience imaginative failure in cases like *Giselda*, regardless of the flexibility of our theoretical convictions. To see this, consider someone who experiences no imaginative failure when reading *Giselda**; probably, you are such a person. It follows from the claim under consideration that this person cannot have any relevant inflexible commitments — *i. e.* such a person must think female infanticide acceptable in *some* cases. But this person may still experience imaginative failure when reading *Giselda*. Thus, whatever is causing her to suffer imaginative failure, it cannot be the inflexibility of her theoretical commitments; it must be something else (even if, in addition to this "something else", an appreciator's inflexible commitments can overdetermine imaginative failure in other cases). The claims that imaginative failure will not occur if appreciators

14. In fairness, Todd acknowledges that an expressivist with firm moral convictions may be as prone to imaginative failure as a realist with looser moral convictions. However, I fail to see how meta-ethical commitments bear any relevance to moral cases of imaginative failure such as *Giselda*.

think up a qualifying context, or that otherwise it must be due to the inflexibility of an appreciator's theoretical commitments, are untenable, leaving us with a puzzle: Whence imaginative failure?¹⁵

2.2 Reinstating the Fictionality Puzzle

People experience imaginative failure. And premise 3 in the argument above tells us that fictionality failure may be legitimately inferred only from imaginative failure, if at all. Therefore, to deny that there is a fictionality puzzle, one must show that imaginative failure never licences an inference to fictionality failure. Todd offers three arguments to this effect.

The first argument is that limiting what is fictional by what appreciators are able to imagine "seems to deny authors the very power that makes fiction possible in the first place". He continues:

One who refused to read a work of fiction because it violates all sorts of metaphysical, logical and conceptual "truths" which one could not fully imagine would manifest at the very least a very odd attitude to fiction. Refusing to allow that a work can make it fictional that the pig in the restaurant at the end of the universe tries to persuade the guests in perfect English that he desires to be eaten would be an indictment of the reader's view of fiction, not of the fiction itself. (Todd 2009, p. 199)

Todd's argument is a simple *reductio*: imaginative failure is imaginer-relative; therefore, if one can legitimately infer fictionality failure from imaginative failure, then fictionality failure is also imaginer-relative; but if what is fictional is relative to different imaginers, then authorial

15. Could Todd not just attribute imaginative failure to a more comprehensive inflexible theoretical commitment — *e.g.* a commitment to the wrongness of female-infanticide-in-ordinary-circumstances rather than female-infanticide-*simpliciter*? Yes. But then we are owed an explanation as to why appreciators do not just import non-ordinary circumstances — *i.e.* a qualifying context — to accommodate the author's otherwise puzzling judgement. My own solution in §4 provides this explanation. Thanks to Sam Liao for this worry.

authority fails; but authorial authority cannot fail; therefore, one cannot legitimately infer fictionality failure from imaginative failure. This conclusion is then used to establish Todd's ultimate claim that there is no puzzle.

For clarity, let us call the failure of authorial authority "authorial failure". And since fictionality failure just is the failure of a work, and thus its author, to make something fictional despite explicitly attempting to prescribe it, for the purposes of discussing Todd's argument, authorial failure and fictionality failure come to the same thing. But now the argument clearly begs the question. For it says that we cannot infer fictionality failure from imaginative failure because this would mean that there was authorial failure, which cannot occur. But since authorial failure just is fictionality failure, this amounts to saying that because authorial authority cannot fail, authorial authority cannot fail.

Todd's second argument is that an appreciator's imaginative capacities might fall short of the author's powers of fiction-making. For instance, consider a story in which a super-villain, Dr. Quantum, occupies two distant places at once by exploiting quantum superpositions. Amilie, unfamiliar with quantum mechanics, might fail to imagine the proposition because she fails to understand how something could in any sense occupy two distant places at once. Yet Amilie's imaginative inability does not undermine that, fictionally, Dr. Quantum does just that. The point is compelling. Fictionality failure certainly does not follow from imaginative shortcomings of this sort. And so one can grant the general point that imaginative failure, understood very broadly, does not imply fictionality failure. However, it is not clear that this undermines the inference from imaginative to fictionality failure in all cases — that is, from certain kinds of imaginative failure. It is of course true that one should not require that *all* appreciators be able to successfully imagine *p* in order for *p* to count as fictional, since appreciators can be deficient, as our example shows. One should not determine what is fictional on the evidence of such appreciators any more than one should determine a painting's

quality by the judgements of the colour-blind. Amilie's failure to imagine does not licence an inference to what is fictional, because the deficiency is so clearly with Amilie and not the work. However, when imaginative failure still occurs systematically across a set of sufficiently proper cases of appreciation, *i. e.* where no explanation in terms of the deficient conditions of appreciation is forthcoming, we have perfectly reasonable grounds for inferring fictionality failure.¹⁶

