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Dramaturgy for Emotions From Fictional Narration

Dolf Zillmann
University of Alabama

After clarifying several issues that have unnecessarily complicated and confused the analysis of emotion arising from fiction, this chapter integrates research-supported psychological and physiological paradigms of emotion to explain the diversity of affective reactions to dramatic fictional formats. Cinematic presentation is of focal interest, but alternative forms of presentation are given attention also. The three-factor theory of emotion and the excitation-transfer paradigm are employed to account for the elicitation of emotional reactions and for the intensity of these reactions. In an analysis of excitatory functions, the escalation of affect intensity by dramaturgic means is given special consideration. A theory of the formation of affective dispositions and their consequences for empathic responding is based on the analysis of cognitive functions. In this connection, a model of the dispositional override of empathy is featured to shed light on seemingly inappropriate, malicious, if not sadistic, joyous reactions to others' demise. Cognitive functions are further explored in the emotional effect of moral sanction.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

We all know how compellingly a good tale can engross and emotionally stir an audience. We all have experienced being touched and roused by dramatic stories that, upon reflection, we had little cause to construe as veridical accounts of actual happenings. And we all have witnessed others succumb to the same experiences. Oddly, however, many of those who ventured to subject the circumstances of such reactivity to rational analysis responded with bewilderment and came to consider the evocation of emotion by fictional narratives wanting in plausibility.

three basic questions to ask in this field are "What makes audiences react?" and "How or why do they react that way?" and "What larger societal effects does the reaction have?" The second question is more psychological/physiological. I'm more interested in the first and third questions.

Responding to Fictional Events as Though They Were Real

The analyses in question tend to start with exemplars of the unreality of fictional portrayals. Holland (2003), for instance, in the process of pondering why we respond to fictional events as though they were real, relates how he and others cried their hearts out when, during exposure to the motion picture *Love Story*, the college girl Jenny Cavalieri dies of leukemia. He asks himself why he and the others cared, as much as they apparently did, about the plight of a make-believe creature, invented by a writer, played by a healthy actress, recorded by an intrusive camera, and projected onto a screen as a fleeting flicker. The circumstances are undoubtedly artificial in the highest degree, and one should expect that rational beings cannot help becoming cognizant of this artificiality, have a hard time ignoring it, and ultimately be unable to respond as if Jenny were a real person of their acquaintance.

Some time ago, the British writer Coleridge (1817/1960) thought to resolve the irritating recognition of 'fictional unreality' by stipulating a faith requirement for reaching what he called the poetic truth of literary works. Specifically, he asked from his readers a "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment" (p. 169). Given the romantic nature of Coleridge's poetry, the requested suspension of disbelief may well have aided the making of somewhat realistic meaning of his often supernatural settings. In the face of modern cinema, with its high-fidelity representation of emotional circumstances and expressed experiences, however, it rings hollow to expect viewers to intently discard their concerns about 'the unreality of plays of light on the screen,' along with other artificialities, in order to allow emotional reactions to materialize. Fictional films apparently have the capacity to evoke emotions without the stipulated self-deceptive cognitive effort toward the dismissal of artificiality within the presentation. In the absence of evidence that would favor the volitional suspension of disbelief as a necessary condition for emotional reactivity, the persisting broad acceptance of Coleridge's suggestion in many literary circles can only be considered astounding.

Holland (2003) recently attempted to provide firmer grounds for Coleridge's formula. Based on neurological speculations about aesthetic sensation and the conception of beauty (Tooby & Cosmides, 2001), he essentially argues that, as the respondent to fiction is typically confined to a restful sitting position, the brain's highly developed prefrontal cortices are busy inhibiting overt actions and their planning—such planning being what these structures usually do—and that they therefore fail to generate cognizance of the artificiality of the emotion-inducing circumstances. Although it is left unclear why the inhibition of action planning would place greater demands on information processing in the prefrontal structures than would the actual planning and execution of specific plans, it is thus suggested that the necessity of action inhibition renders the prefrontal regions incapable of cautioning us about the fictional nature of presentations, and that we consequently fall prey to the lure of fiction, mistaking it for reality, with the result that our emotions are left to the unchecked powers of archaic brain structures. Holland then extended his reasoning by insinuating a fictional gullibility for children. As their prefrontal cortices are not yet fully developed and the perception of reality is immature, they are seen as yielding readily to the impressions provided by the archaic structures. Moreover, he applied his neural-immaturity model to adulthood, arguing, in accordance with earlier developed psychoanalytical interpretations of his (Holland, 1968), that the consumption of fiction triggers a mental regression to childhood, and that the reality illusion is part and parcel of this regression.

Alternative efforts to elucidate the perplexing illusion of reality in fiction may seem less contrived, but also fail to provide a convincing account of the illusory process (cf. Tan, 1996; Turvey, 1997). The more coherent explanations simply proclaim the existence of a mental faculty for converting the physical stimuli of fiction to mental representations that are unbound

i.o.w. it's not a
conscious
suspension of
disbelief

wow! Is there
evidence that
cinematic fiction has
a more powerful
effect than stage or
literary fiction? this
could be huge in
studying effects of
early cinema.

by reality concerns and that function as the pivotal causal agents for emotions. Carroll (1988, 1990), for instance, argues that the assessment of veridicality is immaterial for the elicitation of emotions. Mental representations or thought constructions are deemed capable of triggering emotions, irrespective of the truth-value of these representations and constructions. Smith (1995a, 1995b, 1997), referring to such mental representations as imaginations, similarly contends that emotion elicitation does not depend upon a commitment to the actuality of events. Carroll and Smith, along with others (e.g., Allen, 1993; Peters, 1989), thus hold that fiction need not be mistaken for reality in order to arouse emotions, and that imaginary processes, once instigated by fiction, are supremely capable of evoking genuine emotions. The epistemic illusion is therefore considered expandable baggage in the explanation of emotion from fiction. Allen (1997) considers this illusion "thoroughly debunked" (p. 79).

