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Menninghaus et al. address a version of the “paradox of tragedy” (see Robinson 2009). We do not want to experience suffering, for example, grief, but we enjoy stories about grief, even when they make us weep. The article insightfully articulates eight factors to explain the paradox. But, as with any new theory of complex phenomena, there are problems with the current formulation. First, the eight factors appear diffuse, almost random, only loosely held together by the spatial metaphor of Distancing and Embracing. Moreover, the authors draw on a range of theories from psychoanalysis to Structuralist linguistics. A more satisfying explanation would integrate those factors into an account that relies on better understood, literally specified, cognitive structures and processes.

To some extent, the authors take up appraisal theory for their explanatory framework. That provides a degree of integration. But it may lead to other problems. Specifically, the authors explain the paradox of tragedy by reference to processes that may raise difficulties for appraisal-based accounts. For example, the *fiction frame* discussed by the authors as part of the Distancing metaphor, would seem to generate the “paradox of fiction” (see Robinson 2009), the problem that we know characters do not exist, but we weep over their (nonexistent) sorrow and rejoice over their (nonexistent) happiness. If emotion results from our assessment of an event’s consequences for our well-being, as appraisal accounts have it (see Oatley 2012, p. 30), then it would appear that fictions should have no emotional consequences. *Prima facie*, our emotional response to fiction would appear problematic for appraisal theory. Of course, it is always possible for advocates of appraisal theory to contend that the appraisal process need not have bearing on our actual well-being or even our beliefs about our well-being. But then one wonders just what is being explained by appraisal theory and how it is being explained.

There are three points to be made in relation to these issues. First, the insights of the article might be more productively developed by reference to an account of emotion that takes elicitors for emotion to be concrete particulars given in perception, (emotional) memories, and simulations. The idea here is that the eliciting conditions for emotion are ultimately concrete and experiential. Appraisal may affect our emotions, but it does so not because of its logic, but because of the concrete emotional memories or simulations that it activates. This is why, for example, painful images of individual suffering tend to arouse our empathy, whereas statistics typically do not (cf. Bloom 2016, p. 89). Simulation of concrete particulars may be an especially important and underappreciated process in emotional response. (For further discussion, see Hogan [2011].)

Second, and related to the first point, the Distancing-Embracing metaphor may be discarded if we have an adequate account of simulation. The paradoxes of tragedy and fiction are versions of problems that bear on counterfactual and hypothetical simulations. Consider what happens when we imagine dire outcomes of some unattempted action. We have an aversive response to those simulated outcomes. That aversive response helps to motivate us to avoid actions that would lead to those outcomes. Conversely, if we imagine desirable outcomes, we experience a degree of pleasure. That pleasure helps to motivate us to engage in the relevant sorts of action. In both the aversive and attractive cases, we have a version of the paradox of fiction. We feel emotion even though we are not experiencing real situations, but imagining unreal ones. This is not a paradox for the explanation of emotion in terms of concrete, experiential particulars. (For further discussion, see Hogan [2013].)

In the case of aversive simulation, we have in effect a paradox of tragedy as well. We engage in the simulation of tragic outcomes to our endeavors, despite the aversive quality of the experience, sometimes even dwelling on the utter awfulness of those outcomes. *Prima facie*, one would expect this to be a matter of reward system involvement, which drives “seeking” (as Panksepp & Biven [2012] put it), even in the absence of “liking” (on reward components, see Chatterjee [2014, p. 209]). There is at least some

evidence for this in research showing the activation of the reward system in compassion (see Kim et al. 2009), which presumably involves simulation of the target’s feelings and experiences.

In short, the paradoxes of fiction and tragedy are special cases of the emotional operation of simulation. The literary paradoxes are explained by the same processes as account for simulation.

Finally, this analysis is consistent with the evolutionary function of simulation. Specifically, simulation allows us to avoid danger and pursue opportunities with less risk, because we envision the consequences of our actions “offline.” This is particularly important in the case of danger, because simulation involves no real threat. But simulation has this function only if it engages our motivation systems. The simulation of dangerous outcomes motivates our avoidance of actions leading to those outcomes precisely because it provokes our fear. At the same time, our emotional response to such simulated outcomes cannot be so aversive as to prevent simulation in the first place. Thus, evolution has calibrated simulation bearing on dangers to produce both aversive emotion and engagement (through reward system activation).