A different difficulty arises from Kendall Walton's point that the fictionality of some proposition *p* is neither necessary nor sufficient for imagining that *p*. It is not sufficient, since one may recognize that *p* is fictional without imagining it. Nor is it necessary; one may engage in fanciful imaginings not authorized by a work (Walton 2006/2008, p. 51). I might imagine, for instance, that James Bond experiences crippling erectile dysfunction without it being fictional in the work that he does. These kinds of cases also clearly fall short of proper engagement and so can be dealt with as above. However, Walton also claims that not only what *is* fictional and what we *do* imagine can come apart, but that it is possible for a proposition to be fictional even if we are *unable* to imagine it. This poses a different difficulty for the rebuttal I just made to Todd, for Walton intends this claim not for deficient cases of appreciation, like Amilie's, but for appreciation in general. It might also seem a strange claim for Walton to make, since on his theory *p*'s being fictional in *w* is true just in case appreciators of *w* ought to imagine *p*. And, put together, these two claims appear to be inconsistent with the principle of *ought implies can* (Walton 2006/2008, p. 56).¹⁷ Walton gets around this by pointing out that the 'ought' here

16. Hence, my appeals to what "we" can imagine, and "our" responses, should be read with a sufficient degree of idealization in mind (except where this is obviously not my intention). I will not delve into aesthetic idealization *per se*, since this would take us too far afield, though I discuss aspects of it at the end of the paper.

17. In the interest of space, I am ignoring here the problems raised in (Walton 2015) concerning propositions we are prescribed to imagine that are not fictional.

is conditional: we ought to imagine *p* if we are to "fully appreciate" *w*. But we may simply be unable to fully appreciate *w*.

Walton is here mooted the possibility of a work that systematically induces imaginative failure across non-deficient appreciations, but without inducing fictionality failure. Call this an "unimaginable-yet-fictional" work. As it stands, it is merely a theoretical possibility, though I have no overriding reason to rule it out. Suppose such a work existed. We might find it especially valuable; many artworks exploit contingent "weaknesses" in our psychology to great effect; *trompe l'œil* paintings are one example, and Leonardo da Vinci's use of *sfumato* in *La Bella Principessa* and, more famously, the *Mona Lisa* to create an ambiguous smile is another.¹⁸ Unimaginable-yet-fictional works might be another. Would such a work contradict my claim that cases inducing imaginative failure systematically across proper appreciations give us good grounds to think they also exhibit fictionality failure? I do not think so. One ought to be a pluralist about failures to imagine what a work prescribes, or merely attempts to. Some cases of imaginative failure are explained by the deficiency of the appreciator, some by the deficiency of the conditions under which she appreciates, and some, if unimaginable-yet-fictional works are possible, by systematic deficiencies across appreciators, however ideal. But, in addition, there will be cases where what explains imaginative failure is not plausibly a deficiency in appreciation, and thus must be explained by the work. On these occasions, imaginative failure gives one at least defeasible grounds on which to infer fictionality failure. Puzzle cases such as *Giselda* and *Death* present just such occasions. And provided the reasons *why* these puzzle cases exhibit fictionality failure are not obvious, we have the fictionality puzzle.

2.3 Normative, not Psychological, Puzzles

In the previous subsections I have tried not only to show that there are interesting puzzles here, but to use Todd's observations to motivate a

18. For recent empirical work into the *sfumato* technique and how it works, see (Soranzo & Newberry 2015).

new way of thinking about them and how they connect. In particular, by eliminating cases of imaginative failure for which appreciators evidently bear sole responsibility, we are left with cases for which a different kind of explanation is due. Of course, one might worry that restricting one's attention in this way misses the point. We have two puzzles: one concerns the imagination; the other concerns fictional truth. Insofar as one is concerned with the first puzzle, one might think, surely one ought *not* restrict one's attention. After all, do we not want to capture and explain regular appreciators and the failures they experience? I agree we do, provided we understand the problem to be explained here as purely psychological. But notice that, approached in this way, Amilie's failure to imagine what happens in *Dr. Quantum* is just as (un)puzzling as, say, a Kantian's failure to imagine a morally right murder. Both demand an equally simple explanation — *i. e.* very simple; this, I take it, is precisely Todd's point when he denies that imaginative failure is puzzling. So, in one sense, Todd is right about imaginative failure. Provided we look at such a failure in terms of the imagination in general, as a psychological capacity whose engagement with any particular work is incidental, there will be little to puzzle over.¹⁹ At least, any remaining puzzle will not be our original one. In contrast, if we construe imaginative failure as premised on engaging with a *work* of fiction, a different problem space emerges. Construed this way, each case of imaginative failure raises the question: What is responsible for the failure, the work or the appreciator? Todd appeals to cases in which responsibility lies with the appreciator to argue that imaginative failure does not beget fictionality failure, and thus does not bear on the limits of authorial power. But it is implausible to think there are *no* constraints on authorial power and that these constraints never explain an appreciator's inability to imagine. To take an extreme and obvious case, an author, and thus her work, cannot make everything that is fictional in 1984 fictional in another work

19. Dustin Stokes also seems to be saying something along these lines in his discussion of global and local constraints on imagining in his (2006, pp. 404–405). Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me see this.

by simply writing “Sausage” — not in most art-historical contexts anyway. This shows that there must be a point at which the burden of responsibility for imaginative failure shifts from appreciator to work — presumably somewhat further down the literary scale than the sausage story. Hence my argument for restricting our concern to cases of proper appreciation. Instances in which appreciators bear (sole) responsibility for imaginative failure are unpuzzling; this restriction removes them from our theoretical ambit.