Such debunking did not prevent, however, that a new illusion emerged and took center stage in recent fiction theories. The new illusion focuses on fictional absorption as a reality that mediates emotion. Allen (1993, 1997), for example, envisions a 'projective illusion;' that is, an illusion in which respondents succumb to sensory deception by a presentation although, at the onset of exposure, they may have been cognizant of inherent unrealities. The process has come to be known as *experiencing fiction from within*. In this scheme of things, it is 'imagining fiction from the inside' that is expected to produce the variety of emotions that fiction is capable of producing (Smith, 1997; Walton, 1990). Such perception from the inside is also construed as 'central imagining,' in contrast to decentralized perception from the standpoint of no one in particular (Wollheim, 1987). Analogously, perception of this kind has been characterized as 'personal,' in contrast to impersonal (Currie, 1995). Observers unfamiliar with the nomenclature and conceptualizations of this literary discourse may wonder whether 'experiencing fiction from within' is not much the same as what Coleridge must have had in mind when he called for the abandonment of all disbeliefs upon entrance into a fictional world.

Both Currie (1995) and Wollheim (1987) also speak of *simulation* as a process of adopting and sharing the beliefs, dispositions, and experiences of fictional others, this to the point of disconnecting from habitual reactions under less artificial circumstances. Walton (1990) similarly proposes that 'imagination from the inside' involves imagining oneself to be a person other than oneself. These and similar constructions (Gaut, 1999) usually focus on *mimesis* as a process of permeating and taking-on others' mental and bodily traits (Oatley, 1995). They entail essential elements of psychoanalytic reasoning and thus may be viewed as a variant of the Freudian concept of *identification* (Freud, 1921/1964a, 1923/1964b), if not as a renewed embrace of the original concept. In the case of the earlier reported intense emotional reactions to seeing the heroine of *Love Story* suffer and die, emotionality would be interpreted as the result of viewers' deliberate or possibly involuntary imaginary penetration and usurpation of the heroine's experiential state. The fact that this process of 'taking the place of another person' is thought to be contingent upon, as well as concurrent with, the temporary abandonment of self-consciousness, is again reminiscent of Coleridge's implicitly stipulated denial of the prevailing actual, situational reality. One can only wonder how, under these conditions of 'feeling with others from within,' respondents to fiction ever manage to experience emotions as their own.

The problem with these interpretations is that they are chiefly intuitive, at best supported by selective personal experiences and informal observations of others' behavior. Pertinent contributions of contemporary psychology are largely ignored and certainly not meaningfully integrated in the indicated theorizing (Konijn, 1999). As a result, the construction of new rationales often amounts to a rephrasing of earlier expressed ideas in philosophy and fiction scholarship; such as, for instance, Allen's (1993) projective illusion that can be construed as a reformulation of Burch's (1979) notion of being present in, and part of, the fictional environment, the so-called *diegetic effect*.

or more likely, her
boyfriend's state as
he watches her suffer



The proposal that emotions from fiction are mediated by mental processes of sorts is not so much amiss as it is incomplete and vague. The issue is to discern and implicate specific mediating processes and to assemble them into a coherent mechanism of emotion evocation via exposure to fiction. It would seem that, rather than relying on philosophy and pre-empirical psychology, this can be best accomplished by constructing theories in accordance with current evidence from psychological and neuroendocrinological explorations into emotional reactivity. The construction of theories in these terms is consequently attempted in the discourse to follow.

Discounting Apparent Reality: A Reversal of Coleridge's Formula

Fictional narration manifests itself in two distinct semiotic modalities. It is either *iconic*, in which case the stimuli that represent mimic the physical features of the stimuli that are represented; or it is *symbolic*, in which case the relationship between representing and represented stimuli is morphologically arbitrary and representation must be arranged by consent. Symbolic representation typifies conventional, natural languages. Iconic representation, evolutionarily speaking the older one of the two formats, is manifest in copies of the represented, these copies having sufficient resemblance with the represented to identify it without necessitating additional explanation. Cinematic presentations epitomize iconic representation within the visual and auditory perceptual domains. However, iconic representation applies to all forms of sensory means of information conveyance, including olfaction and tactility. Needless to say, fictional presentations liberally combine iconic and symbolic modalities of representation; that is, verbal presentations may feature images, and spoken language typically permeates predominantly iconic presentations.

The fact that representations that are characterized by extreme degrees of iconicity are essentially indistinguishable from the physical stimulus conditions that they represent has momentous implications for emotional reactivity. The reason for this is that, if the *physical reality* is capable of triggering emotional reactions, so should their iconically mediated *apparent reality*. If, for example, an actual encounter with a poisonous snake in striking position strikes fear, so should its encounter in a perfect iconic representation. The argument that respondents to iconic representations would be cognizant of the mediational artificiality, and thus could not respond to it emotionally, at least not as strongly as they would to the represented physical reality, is not necessarily compelling. This, because recent neurophysiological research revealed that substructures of the limbic system, mostly the amygdala, continually monitor the environment for indications of threats and dangers, and that upon their encounter, emotional reactions are triggered before the information is passed on to the neocortex; that is, prior to awareness of the specific emotion-inducing conditions (LeDoux, 1996; LeDoux & Phelps, 2000). It has been demonstrated, moreover, that the amygdala not only signals detected threats, but also estimates their severity and thereby determines the intensity of emotional reactivity. Most important here, any analysis and scrutiny of the presentational or representational status of emotion-inducing stimuli can commence only after autonomic and incipient behavioral reactions have been initiated. In other words, emotional reactions elusive of volitional control, including those associated with sympathetic excitation as the pivotal determinant of emotional intensity, have been set in motion before 'reality' could be discerned as actual or fictional.