Of course, emotion in response to simulation must not be as strong as emotion in response to real experience. We see this particularly in the simulation of future pleasure. The enjoyment of such simulation must be less than the actual experience of pleasure or we would not be motivated to pursue the real pleasure. Fantasy would be as good as the real thing. Here, too, evolution has calibrated simulation, in this case producing pleasure, but also limiting it.

The aim of these comments is to suggest a more systematic and integrated account of the emotional response to fiction, incorporating the insights of Menninghaus et al. For example, simulation helps us to understand the cognitive processes adumbrated by the Distancing-Embracing metaphor. In addition, the two forms of evolutionary calibration help us to understand the function of those processes.

“Negative emotions” live in stories, not in the hearts of readers who enjoy them

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Abstract: The commendably ambitious project by Menninghaus et al. fails because its main connective tissue – “negative emotions” – is beyond the grasp of the authors’ largely literary approach. The critique focuses on their treatment of the Paradox of Fiction, the neglect of the biological, adaptive nature of emotions, and the absence of convincing empirical support for key aspects of the proposed model.

Menninghaus et al. deserve plaudits for attempting to interweave rhetorical, literary, philosophical, and scientific issues that are of consequence in the art process. A multidisciplinary approach is indeed what addressing the nexus of creation, production, and reception of art requires. However, the project largely fails, not because it is too ambitious, but because of its choice and treatment of the main connective tissue – something called “negative emotions.”

The principal purpose of the commentary is a critique of the authors’ treatment of this concept, exemplified already in their opening sentence: “Enjoyment associated with negative emotions in art reception has been a central issue in poetics and aesthetics ever since Aristotle’s theory of tragedy” (sect. 1). If already the first sentence manages to conflate a prototypical story’s themes that involve the characters’ anger, fear, and sadness with the readers’ allegedly analogous “negative” emotional states (and even an empathetic one, pity), that is because the article continually confounds such key issues.

Two preliminary remarks: Aristotle's *catharsis* (mentioned prominently in the article) is arguably not about the spectators' enjoyment of their negative emotions, but rather about the satisfaction that they experience because they have *safely* "purged themselves" of the hostility that had gradually built up because of adverse life events (Konečni 1991). Also, much classical rhetoric (also mentioned prominently) has actually very little to say about "negative emotions" with regard to either the orator's/poet's motives and themes or the recipients' emotional states. A well-known example is Longinus (or pseudo-Longinus, first or third century CE), whose text *On the Sublime* was influential in eighteenth-century Europe and continues to be widely discussed in American classicists' circles (see, for example, the translation and commentary by Arieti & Crossett [1985]). One can safely claim that only with Edmund Burke (1759/1971, Pt V, sect. I) is the effect of "words" on "affections," if any, argued in depth and influentially.

Turning to the key issues: Much of the article obliquely revolves around what is known as the Paradox of Fiction (the Anna Karenina Paradox), first discussed in modern, post-Humean times by Colin Radford and Michael Weston (1975). Briefly, it refers to the readers' feeling sad about, or moved by, the sad fate of a nonexistent person, a literary character. Almost all of the many philosophers who have addressed this problem have invoked terms such as quasi-emotion and as-if emotion, and even denied it the status of a genuine paradox – based on their belief that the readers' state is only the real-life emotion's very pale analogue. However, here is the Menninghaus et al. position: "These terms [as-if, quasi-, pseudo-] evoke the notion (which we consider misleading) that art-elicited emotions may be somehow a species of inauthentic emotions" (sect. 1, point C, para. 2). (Significantly, the authors fail to return to this issue.)

But of course they are inauthentic – certainly so from the following viewpoint, which challenges some other key aspects of the article. Emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and joy are subjective states that are caused by significant events involving threat to survival, struggle for limited resources, and bonding with, or loss of, a cherished mate or progeny. These events are predominantly *social*, involving real people. It is not surprising that the oral and written descriptions of such events have always been enjoyable, interesting, and, frequently, instructive to readers. Many accounts have described the emotions allegedly experienced by mythical or real-life characters, most of which have indeed been "negative," which explains my choice of emotion terms above – terms that reflect existential and adaptive concerns. Precisely for this reason, because of the massive cognitive, metabolic, and physiological investment required to sustain the major basic emotions, it follows that it would not be desirable for readers and listeners to experience the genuine emotions themselves. Wisely, they usually do not.