Have I reneged on my earlier claim that the imaginative puzzle is genuine? No. I have made two consistent and related claims. First, there are cases of imaginative failure for which appreciators do not bear sole responsibility; these present a real puzzle. Second, *if* we approach imaginative failure as a pure failure of the imagination, divorced from proper engagement with a work of fiction, *then* our attention will be restricted to the kinds of failures for which appreciators bear sole responsibility, which are not especially puzzling.

So, the *puzzle* of imaginative failure does not lie with the imagination as pure psychological capacity, but as properly engaged with a work of fiction. Proper engagement is engagement subject to normative constraints determined by the particular work of fiction. I therefore suggest we understand the imaginative puzzle not as psychological but as *normative* in character. Since a work's failure to normatively licence the appreciator's imagining that *p* just *is* her failure to make *p* fictional, this normative understanding reveals a fruitful approach that connects our two puzzles: once we explain fictionality failure, an explanation for imaginative failure drops out for free. Another way to put this is that imaginative failure is a datum we must explain, and fictionality failure is the theoretical posit via which we explain it. I will show how this works in §4 when I lay out my positive proposal.

III. Dependence

Imaginative and fictionality failure were originally thought to arise when works attempt to prescribe morally deviant claims, as in *Giselda*. However, it soon became clear that the puzzles extend to evaluatively

deviant claims generally.²⁰ On this characterization, the puzzles consist in explaining an asymmetry between descriptively deviant claims that do not generate puzzle cases (*e.g.* that farm animals carry out, and then betray, a revolution) and evaluatively deviant ones that do (*e.g.* that some actually terrible poem is fictionally good). More recent discussion has revealed that puzzle cases stretch beyond cases of narrowly evaluative deviance.²¹ Take this case:

Oval

They flopped down beneath the great maple. One more item to find, and yet the game seemed lost. Hang on, Sally said. It's staring us in the face. This is a maple tree we're under. She grabbed a five-fingered leaf. Here was the oval they needed! They ran off to claim their prize. (Yablo 2002, p. 485)

One might think puzzle cases result from attempting to prescribe impossibilities. It is impossible, one might argue, for female infanticide to be moral, or a five-fingered leaf to be oval. As it stands, however, this is too crude. For one, we would need to specify the relevant kind of impossibility. Physical impossibility will not suffice, for example, since then *Superman* would constitute one long puzzle case. Princes turning into frogs (and preserving identity), time travellers interfering with their parents' first courtship, and the eternal ascent of M.C. Escher's stairs, or of Shepard tones, are all examples that show metaphysical impossibility will not do either.²²

20. See (Hume 1757/2007), (Walton 1990), (Moran 1994), (Walton 1994), and more recently (Gendler 2000), (Weatherson 2004), and (Stokes 2006).

21. See especially (Weatherson 2004) for several candidate cases. Where these cases involve *imaginative* failure (as opposed to one of the other three failures Weatherson considers), this puts strain on those who look to our evaluative or conative attitudes to solve the imaginative puzzle, such as (Currie 2002) and (Stokes 2006). For Stokes' response, see (Stokes 2006, p. 403n)

22. For more on these issues, see (Moran 1994, pp. 100–101), (Yablo 2002), (Stokes 2006, especially pp. 118–119). See also (Kung 2014) for an anti-Kripkean

Kendall Walton has tentatively suggested that puzzle cases arise when works violate certain dependence relations, although which relations and why "is still a mystery" (Walton 1994, p. 44). So, for instance, *Giselda* is a puzzle case because the story violates a dependence relation between moral properties and "natural" ones. Brian Weatherson has developed this suggestion, calling the relevant dependence relation "virtue"; this is the relation between a set of "higher-level" facts *H* and "lower-level" facts *L*, where the truth of propositions in *H* is not primitive but holds *in virtue* of the truth of propositions in *L*. On Weatherson's view, puzzle cases arise when an author attempts to prescribe a set of higher-level propositions *H* and lower-level ones *L*, where the truth of propositions in *L* rule out the lower-level facts required for the truth of the propositions in *H*. Weatherson uses virtue to produce a solution for each puzzle. When a work violates virtue relations we believe obtain, imaginative failure results. When a work violates virtue relations that actually obtain, fictionality failure results (Weatherson 2004, p. 21). Weatherson says virtue relations are fundamental; we "import" them automatically into fictions such that authors cannot easily cancel them by mere say-so (Weatherson 2004, pp. 16–17, p. 22n).²³ Why is this? Weatherson appeals to a general fact about concept application; authors can completely determine their stories' lower-level facts. But having done this, they enjoy no epistemic privilege regarding which concepts apply there (Weatherson 2004, pp. 22–23).²⁴

Does Weatherson's solution work? There is an obvious objection. And although Weatherson has a ready reply, it reveals a significant problem. To see this, recall the notion of a "qualifying context". In the case of *Giselda*, for instance, adding the qualifying context to transform

argument for imagining impossibilities that appeals to stipulation and, of course, (Kripke 1980, especially pp. 156–158).

23. Though he concedes authors may be able to cancel them in works longer than the toy examples discussed in the literature.