The time priority of amygdaloid response mediation over neocortical stimulus evaluation challenges Coleridge's (1817/1960) conception of creating reality from fiction. It would appear that a 'willing suspension of disbelief' is utterly unnecessary for the evocation of emotion via fiction, at least via high-fidelity iconic representations of fictional events. Not only is it unnecessary to get rid of doubts and intently embrace an illusion to experience emotions, but the reverse applies in that *genuine emotions are to be discounted by rising awareness of the*

artificiality of their induction. Iconically represented reality functions as actual reality that may or may not be immediately faulted and degraded as pseudo-reality. The iconic representation of images and sounds of an onrushing wall of water, for instance, thus should stir our emotions as apparent reality, much as their physical reality would, and only upon reflection should we appreciate, perhaps inevitably so, the artificiality of the induction of our emotions. The sequence of events, therefore, is not that cognizance of the pseudo-reality of presentations has to be suppressed before emotions can occur, but that emotions are first induced by apparent reality, which then may be discounted as artificial.

The evocation of emotion via symbolic representations of fictional events is obviously less direct in that apparent realities need to be ideationally constructed. Put simply, symbolic representations, usually conveyed by spoken and written language, have to be translated, through immense associative activity in the neural networks of the neocortex, to mental representations of any kind of presented reality (Damasio, 1994; Lang, 1979, 1984). This activity calls upon experiences that pertain to the symbolic input and thereby personalizes the rendering of its meaning. Via direct connections between amygdala and hippocampus, emotional experiences are afforded long-term storage in the latter structure. The associative pursuit of experiences related to the symbolic input also calls upon this store and activates salient emotional memories. Their activation tends to reinstate, at least in part, the autonomic and somatic manifestations of the focal emotional experiences. Such revival of emotional memories further personalizes the rendering of the input's meaning. However, notwithstanding such seemingly elaborate conversion of symbolic representations to 'apparent reality,' ideational representations, once constructed, should mediate emotions much as the apparent reality of iconic representations. This is to say that symbolic representations of fictional events also induce genuine emotions that, despite their likely higher degree of subjectification than those induced by iconic representations, again may be discounted by rising awareness of the artificiality of their induction.

Irrespective of the semiotic mode of fictional presentations, the autonomic reactivity associated with the emotions that these presentations evoke is largely independent of volition. Behavioral reactivity, in contrast, is subject to volitional control. This control manifests itself in the inhibition of most, if not all, goal-directed responses that would be meaningful if the presented events were to happen in the respondent's actual environment. But inhibition does not extend to all emotion-linked movements that are given meaning by a presentation. In fact, incipient movements, evident in jerks of the body and limbs in correspondence with presented events, may be construed as indicators of genuine emotional action preparedness. In appreciation of the inappropriateness of any prepared actions, however, their execution is quickly suppressed.

This analysis suggests that respondents to fiction are both (a) lost in the apparent reality of presentations, indeed responding to it as if it were real; and (b) cognizant of its artificiality, by inhibiting actions that would be meaningful only within the represented reality. The two states are non-concurrent, however. It is suggested that respondents liberally enter and exit the one or the other state. Fictional presentations abound with indications of artificiality (cf. Tan, 1996), and these indications function as cues that discount apparent reality and demand the inhibition of overt action. It would seem likely, then, that respondents to fiction can be held emotionally captive by apparent reality, but not for any length of time. The opportunity for opting out seems ever present.

i.e. audience is taken out of the moment

On Getting Carried Away in Fictional Environments

The apparent exception to the inhibition rule is the rather common performance of communicative acts, the address of fictional characters in particular. Respondents to fiction are known to talk to these characters as if they were present in the flesh. When sufficiently engaged

emotionally, they routinely warn protagonists of imminent danger and suggest protective action. It has been observed, for instance, that members of the audience of the horror film *Friday the 13th*, when seeing the heroine stalked and cornered by the infamous hockey-masked killer Jason, yelled out to her: "Watch out! Behind you!" and "Take the ax. Hit him! Hit him!" (Zillmann, Weaver, Mundorf, & Aust, 1986). Approval of effective coping was analogously expressed in exclamations like "That's the way!" or "That will show him!" Anybody who ever watched children respond to puppet shows will appreciate that young audiences are particularly expressive in these terms. Scenes of a likable protagonist who is apparently ignorant of the fact that an ill-willed crocodile, lion, or dragon is sneaking up on him, have been used around the world and through the ages to tease children into frantically screaming warnings to their hero, in efforts of saving him. Reactions of this kind have been observed in children as young as four years of age (Zillmann & Bryant, 1975). Children seem to be truly lost, if only for the moment, in the apparent reality of fiction. However, a sensitivity to discounting cues, enabling them to elude the spell of such reality, is bound to develop and mature soon enough.

The sketched communicative actions by respondents to fiction (actually, to nonfiction as well) have been used to challenge the broadly used Freudian concept of *identification* (Freud, 1921/1964a, 1923/1964b). A detailed account of this challenge may be found elsewhere (Zillmann, 1995). Suffice it here to focus on identification in the context of fiction and its implications for emotional reactivity.

Freud (1905–1906/1987) addressed this limited issue most directly in a treatise on stage play. The play is thought to create a pseudo-world that allows the spectator, characterized as "a poor soul to whom nothing of importance seems to happen, who some time ago had to moderate or abandon his ambition to take center stage in matters of significance, and who longs to feel and to act and to arrange things according to his desires" (pp. 656–657), to attain the fulfillment of his thwarted wishes. Following Freud, the spectator "wants to be a hero, if only for a limited time, and playwrights and actors make it possible for him through *identification* with a hero" (p. 657).