A related problematic issue is that Menninghaus et al., presumably striving to be inclusive with regard to the temporal arts, discuss music in the analogous vein. But here, again, many major philosophers (Noël Carroll, Peter Kivy, Nick Zangwill) are in agreement that the so-called "sad music" does not make listeners genuinely sad – in line, generally, with the views of people as otherwise diverse as Eduard Hanslick and Igor Stravinsky (Konečni 2008; 2013; Konečni et al. 2008).

Then, there is the authors' recruitment into their model of the concept of *distancing* as something of a conceptual novelty. In fact, it was probably first introduced into English-language aesthetics in the 1950s by the commentators of Bertolt Brecht's "epic theater" (Konečni 1991). But the authors' dilemma should be this: If the story-induced readers' state is a genuine, real life-like sadness, then distancing would be next to impossible to accomplish; and if it is a quasi-sadness, then there is no need for distancing. No one has seriously challenged the Radford and Weston (1975) view that our "sadness" about Anna's (or Mercutio's or Duchess of Malfi's) sad fate does not have any of the goal-directed or coping attributes characteristic of genuine emotions.

Finally, only three studies (Gerger et al. 2014, involving "affectively negative pictures"; Lundqvist et al. 2009, using "sad music";

and Wagner et al. 2016, with "anger-inducing performances") are cited by Menninghaus et al. to the effect that they report autonomic and electromyographic (EMG) changes in viewers and listeners. However, a close examination reveals that in all three studies there are major methodological shortcomings (see also Konečni 2015). The autonomic results are weak and hardly indicative of genuine emotions. As for the EMG findings, they seem to demonstrate the participants' "facial commentary," rather than genuine emotional experience. Such absence of links to solid and pertinent empirical work would seem to reveal the authors' analysis for what it actually is – a mostly *literary* handling of emotions. This is by no means intended as a condescending description, but rather as a warning that a predominantly literary analysis of the role of emotion in art runs into serious problems when it reaches beyond metaphor to handle psychological states with clear biological underpinnings.

What is art and how does it differ from aesthetics?

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Abstract: Art objects differ from other objects because they are intentionally created to embody a producer's (i.e., artist's) expression. Hence, art objects are social objects whose appeal and value are determined largely by the strategic interaction between the artist and the audience. I discuss several aspects of how strategic interaction can affect an art object's perceived value and aesthetic appeal.

A person's perceived value of an art object will always be influenced by the object's aesthetic appeal. But aesthetics is only one component of determining an art object's perceived value as the following examples illustrate: An identical poster print of a Mondrian painting would, by definition, have the same aesthetic appeal as the original painting, yet the former would have much lower perceived value and would also not be perceived as art (it merely represents a copy of an art object). Likewise, a software algorithm could generate an unlimited number of original "Mondrian" motifs. Some might even be more appealing, creative, or unique than those created by the artist himself. But again, only the paintings with the motifs designed by Mondrian would be considered as art and hence be perceived as having artistic value.

These two examples illustrate what makes art different from other forms of aesthetically appealing objects such as décor and entertainment objects. As we have shown elsewhere (Kreuzbauer & Keller 2017; Kreuzbauer et al. 2015), art objects are intentionally made to embody a producer's (i.e., artist's) expression. In other words, the art object represents the materialised expression from the very moment when it was produced (i.e., the material object "freezes" a moment of time and space). Whereas Mondrian's original painting is a truthful representation of his expression in the moment of creation, the poster print would merely be its copy. Likewise, an expression can be performed only by a human being and not by a computer algorithm.

This shows that art objects are social objects, whose appeal and value are determined largely by the strategic interaction between the artist and the audience.

Besides determining whether the artwork truly embodies an artist's expression, psychological valuation and appeal towards the artwork depend mainly on the content it intends to communicate. For example, an artist might draw the content of a trash can to address the negative consequences of consumerism. It is possible that such kind of negative associations would lead to higher pleasure as predicted by the Distancing-Embracing