24. Weatherson's solution is to that extent closer than it might seem to Derek Matravers' "report model" solution. See (Matravers 2003).

it into *Giselda** removes the story from the class of virtue-violating cases as well as puzzle cases, just as Weatherson's solution predicts. But, runs the objection, why do readers not always resolve violations of virtue in this way, by simply imagining a qualifying context (as per Stock's proposal)? Weatherson's response is that fictions come with a "That's all" clause. He writes:

[...] the instructions that go along with the fiction forbid us from imagining any relevant lower-level facts that would constitute the truth of the higher-level claim. We have not stressed it much above, but it is relevant that fictions understood as invitations to imagine have a "That's all" clause. We are not imagining *Death* if we imagine that Jack and Jill had just stopped arguing with each other and were about to shoot everyone in sight when Craig shot them in self-defence. The story does not explicitly say that wasn't about to happen. It doesn't include a "That's all" clause. But such clauses have to be understood. So not only are we instructed to imagine something that seems incompatible with Craig's action's being morally acceptable; we are also instructed (tacitly) not to imagine anything that would make it the case that his action is morally acceptable. (Weatherson 2004, p. 20)

Weatherson's "That's all" clause says that we are not allowed to imagine that any relevant lower-level propositions – that is, any propositions relevant to the truth of the higher-level claim(s) beyond those explicit in the text – are fictional in *Death*. But while the permissibility operator here clearly takes the narrowest possible scope over the proposition *we imagine relevant lower-level propositions*, it is unclear whether the universal quantifier falls under the negation's scope or vice versa. That is, it is unclear which of the following to identify as Weatherson's "That's all" clause:

Imaginative and Fictionality Failure: A Normative Approach

TA1: For every relevant lower-level proposition, it is not the case that we are permitted to imagine it is fictional.

TA2: It is not the case that for every relevant lower-level proposition we are permitted to imagine it is fictional.

The first sentence in the quotation could be read as endorsing TA2 – *i. e.* that we are not allowed to imagine that any old virtue-preserving lower-level proposition we please is fictional; there are some that are forbidden by proper engagement (though there may be some that are not). The last sentence, however, suggests TA1 is the better reading – *i. e.* that there is no virtue-preserving lower-level proposition that we are permitted to imagine is fictional. TA2 clearly won't do the job of Weatherson's clause, because readers do not need to be able to imagine *any* relevant lower-level propositions they please in order to supply a qualifying context. One set of propositions will suffice. So that leaves us with TA1. But TA1 is far too strong as a general principle for literary fictions; there are plenty of lower-level propositions we do import and imagine when engaging with literary fictions, and as I will show, crucially, some of these are relevant lower-level ones, *i. e.* virtue-preserving propositions. I will briefly discuss importation in fiction in general before demonstrating that TA1 is false as a general condition on appreciating literary fictions.

In perhaps the simplest case, the "Reality Principle" governs which propositions are imported into a fiction.²⁵ The principle states that, *ceteris paribus*, the fictional world is like the real world: we are to import and thus imagine (should the question arise) any propositions true in the actual world that mesh with the fiction's explicit content. Consider this passage from Orwell's *Burmese Days*, to illustrate:

25. Sometimes, especially with historical fictions or works in special genres, the Reality Principle gives way to a different principle. On this, see (Walton 1990, pp. 144–161) and (Lewis 1978). Stacie Friend has suggested to me, persuasively, that we should accept what she calls the "Reality Assumption" instead of the Reality Principle. She thinks the former is similar to Gareth Evans' "Incorporation Principle" (Evans 1980, pp. 354–356) and Marie-Laure Ryan's "Principle of Minimal Departure" (Ryan 1991, pp. 48–60).

There was a thunderous roar from the road, and such a shower of stones that everyone was hit, including the Burmans on the path. One stone took Mr MacGregor full in the face, almost knocking him down. The Europeans bolted hastily inside and barred the door. Mr MacGregor's spectacles were smashed and his nose streaming blood. (Orwell 1934/2009, p. 276)

Since Mr MacGregor is human and his world much like ours, we may import the proposition that he dislikes being hit in the face by a stone. This, in turn, allows us to pity Mr MacGregor without the author needing remind us that stones to the face hurt, Mr MacGregor does not enjoy pain, and gratuitous pain, even to a colonial officer, warrants pity. The Reality Principle thus allows in certain important "generic" assumptions from the actual world. Stones can be tiny, and Mr MacGregor could be anaesthetized or a masochist. But unless the author says otherwise, we may assume that the stone to the face hurts and that Mr MacGregor dislikes it.

Returning to TA₁, suppose the following appeared in a naturalistic novel:

Denise

Denise went to bed complaining of a strong headache. Her friends and family wished her goodnight. Three days later they buried her in the grounds of the old church. In the circumstances, it was the proper thing to do.

Wait! They buried Denise alive? And the author thinks killing by live burial is acceptable?! Well, no. Presumably, it is fictional that Denise died of whatever ailed her and the burial was her funeral. The author need not state it explicitly — we import it into the fiction and imagine accordingly. Importantly, notice that Denise's dying counts as a relevant virtue-preserving lower-level fact relative to the passage's judgement of propriety. Similarly, if a story reads, "Henry died, but

it wasn't at all sad", then usually we may import the proposition that something about Henry or his death explains why his death was not sad.²⁶ So TA₁ does not help either.