The noted film director Martin Scorsese, in televised commercials promoting motion-picture entertainment, expressed the broad generalization of this conception most succinctly in pointing to the wealth of intriguing fictional characters and proclaiming to the audience that, as you watch the films, "You are them!" Identification, then, is taken to mean that respondents to fictional drama experience other beings 'from the inside,' thinking and feeling as though they were them.

The usefulness of this conceptualization has been severely challenged by both Tan (1995, 1996) and Zillmann (1995). This challenge is in large measure based on the already indicated communicative behavior that respondents to fiction direct at its characters. Such behavior does not suggest that respondents, if only for the moment, believe to perform actions in a fictional character's stead or to exist as a particular character of a play. Instead, this communicative behavior compellingly reveals that emotionally engaged respondents are *witnesses* to the events before them. As these events define 'apparent reality,' the respondents may be accused of having succumbed to the illusion of being party to depicted happenings in the sense of being present as a witness. This conception may be considered a form of the earlier mentioned *diegetic effect* (Burch, 1979; Tan, 1996) that manifests itself in the illusion of being present in, and therefore part of, the fictional environment.

Taking a witness perspective to fiction removes the mysticism connected with the idea of 'becoming one with another being,' in one form or another, from the discourse about induced emotions. It does not remove concepts such as emulation, however. In fact, the desire to want to be like some others, to assume their features and habits, is now understood as a consequence of the emotional reactivity of witnesses, especially of their sympathetic feelings toward particular characters.

It should be noticed that, in dealing with fiction and emotional reactivity, the witness perspective is entirely compatible with the paradigm of *parasocial interaction* (Horton & Strauss, 1957; Horton & Wohl, 1956). This paradigm addresses the formation of dispositions of sympathy or antipathy toward repeatedly observed fictional characters in television programs, such as soap operas or situation comedies. Ample evidence has been aggregated that characters are eventually treated, including being talked to, as if they were actual friends or enemies (e.g., Fabian, 1993; Gleich & Burst, 1996; Isotalus, 1995; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Clearly, this paradigm manifests the witness perspective and entails a denial of identification (Giles, 2002). Equally clear is that parasocial interaction is not limited to the repetitive and prolonged encounter of characters in fiction, but also applies to the limited encounter of characters during the course of a single play.

The following analysis of emotional reactivity to fiction is cast entirely within the witness perspective and should give evidence of its epistemic efficacy.

EXCITATORY PROCESSES IN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

The dynamics of emotion that govern responses to actual situations, to their iconic or symbolic representation, and to the presentation of fictional events may be much the same. There is research evidence, in fact, that demonstrates considerable commonality in the mediation of affect by these different formats (Zillmann, 2000a; Zillmann & Knobloch, 2001). However, one principal condition exists that sets cinematic storytelling apart from alternative means of relating chains of events, and this condition proves to be pivotal in considering the creation and modification of emotional reactions. The condition in question is simply that cinematic narrative invariably compresses the time course of the happenings that make up a story and then, in delivering the story, imposes continuance of reception in real time (Bordwell, 1985; Branigan, 1992; Carroll, 1990; Tan, 1996).

Consequences of Continuance of Information Uptake

Emotions evoked in actuality by personal success or failure are usually allowed to run their course. A person, after achieving an important goal, may be ecstatic for minutes and jubilant for hours. Alternatively, a grievous experience may foster despair or sadness that similarly persists for comparatively long periods of time. Mostly for physiological reasons, but also as a result of reflection, emotions are not momentary experiences. But cinematic narrative treats them as if they were. As a rule rather than the exception, featured events that instigate emotions are followed by the presentation of other events long before all relevant aspects of the instigated emotions have subsided. Such compression of emotional and nonemotional events has, as we will see, intriguing implications for emotional experience.

It should be noted at this point that the compression of events in cinematic narrative does not necessarily extend to fiction generally. Written prose allows readers to pause when emotionally stirred and to continue reading only after recovery. All presentational formats that permit the pacing of information uptake afford recipients a degree of control over their affective responding. All formats that dictate the pace of uptake, whether concerning fiction or nonfiction, do not; or they do so in a most limited way. It is conceivable, for instance, that cinematic presentations are occasionally halted when viewers are unduly distressed by featured events, and that exposure is continued later as composure is regained. Readers of prose may similarly violate presumed pacing norms by continuing to read despite being emotionally agitated from

exposure to immediately preceding text. In case such uninterrupted, continuous reading occurs, the contiguity of emotion instigation approximates that of formats imposing continuance of reception. It is by no means identical, however, as prose cannot present episodic occurrences in real time. Such discrepancies in continuous reception notwithstanding, the cinematically imposed continuous information uptake in real time, as well as the occasionally self-imposed undisrupted information uptake by avid readers of prose, entails unique means of evoking and escalating emotional experience. The paradigm that addresses these means focuses on the transfer of excitation from an initial emotional reaction to subsequent ones, primarily to the immediately following reaction.

Excitation Transfer in the Experience of Emotion

Cognitive activity does not sufficiently define emotional experience. It is generally thought that emotions entail a stirring, rousing, and driving component. This component of the emotions has been labeled arousal or excitation, and it has been conceived of in bodily terms. Two-factor theories have suggested an interaction between cognition and arousal, with cognition determining emotions in kind and arousal their experiential intensity and behavioral urgency (Hebb, 1955; Schachter, 1964). This conception has been elaborated in a three-factor theory that more fully accounts for the mostly involuntary evocation of excitatory activities as well as for their waxing and waning over time (Zillmann, 1978, 1983).

Three-factor theory distinguishes between dispositional, excitatory, and experiential components of emotion. Both the dispositional and excitatory components integrate reflexive response tendencies with reactions acquired through learning, whereas the experiential component involves cognition in the service of behavioral guidance and response correction. Basic emotions, such as specific fears and aggressive impulses, often defy rationality and are not instigated by reflection. Excitation associated with these emotions is obviously not controlled by contemplation either. Rather archaic mechanisms mediate these reactions, whether they are made in response to actual situations or to their iconic representations. However, cognitive elaboration can function as a corrective, and diminish and shortcut emotions that are recognized as inappropriate and groundless. It also can exacerbate and even initiate emotions by fostering comprehension and evaluation of relevant circumstances.

