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THEORIES OF FICTION

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ТЕОРІЇ ФІКЦІЙНОСТІ**

Mimetic theories of fiction (and art in general) take many forms. Works of fiction have been supposed to 'imitate' or 'mirror' the world in different ways, sometimes through similarity (verisimilitude of character and incident), sometimes - through embodying universal truths, often in other ways besides. Where 'mimesis' means 'representation' the connection with truth is made through the idea that sentences (or thoughts or beliefs) are true in virtue of 'representing states of affairs'. However, representation is much less clear a notion than truth itself and there are conceptions of artistic representation, which make no reference to truth. Certainly, mimesis, in its different interpretations, need not be confined to semantic or semiotic correspondence between sign and object or proposition and facts. It might be associated, for example, with the idea of internal coherence or 'acceptability' or 'ringing true', in colloquial usage, rather than being true. The traditional conception of mimesis relies as much on relations between mental images (in artists and spectators) as on relations between images and objects. And in a recent treatment, by Kendall Walton, mimesis ceases to be a relation of any kind (certainly far removed from truth) and is defined in terms of culturally based 'functions' and roles in games of making-believe.

Epistemological theories emphasize knowledge, belief, and the idea of 'learning from fiction'. In different versions, this learning might or might not be propositional, in the sense of involving the grasp of truths. Knowledge required from reading literary works could be 'knowledge how' as well as 'knowledge that', what we learn could be skills, cognitive or otherwise, as well as facts. Where 'knowledge how' is at the centre of the cognitive defense of fiction neither truth nor propositions need be involved. The question remains, however, not whether it is possible for works of literature to impart knowledge – that can be trivially conceded, if only at a causal level – but what role such knowledge plays in literary appreciation. Moral theories offer moral truths or moral knowledge as the primary cognitive contribution of literary works. Although in unsophisticated version 'the moral of the story' is encapsulated in a general proposition 'implied' or 'suggested' by the work, it is more common to find 'moral truths' conceived in more diffuse form, for example as special kinds of beliefs. Again, the central issue is not whether literature can have 'moral content', from which readers might learn something, but rather the form this content takes and its relation to truth and value. These theories allow for a propositional conception of truths, albeit without express commitment to any substantive view. However, integrity and affective theories seem to move well away from the paradigm of propositional truth and although the term 'truth' is used in connection with them, it is soon evident that rather different considerations are at stake. Integrity theories concentrate on the sincerity of an author as a mark of 'truthfulness' or the 'authenticity' of an artistic presentation. Affective theories appeal to the affective wrought by works of fiction, some of which can be seen as cognitive. There is likely to be an overlap here with other theories, particularly those classed as epistemological. Truth must enter the picture in so far as works of fiction might causally include true beliefs.

This brief survey of cognitive or 'truth' theories shows the broad nature of support for 'literary' truth but also its lack of cohesion. It shows too that post-structuralist attack on metaphysical and literary realism or the idea of an objective world or a 'privileged discourse' are not sufficient to disarm 'pro-truth' sympathizers.

Walton Kendall L. Fearing Fictions. *Journal of Philosophy*, 75. 1978. P.5-28.