If I had to speculate, I would guess that where Weatherson goes wrong here is in thinking that where authors make true some lower-level facts that explicitly, if defeasibly, rule out some higher-level claims, to attempt to import lower-level propositions that will make those higher-level claims kosher again is *ipso facto* to cease engaging with the same work. *Denise* shows that this thought is mistaken. Still, Weatherson is right that something like a "That's all" clause governs our engagement with puzzle cases. But since the kind of case just considered shows that it cannot be equivalent to TA₁, any such clause will have at most a limited jurisdiction, like TA₂. Invoking a "That's all" clause, therefore, does not blunt the objection. Behind the invocation lies a puzzle as difficult as the one the clause is meant to help solve: Why do puzzle cases forbid importation of the qualifying kind while non-puzzle cases allow it?

A tempting answer is that the Reality Principle's preference for default propositions from the actual world explains why we may import the proposition that Denise died suddenly, but not that Giselda, say, lives in a dystopic world. If we are told that a person retired to bed feeling ill and was "properly" buried three days later, it is reasonable to assume she died. But where a person "rightly" commits female infanticide, we might think the Reality Principle dries up. A bizarre dystopian state or a divine order that sends child-killers and their victims to Heaven: these additions are too exotic, or perhaps too *ad hoc*, for import, even if an author could make them fictional by explicit means.

Does this reply work? True, in reading *Giselda* we cannot just import any old crazy propositions. But this is hardly necessary to render the story a non-puzzle case. Fictionally, there is some-mechanism-or-other by which Superman flies, though we know not what it is,

26. I discuss this kind of non-specific or promissory importation shortly.

and there is no particular mechanism such that fictionally *it* is the mechanism. And this point generalizes: propositions appreciators may import are typically non-specific — *i. e.* to be logically analyzed as *de dicto* rather than *de re*. Thus, to claim that puzzle cases resist the qualifying contexts they require because these would be too exotic is implausible; were that the only barrier, we could always import non-specific contexts instead. So we are still left with a question: What about puzzle cases prevents us from importing even such non-specific qualifying contexts?

If we are to solve our two puzzles, we must answer two questions. (1) Why do puzzle cases require qualifying contexts to make the propositions they attempt to prescribe fictional and imaginable? (2) Why can we not import such contexts into puzzle cases? Weatherson's solution addresses (1) but not (2). In what follows, I describe a framework for answering both by using two central concepts, *adequacy* and *exhaustivity*, and sharpening them up by considering the subtleties surrounding their application.²⁷

IV. Claims and Their Grounds

Let us understand 'grounds' in '*p* are the grounds for *q*' in the neutral sense — *i. e.* as *putative* or *supposed* grounds. Let grounds for a claim *C* be *inadequate* whenever they fail to ground *C* in the normative sense — *i. e.* fail to make *C* true, fail to explain *C*. And let grounds be *exhaustive* whenever there are no additional grounds available (that is, true) that will ground *C*.²⁸ *C* is then inadequately and exhaustively grounded when (a) *C* requires adequate grounds (*i. e.* is not primitive); (b) grounds for *C*, if any, are inadequate; and (c) there are no further grounds available that will render *C* adequately grounded. My positive proposal is this:

27. Answering questions (1) and (2) fully would require laying out complete theories of fictional grounding and import, respectively. This is something I am neither able to do nor optimistic could ever be done, for reasons I will clarify in the following section.
28. I am thinking of grounding as requiring only what is sometimes called *partial* grounding: namely that grounds g_1, \dots, g_n ground *C* in conjunction with the background facts.

Fictionality failure occurs when, on the best interpretation(s), a work attempts to prescribe a claim that, fictionally, is *inadequately* and *exhaustively* grounded. That is, fictionality failure arises when a work purports that: it is fictional that *C* on grounds g^1, \dots, g^n , if any, but (a) it is not fictional that: g^1, \dots, g^n adequately ground *C*; and (b) it is not fictional that: there is a proposition g^* , such that g^* is true and *C* is adequately grounded by $g^1, \dots, g^n + g^*$. Of course, when grounds for *C* are exhaustive, this does not rule out the importation of *any* further propositions not made explicit by the work, since many *ceteris paribus* facts not bearing on the truth of *C* will still be importable (for reasons discussed in the previous section). Exhaustivity merely rules out the importation of relevant propositions that will ground *C*. Inadequacy explains the need for a qualifying context; existing grounds do not ground *C*, yet the work attempts to prescribe *C* on the basis of those grounds. And exhaustivity explains why qualifying contexts cannot be imported; such contexts introduce new propositions that would ground *C* — precisely what exhaustivity rules out.²⁹ In that respect, exhaustivity plays the role Weatherson intended for his "That's all" clause.

As for imaginative failure of the genuinely puzzling sort, I propose it occurs in the same cases as fictionality failure. This is because, as I argued in §2, the modal strength of "imaginability" is normative, rather than psychological or alethic. To say we *cannot* imagine some proposition a puzzle case attempts to prescribe is to make a normative claim about proper engagement, not our imaginative capacity *simpliciter*. This much is clear from comparing *Giselda* and *Giselda**. We cannot imagine a qualifying context in *Giselda* in the same way we cannot imagine Dr. Faust breakdancing; it is not beyond us — it simply falls outside of proper engagement with Goethe's play (at least,

29. Brian Weatherson has suggested to me that *exhaustivity* also explains why gratuitous authorial evaluations feel odd. When an author gives us *prima facie* sufficient and exhaustive grounds to conclude that, for instance, Katharina is small, there is something off-putting about the author then telling us explicitly that "Katharina is small". Exhaustivity secures Katharina's smallness, making any explicit claim otiose.

as traditionally staged). My proposal, therefore, not only solves both puzzles, but does so with a single solution that explains the connection between them.