This brings us to emotional misreactions that are not recognized as such, misreactions that are regularly and often deliberately created in cinematic presentations. On the well-founded premise that cognitive adaptation to stimulus change is rapid and quasi-instantaneous, whereas excitatory adaptation is sluggish and time-consuming, it can be expected that persons will quickly switch cognitively from situation to situation, while excitation instigated by a first situation will persist through a second one and possibly through yet others (Zillmann, 1996a). It is established beyond doubt that excitation, once triggered, decays rather slowly. For all practical purposes, it takes at least three minutes, often ten or more minutes, on occasion hours for excitation to return to normal levels. This is for reasons of humoral mediation. Specifically, excitatory reactions are instigated by the release of adrenal hormones (the catecholamines epinephrine, norepinephrine, and dopamine, in particular) and, to a lesser degree, of gonadal steroids (mostly testosterone) into systemic circulation that persists until these agents are metabolized (Zillmann & Zillmann, 1996). Excitation in response to particular stimuli, then, is bound to enter into subsequent experiences. In case of contiguously placed discrete emotions, residual excitation from the first thus will intensify the immediately subsequent emotion, regardless of taxonomical differences in these emotions. Moreover, depending on the strength of the initial excitatory reaction and the time separation of emotions elicited at later times, residual excitation may intensify experiences further down the line. This is the principle of excitation transfer.

Before considering the effects of the cinematic chunking of emotion-inducing episodes, let us take a look at common experiences of emotional overreaction in situations of rapid cognitive but sluggish excitatory adjustment to changing conditions. Let us imagine, for a moment, a lady who steps on a snake in the grass of her backyard. Deep-rooted survival mechanisms, organized in the brain's limbic system (LeDoux, 1996; LeDoux & Phelps, 2000), will be activated and make her jump back and possibly scream. Following this initial reaction, she might find the time to construe her emotional behavior as fear and panic. She might also notice herself shaking and thus realize that she is greatly excited. Let us imagine further that, upon looking once more at the object of her terror, she recognizes that the snake is a rubber dummy, in all probability planted by her mischievous son who rushes onto the scene, laughing his head off. This recognition, a result of instant cognitive adjustment to changing circumstances, proves her initial emotion of fear groundless and invites a new interpretation of her experiential state. If she is annoyed with her son for giving her such a scare, she is likely to become infuriated. But after fully comprehending the prank, she might consider being angry inappropriate and cognitively adjust once more, this time joining in his laughter and appraising her experience as amusement. Throughout this cognitive switching from experiential state to state, the excitatory reaction to the detected danger in the grass persisted to varying degrees. It initially determined the intensity of the fear reaction. The residual excitation from this reaction then intensified the emotion of anger and the experience of amusement. Had the lady acted out her anger, she would have overreacted in punishing her son. But transfer-intensified reacting might also have expressed itself in fits of laughter bordering on the hysterical.

Emotional overreactions of this sort are commonplace. At one time or another, everybody seems to have experienced the extraordinary intensity of frustration after rousing efforts, of joy upon the sudden resolution of nagging annoyances, of gaiety after unfounded apprehensions, or for that matter, of sexual pleasures in making up after acute conflict (Zillmann, 1998a). Irrespective of personal experiences, however, ample research evidence exists that shows the transfer intensification of all so-called active emotions (i.e., emotions associated with increased levels of excitation), of their experiential states as well as of their behavioral manifestations (Zillmann, 1983, 1996a). It has been demonstrated experimentally, for instance, that residual excitation from sexual excitement can intensify anger and aggressive behavior, but also altruistic feelings and supportive actions. Moreover, residual excitation from either sexual excitement or disgust has been found to facilitate such diverse emotional experiences as the enjoyment of music, the appreciation of humor, and feelings of sadness. Residues from feelings of sadness and fear, in turn, have been found to intensify joyous reactions to fortuitous happenings. Frustration has been observed to intensify euphoric as well as angry subsequent feelings. Even nonemotionally induced, hedonically neutral excitation was found to transfer into subsequent states. Specifically, it has been demonstrated that residual excitation from strenuous physical exercise can enhance feelings of anger and aggressive behavior, intensify sexual arousal, promote help-giving, elicit feelings of grandiosity and elation, foster favorable reactions to advertisements, and facilitate sexual attraction.

In summary, then, residual excitation from essentially any excited emotional reaction is capable of intensifying any other excited emotional reaction. The degree of intensification depends, of course, on the magnitude of residues prevailing at the time. Figure 13.1 presents this paradigm of the intensification of contiguous emotions in graphic form.



Transfer in the Experience of Emotions From Cinematic Narration

In the empirical exploration of the enjoyment of cinematic presentations, the excitation-transfer paradigm has been employed, primarily, to explain the suspense paradox. Why is it that

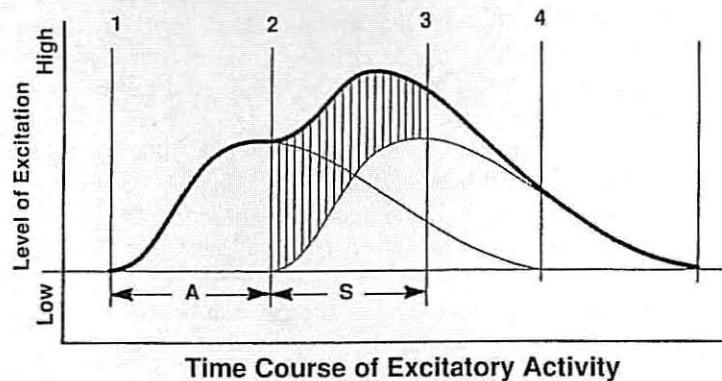


FIG. 13.1. A model of excitation transfer in which residual excitation from a preceding excitatory reaction combines additively with the excitatory reaction to current stimulation. An antecedent stimulus condition (A), persisting from time 1 to time 2, is assumed to produce excitatory activity that has entirely decayed only at time 4. Similarly, a subsequent stimulus condition (S), persisting from time 2 to time 3, is assumed to produce excitatory activity that has entirely decayed only at time 5. Residual excitation from condition A and excitation specific to condition S combine from time 2 to time 4. The extent to which the transfer of residues from condition A increases the excitatory activity associated with condition S is shown in the shaded area.

emotional distress from witnessing protagonists in peril can be converted to joy upon suspense resolution? Moreover, how can it be that greater initial distress fosters more joy in the end (Carroll, 1990; Vorderer & Knobloch, 2000; Zillmann, 1980)? Research with both children and adults has firmly established this long presumed relationship (cf. Zillmann, 1996b). Excitation transfer is its explanation. Specifically, the distressing experience of suspense is arousing, and residues of this arousal linger through resolution and intensify the experience of relief and euphoria. Again, cognitive adjustment to the changed circumstances featured in the resolution is rapid, whereas excitatory adjustment is drawn out. The more intense the suspense-induced distress, the greater the excitatory residues that come to energize joyous reactions to the satisfying outcomes of the resolution.

The transfer logic is perhaps best illustrated by narratives that present seemingly doomed protagonists who struggle against hostile environments and who merely manage to survive. There may be little heroism, if any, in this getting away with dear life. The resolution thus offers little to celebrate and to be jubilant about. Such minimal-heroism resolution can be intensely enjoyed, however, when appropriately preceded by empathic torment. This overreaction to minimal heroism is simply more obtrusive than that triggered by resolutions featuring great heroic accomplishments. In neither case, however, can the euphoric reaction be considered the result of experienced relief, because the reaction is not contingent upon a sharp decline in excitedness but, if anything, hinges on a boost of excitation.

Another narrative domain that has received some attention in these terms is tragedy (de Wied, Zillmann, & Ordman, 1995; Zillmann, 1998b). It has been observed that highly empathic persons are more distressed by exposure to dramatized tragic happenings than are their less empathic counterparts, and that the former group literally sheds more tears about these happenings than does the latter group. The resolution again offers little that might be celebrated. But those who are particularly distressed by the tragic events take whatever redeeming value there may be in the resolution as a cue for contentment, experience such feelings more intently because of excitatory residues, and report greater enjoyment of tragic drama overall.

Other research has shown the transfer intensification of humor (Zillmann, 2000b). The concept of comic relief obviously focuses on relief. Its cinematic form may well serve this

e.g. passive characters in *Pianist* or *War of the Worlds*

purpose in preventing excessive distress on occasion (King Jablonski & Zillmann, 1995; Zillmann, Gibson, Ordman, & Aust, 1994). But the concept can also be construed as one that maximizes mirth in response to comic situations. Comic material may be mediocre, but is bound to produce strong reactions after tense, arousing scenes. These arousal-enhanced reactions of amusement, especially when overtly expressed in laughter, may have a cumulative effect and result in assessments of greater enjoyment of drama that provides frequent opportunities for comic relief.

Toward a Dramaturgy for the Transfer Facilitation of Emotions

can this be applied
to the stage?
Why or why not?

Much research on the transfer-facilitation of emotions has been conducted independent of cinematic considerations (cf. Zillmann, 1979, 1996a, 1998a). Nonetheless, most demonstrations, such as that residual arousal from distress can facilitate subsequent sexual excitement or that excitatory residues from fear can intensify feelings of sympathy and support, are directly applicable to cinematic dramaturgy. Scenes can be aggregated in ways that maximize emotional reactivity to some and minimize it to others. For instance, arousing violence preceding the display of sexual behavior will intensify reactions to the sexual scenes, and arousing distressing torture will energize jubilation and applause to the punitive brutalization of the torturer. Transfer theory projects such facilitation for all scene-evoked affective reactions, provided that the afore-placed scenes produce arousal and that residues of the arousal outlast these scenes.

In developing a dramaturgy of excitation transfer more formally, the following propositions can be expressed;

- (a) Arousing scenes from which excitatory residues are to be transferred into subsequent scenes must terminate before appreciable dissipation of excitation can manifest itself. Ideally, arousing scenes conclude with arousal at a maximum;
- (b) The intensification of affect in response to subsequent scenes is a function of the magnitude of excitation elicited by these scenes plus that of residual excitation from preceding scenes;
- (c) Affect facilitation is stronger, the more immediate the placement of subsequent scenes;
- (d) Affect facilitation is stronger, the less drawn out the subsequent scenes;
- (e) In case both antecedent and subsequent scenes are strongly arousing, affect facilitation can escalate. The escalation is limited, however, by experiential maxima for excitation. A law of initial values specifies that excitatory contributions from arousing scenes are inversely proportional to the height of prevailing levels of arousal (Wilder, 1957). In other words, as experienced arousal levels increase, successively less excitation from arousing scenes can be added. The law thus renders the aggregation of highly arousing scenes comparatively inefficient for transfer;
- (f) The facilitation of affect in response to scenes that are separated from preceding arousing scenes by unarousing scenes is stronger the shorter the time of the separating scenes. Facilitation terminates, of course, with the complete dissipation of residual excitation; and
- (g) The facilitation of affect in response to subsequent scenes is prevented by delaying their placement until excitatory residues from preceding scenes have completely dissipated.

Figure 13.2 presents principal transfer situations in simplified graphic form.