To illustrate the solution, consider *Giselda* again. The passage makes a moral claim and describes a fact about Giselda's daughter that is supposed to ground that claim. The lack of further information combined with the locution "after all" make these grounds exhaustive on a best interpretation. Because they are exhaustive, we cannot supplement them by importing anything that would amount to a qualifying context. Lacking such a context, the daughter's gender is inadequate grounds for the claim, inducing both fictionality failure and imaginative failure.

Actually, this oversimplifies somewhat, but the complication reveals a strength of my proposal. The complication is that we are consulting intuitions about vanishingly small passages, which we should treat with caution. We know how to engage with traditional works of literary fiction. The terms of engagement for these toy cases are murkier, however. This does not mean our intuitions about them are worthless. But it does mean those intuitions are more volatile than I have let on.³⁰ When Walton first introduced *Giselda*, he did not specify the fictional context in which it figures — its position in the text, the story's genre, etc. — but these factors shape how we view the case. I suppose *Giselda* is meant to appear in the middle of a naturalistic story, and seen this way it is surely puzzling. However, suppose it were a novel's opening line. Under this aspect, one might wonder whether *Giselda* counts as a puzzle case. Compare the famous opening from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was
the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was
the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was
the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was

30. That said, accusations that the short examples are artificial and so worthless for theorizing literary fiction are often overblown, if only because there is a genre of extremely short literary fictions: micro fiction.

the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had
everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were
all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the
other way...

On a literal-minded reading, Dickens simply contradicts himself repeatedly. And if this passage ended the book, it might perplex us. But because it comes early in the book, we anticipate that any incoherence will be explained. And it is:

...in short, the period was so far like the present period,
that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being
received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of
comparison only. (Dickens 1857/2008, p. 1)

The same holds for *Giselda*. Provided we are warranted in anticipating that there is an explanation to come — a qualifying context — *Giselda* seems less puzzling. So, we must be cautious: the brevity of our toy examples may make them abrupt enough to convey a sense of finality that encourages a puzzling reading. Considered under a different aspect, they may require a different reading.³¹ My proposal predicts this effect. I claim that it is only when inadequate grounds for a claim are best interpreted as exhaustive that they induce our puzzles. Insofar as a putative puzzle case under one aspect makes the best interpretation one on which we should anticipate further explanation for a claim, we treat existing grounds as non-exhaustive. Thus, considering our toy examples under such an aspect should align with less puzzlement, which it does.

What, in a given fiction, makes some truths adequate grounds for another? In general, as said above, a claim is adequately grounded

31. Cain Todd clearly approaches *Giselda* under this kind of open-ended aspect. He writes "On first encountering [*Giselda*] my only clear instinctive reaction was to try to imagine in what fictional context this claim might be coherently asserted. It certainly wasn't to resist imagining it in any clear sense" (Todd 2009, p. 191).

when its grounds explain it (in some sense) by making it true. And when a work is of a naturalistic sort, the standards will be identical with those at the actual world. But — and here my grounding relation parts ways with Weatherson’s virtue relation — adequacy in fiction, like exhaustivity, is determined by factors more sensitive to context than Weatherson’s *virtue*. Returning to a passage’s position in a text, early passages containing claims that appear to be inadequately and exhaustively grounded (in the fiction) might make it more probable than in later passages that the standards of adequacy in the fiction are different to those at the actual world. Other relevant factors might include the genre of a work, the explicit claims already made by the author, the remaining canon of which the work forms a part, pragmatic conventions applicable to works of its kind, the ends the work seems to have and how deliberately paradoxical they seem, the kinds of claims we think the flesh-and-blood author is (un)likely to have false beliefs about, and so forth. One important consequence of accommodating these nuances in the grounding relation is that *p*’s grounding *q* doesn’t require anything as strong as *p*’s making *q* true as a matter of metaphysical necessity.³² To see this, consider the following non-moral *Giselda* analogue:

Leaves

All across Sussex, the deciduous trees were clothed in luxuriant green foliage; after all, it was late autumn.

32. This marks an important difference between the kind of grounding relation Kit Fine and other metaphysicians have in mind and the notion at play here: for Fine, the grounding relation combines a modal component and a determinative component (the latter being needed to prevent the fact, say, that the US invaded Panama in 1989 from grounding the fact that $2+2=4$). See (Fine 2012, p. 38). But there could in principle be a fictional world *w* (or, speaking more carefully: fictionally, there could be a world *w*) where none of the worlds accessible to *w* have the same grounding relations. It would be a world where grounding is in some sense contingent. I take it this is not a possibility for the metaphysician’s notion.