Excitation Transfer from Antecedent to Subsequent Scenes

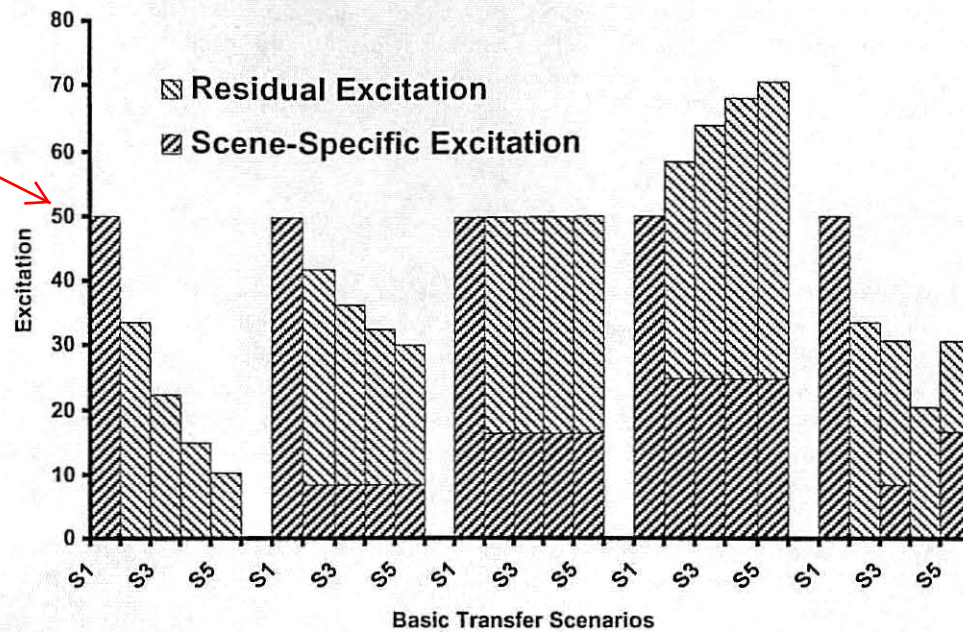


FIG. 13.2. Principal forms of the intensification of emotional reactions to a sequence of scenes as a function of excitatory residues from an immediately preceding arousing scene. Detailed explanation may be found in the text.

The first schema, at the far left, shows an extremely arousing scene (S1) followed by four unarousing scenes (S2-S5). Residual excitation is presumed to dissipate by one third from scene to scene. As can be seen, reactions to S2, whatever its contents, will be highly emotional despite the fact that this scene does not contribute arousal. Transfer intensification is successively weaker for the subsequent scenes.

The second schema indicates transfer under the same conditions, except that S2-S5 are now presumed to contribute minor degrees of arousal (one sixth of S1). These contributions, as can be seen, retain excitation at comparatively high levels for S2-S5. The logic is that of compounded interest. S2 combines excitation from its stimuli with residues from S1. S3 also combines excitation from its stimuli with residues from its antecedent, S2; the S2 residues, however, combine those of S1 and S2. All later scenes analogously benefit from the combined residues of their antecedents.

In the third schema, S2-S5 are presumed to supplement the amount of excitation, one third, that is lost to decay. As shown, high levels of excitation can be maintained by such supplementation.

The fourth schema displays excitatory escalation for subsequent scenes by making them contribute half the excitation of S1, the extremely arousing initial scene. As can be seen, the escalation is negatively accelerated, leveling out eventually (as the result of the law of initial values).

The last schema, at the far right, illustrates excitation transfer in an arbitrarily varied situation. S2 and S4 are presumed to be unarousing, S3 to be mildly arousing (one sixth of S1), and S5 to be moderately arousing (one third of S1). The schema indicates that intermixed nonarousing scenes can be made to appear considerably arousing and that the occasional usage of mildly and moderately arousing scenes can maintain excitation and therefore affect intensity at comparatively high levels.

Strategies for the creation of scene compositions with optimal emotional effects can be constructed by applying propositions (a) through (g). Such strategies are also apparent from inspection of the schemata presented in Figure 13.2.

Our analysis of arousing events in cinematic presentations focused on narration. There is no question, however, that numerous non-textual cinematic techniques exist that are capable of generating excitation. A discussion of these techniques and their possible effects on emotion has been provided by Tan (1996). It should suffice here to point out that, to the extent that the indicated techniques produce arousal independent of connected narrational scenes, their contribution to the intensity of evoked emotions would be in accord with expectations based on excitation-transfer theory.

COGNITIVE PROCESSES IN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

The primary function of cognition is, of course, to provide guidance for our interaction with the physical and social environment. Largely mediated by activity in the prefrontal cortices, cognition mediates the appraisal of conditions that impact our own welfare, and it projects courses of action to get us what we need and to bypass what would harm us. In so doing, it assesses the effectiveness of our efforts and, if need be, corrects their direction.

All this must seem irrelevant for the consideration of emotional reactivity to fiction. Respondents, partaking in an apparent environment as witnesses, need not respond in the indicated manner. But, although their cognitive apparatus does not serve the preparation of overt action in an environment that can be altered by such action, this apparatus is actively preparing the respondents for meaningful interaction, much as if such interaction was imminent. Some of these preparations may be reflexive and not require cognitive elaboration. Moving the head out of the way of an apparently rapidly approaching object would be a case in point. Less obvious are the necessary elaborations in the formation of emotional dispositions. Although the respondents to fiction shall never meet the cast of characters, cognition nonetheless prepares them for interacting with them. As suggested by the already discussed parasocial-interaction model, respondents come to like or dislike fictional characters and then treat them as if they were real friends or enemies. Characters in a play analogously become friend- or enemy-like to varying degrees. This formation of affective dispositions, along with its consequences for emotional reactivity, will now be considered in greater detail. Specifically, we will explore its dependence on the continual monitoring of the characters' behavior, along with the moral assessment of this behavior. However, we shall first give some attention to the more direct ways of instigating emotions by exposure to apparent environments.