Putting aside earlier worries about toy examples, I think *Leaves* as puzzling a case as *Giselda*.³³ But notice that it violates no entrenched metaphysically necessary grounding relations. It is metaphysically possible for a late English autumn to explain the presence of green leaves. Moreover, if virtue relations are ones that “an author cannot cancel [...] by saying so” and invitations to imagine them violated are ones “we cannot easily follow” (Weatherson, p. 17), then virtue does not explain why *Leaves* is a puzzle case. The normal dependence relations in *Leaves* are easily cancelled by beginning the story like so: “Once upon a time, trees only sprouted verdant leaves in the autumn...”. In this context, it being late autumn would suffice to ground the otherwise (potentially) puzzling claim. Now, one might question whether beginning the story in this way really *cancels* ordinary dependence relations, or whether it just introduces a qualifying context. To see that there is more than mere qualifying-context-smuggling going on here, notice that the addition to *Leaves* stipulates a new dependence relation and cancels an old one. Beginning *Leaves* with “Once upon a time, trees only sprouted verdant leaves in the autumn...” is equivalent to beginning *Giselda* with “Once upon a time, committing female infanticide was the right thing to do”. This is not a qualifying context but a straightforward cancellation of ordinary dependence relations by mere say-so — precisely what Weatherson’s virtue relation rules out.

I have largely proceeded as though a work’s explicit claims, even those that are not simply explicit denials of dependence relations, do not bear on whether some particular claim satisfies the standards of adequacy. But what is fictional, including what the dependence relations are, is determined interpretatively, not investigatively. That is, a work of fiction does not offer a fully-formed world to discover, but rather a body of mutually constraining considerations that an interpretation

33. We may be less inclined to *resist* imagining it, since it does not contradict our cherished moral beliefs. But this difference is not germane, given that these motivational barriers to imagination are not my concern here. For more on this, see (Gendler 2000), (Weinberg & Meskin 2006), (Brock 2012, pp. 449–451), and especially (Gendler 2006), where she cogently distinguishes two different sources of difficulty.

must reconcile. The fact that a claim appears inadequately grounded, therefore, can itself alter the facts of the fictional world, including the world's dependence relations, just as inconsistent statements sometimes establish that a narrator is unreliable, rather than that the world is contradictory.³⁴ Otherwise inadequately supported claims might establish, stipulatively, that what are usually inadequate grounds *are* adequate after all. The strange claim in *Giselda*, for instance, could make it fictional that Giselda's is a morally fantastical world where female infanticide is morally required. If I am right about this, then contrary to some people's suspicions, we can create "morality fiction" on the model of science fiction. I see no problem with embracing this possibility. Only one in the grip of a philosophical theory would deny that 12 is not the sum of two primes in Tamar Gendler's *Tower of Goldbach* story.³⁵ Making some moral equivalent of this story fictional does not seem to pose any special theoretical problem, even if it would require greater imaginative exertion—or more writerly craft to transport the appreciator, just as with works that get us to really see a world from a character's morally perverse perspective.³⁶ At the very least, intuitions about this possibility are probably not firm enough to reject it outright.³⁷ One might worry: if the standards of adequacy can be so straightforwardly altered, why are there puzzle cases at all? Bearing in mind the above caveats about toy examples, the answer seems to be that some passages are subject to interpretative constraints, some of

34. Cain Todd argues this point forcefully, citing Peter Lamarque. See (Todd 2009, pp. 205–206) and (Lamarque 1990/2004). There is also a good discussion of related issues by Daniel Nolan (2007) discussing Graham Priest's *Sylvan's Box* story; see (Priest 1997).

35. See (Gendler 2000). Kathleen Stock denies it in (Stock 2003).

36. This is a huge area that I cannot do justice to here. Matthew Kieran offers some excellent examples of fictions where the moral facts seem to be successfully perverted in (Kieran 2003, pp. 69–71). A full defence of my permissive notion of imaginability will have to wait for another time, or author. (Kung 2014) comes very close to my thinking.

37. Of course, imagining comes in many strengths, and it is surely true that we cannot imagine Gendler's story with the ease and vivacity that we can imagine, say, Maaza Mengiste's *Beneath the Lion's Gaze*.

them listed above, such that reading these passages as stipulating new dependency relations is simply interpretatively inappropriate.

Accepting that my proposal explains cases like *Giselda*, does it explain those involving conceptual impossibility like *Oval*? They can be handled in the same way as the others. While the story does not say that the object found was an oval because it was a five-fingered maple leaf, clearly being five-fingered is the putative ground for the claim. Without any fantastical stipulation to the contrary, being five-fingered is inconsistent with, and *a fortiori* inadequate grounds for, being oval. My proposal says that, for *Oval* to be a puzzle case, its grounds must be not only inadequate but exhaustive. I hope to have shown by now that exhaustivity, like adequacy, depends upon a number of contextual factors that our toy examples disguise. Insofar as *Oval* forms part of a conceptually fantastical story whose details we are yet to discover, the grounds are not exhaustive and the story no puzzle case. Insofar as we should interpret the relevant content of *Oval* as final, the grounds are exhaustive and the story a puzzle case.

A benefit of my proposal is that it is immune to counterexamples recently introduced by Anna Mahtani against so-called "conflict" solutions to the imaginative puzzle that superficially resemble my own. These solutions appeal to a conflict between an author's claim and an appreciator's belief. An example is Walton's suggestion that puzzle cases arise when authorial attempts at prescription violate dependence relations as we take them to be. Mahtani offers *The Story of Lucy* as a counterexample to such views. The story describes a morally ambiguous action by the protagonist, Lucy, followed by an authorial pronouncement that the action was right. The purported problem for conflict solutions is that while *Lucy* is a puzzle case, it does not appear to involve conflict; it is unclear whether Lucy did the right thing, but she may have done. To say that she did, therefore, does not conflict with anything appreciators believe (Mahtani 2012).

For *Lucy* to count as a theoretically interesting case that induces imaginative failure, a sufficiently ideal appreciator must find Lucy's action either (a) morally unclear or (b) not morally right. How case (b)

would induce imaginative failure on my view requires no elaboration, so I will focus on (a). Suppose that to engage in proper appreciation one must be morally omniscient. If Lucy's action is morally unclear to such a morally omniscient appreciator, this merely shows that the action's deontic character is genuinely indeterminate. Thus it will present a puzzle case, since the work will then claim that a morally indeterminate action is morally right. Barring any special features of the literary context, such a work will have offered inadequate (and exhaustive) grounds for a claim. If, on the other hand, proper appreciation merely requires minimal moral competence, rather than omniscience, such that one sufficiently ideal appreciator might deem Lucy's action morally unclear while another deems it morally right, then the example would seem to be a puzzle case for the former but not the latter. Does this pose a problem for my proposal? It does not, as I will explain.

One might worry that accepting the possibility of sufficiently ideal appreciators who disagree is just to accept Todd's relativity worry — *i. e.* the worry that imaginative failure is imager-relative due to varying theoretical commitments. But this worry is unwarranted. The cases to which Todd appeals to divorce fictionality from imaginability all involve obvious deficiencies on the part of the appreciator. But where sufficiently *ideal* appreciators disagree, this suggests we finess our understanding of what is fictional, not revise the connections between fiction and the imagination. Returning to *Lucy*, if these appreciators disagree about whether or not Lucy's action is right, then it seems we have two options. The first is to conclude from the disagreement that Lucy's action is morally indeterminate. This would be akin to the way in which ' x is F ' lacks a truth-value according to supervaluationism whenever F is a vague predicate and x is a borderline F -case (*i. e.* ' x is F ' is true under some precisifications of F and false under others). On this picture, Lucy's action would be right (or wrong) only if all sufficiently ideal appreciators judged it right (or wrong); pursuing the supervaluationist analogy, this would be akin to a vagueness case in which ' x is F ' is *supertrue* (or *superfalse*) — *i. e.* true (false) under

all precisifications of F . Otherwise, so long as not all the sufficiently ideal appreciators agree, the action is morally indeterminate. How plausible this approach is to settling on what is true in a fiction will depend in part on which requirements remain constant across proper appreciations; the greater the variability across such appreciations, the fewer things one will be able to determine are fictional.

If this first strategy is consonant with a form of critical monism, the second is pluralist. According to the second strategy, we embrace a new and equally privileged interpretation of *Lucy* for each different moral judgement made by sufficiently ideal appreciators regarding Lucy's action. On some of these interpretations, her action will be right, and on others it will be indeterminate, or wrong, giving us at least three interpretations of what the story makes fictional.³⁸

Importantly, whichever of these two strategies we employ, my account remains unblemished. If the first strategy is preferable, then *Lucy* and cases like it are puzzle cases; sufficiently ideal appreciators disagree as to the rightness of Lucy's action, thereby indicating that it is morally indeterminate. Should the work therefore claim that Lucy acted rightly, that claim will be inadequately grounded. And assuming, as I have been, that these grounds are also exhaustive, we will have a puzzle case. Alternatively, if the second strategy is preferable, then we may have at least two interpretations — two mutually incompatible but equally legitimate accounts of what is fictional in the work. The interpretation on which Lucy's action is morally indeterminate receives the same treatment as on the first option: *Lucy* thusly interpreted will constitute a puzzle case. The interpretation on which

38. Can fictional actions still be morally ambiguous but not indeterminate? Moral ambiguity strikes me as an epistemic notion, so it is not clear that the fictional world can be morally ambiguous, even if it may *seem* so (usually because it is morally indeterminate). Works that defy a stable judgement, or which make understanding how the work induces moral disagreement among (sufficiently ideal) appreciators important, will be aptly described as morally ambiguous. David Mamet's play *Oleanna* might be like this latter case insofar as it exploits gender to encourage different moral judgements of John's and Carol's respective actions in differently gendered appreciators.

Lucy's action is morally right will, however, not present a puzzle case. On this interpretation, the work's claim that Lucy acted rightly will be adequately grounded, hence unpuzzling. In short, insofar as *Lucy* and cases like it present a puzzle case, my account can explain why.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, I had three main aims. First, I defended the claim that puzzle cases present two real puzzles: the imaginative puzzle and the fictionality puzzle. Second, I showed how both puzzles are connected: imaginative failure of the puzzling kind is the result of a normative constraint on imagining laid down by what is fictional in the puzzling work. Third, I used this connection to articulate a common explanation for the central puzzling phenomena, imaginative and fictionality failure: both arise when authors offer grounds for claims that are inadequate and exhaustive.³⁹

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