Emotions From Monitoring Apparent Environments

Evolutionary psychology has emphasized the fight-flight reaction (Cannon, 1932; MacLean, 1990). Individuals are thought to continually monitor their environment for danger and to respond with attack or escape when detecting it. A burst of energy is needed to respond in such fashion, and the immediate instigation of sympathetic excitation serves this purpose. The emotions of anger and fear, then, are energized in preparation for action. Such action is obviously not called for when responding to cinematic representations of danger. However, because these reactions are organized in archaic brain structures, the amygdala in particular, cinematic scenes of danger, in defiance of rationality, still trigger excitatory reactions (cf. LeDoux, 1996; Zillmann, 1998c, 2003).

in 1903,
audiences of
Great Train
Robbery
supposedly
ducked at
gunshot to
camera

this expands on
how excitation is
generated

The fight-flight dichotomy was eventually expanded to a response trichotomy that includes sexual preparedness. Sexuality, serving the preservation of the species rather than self-preservation, is similarly deep-rooted evolutionarily. Sexual activity, organized in the septum, also requires energy for bouts of exertion, and this energy is likewise provided by sympathetic excitation. As in the case of danger, the cinematic presentation of others' sexual opportunities and actions still elicits sexual excitedness, notwithstanding the fact that sexual targets for consummatory behavior are not immediately available (Zillmann, 1986).

Iconic representations of danger and sexual opportunities, then, may be considered basic stimulus conditions that reliably arouse and that, because of it, will foster responses that are construed as affective experiences or emotions. It would seem to be a grave error, however, to consider displays of perilous happenings and of erotic enticements the only, or even the primary, conditions for the creation of excitation and emotions. Cinematic narratives invariably involve, and are built around, people and other animated entities. Floods, quakes, and fires, but also poisonous snakes, snarling leopards, and murderous villains, threaten others; that is, they threaten the narratives' main cast of characters. On occasion, these threats are visually presented as if they were about to victimize the viewer personally (cf. Smith, 1997). But even when presented in this manner, they still only supplement the display of others in peril. For instance, an avalanche presented as rushing at the viewers, or a snarling dog presented as snapping at them, may prove arousing because they more closely than alternative presentations replicate the stimulus conditions of being personally threatened. Such displays thus may be used to create arousal. But they also may serve to provide viewers with a better appreciation of the dangers facing those who are seen coping with them.

But cinematic narratives undoubtedly evoke emotions primarily by featuring others' confrontation with threatening conditions and fortuitous circumstances, as well as by displaying these others' reactions, including emotional ones, to their demise or to their enrichment as such outcomes materialize. Unless the narrative is interactive and makes respondents active participants in its flow (Grodal, 2000; Vorderer, 2000), they remain mere witnesses to the fate of others (Tan, 1995; Zillmann, 1995). Given that, spectators to fictional narratives respond nonetheless with emotions, at times with emotions of extreme intensity, to the fortunes and misfortunes they see others enjoy or suffer. In order to explain such strong emotional involvement with others and their fate, the concept of **empathy** has been invoked and employed to good effect.

i.e. seeing a stimulus with the camera as direct eyes of the audience often doesn't work as well as simply witnessing character reactions to the

Empathic Evocation of Emotion

Empathy can be construed as an archaic mechanism that, through the millennia, served emotional contagion and the coordination of action (Buck & Ginsburg, 1997; Hoffman, 1978, 1987; Plutchik, 1987; see also Zillmann, this volume, Chapter 10). It ultimately served the preservation of individuals and their species. In a group's confrontation with danger, for instance, it undoubtedly was adaptive to get jointly excited and thus prepared for vigorous action. The contagious effect of one individual's expression of fear could instantly permeate the group, readying all for flight, or, the expression of anger and assertive behavior could instantly foster preparedness for concerted resistance and attack.

The conditions of life in contemporary times have, of course, deprived empathy of much of such utility. However, as a mechanism of excitatory contagion, empathy has been retained in the paleomammalian structures of the brain (MacLean, 1967). If this were not the case, it would be difficult to explain, for instance, why observers experience distress when seeing a construction worker fall off the scaffolding and hit the ground, cringing in pain; or for that matter, when watching a movie that shows the protagonist cling with his fingertips to a cliff, apparently about to fall to his death.

Common observation and research evidence (e.g., Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Stotland, 1969) leave no doubt about the fact that people, in responding to the emotions displayed by others in actual situations or in fictional presentations, tend to experience emotions that are hedonically similar to those witnessed and that often have considerable depth. Some time ago, Adam Smith (1759/1971), in connection with his theory of moral sentiments, recognized the lack of ulterior benefits from such emotional investment. In his words:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it (p. 1).

Empathy with others' experience and expression of emotion is by no means a necessary response, however. There obviously exist circumstances under which empathic sensitivities diminish or are entirely abandoned and overpowered by alternative response mechanisms. Under these circumstances, those who witness others' misfortunes are free to take pleasure in these others' demise. The circumstances in question have been well understood since antiquity.

Regarding dramatic narratives, Aristotle articulated them succinctly, although in negative form (Aristotle, ca 330 BCE/1966). Specifically, he found fault with two principal narrative transitions, deeming them utterly unenjoyable. In his *Poetica* he stipulated that:

1. a good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery; or
2. a bad man from misery to happiness.

By implication, he recommended as joy-producing plots those that feature (1) a good person passing from misery to happiness, or (2) a bad person from happiness to misery. Whether presented in negative or positive form, however, the propositions concerning negatively judged persons indicate the absence of empathic reactions to the projected outcome. Apparently, only good characters warrant empathic concerns. Bad characters do not. Bad characters' joy from coming to glory cannot be affectively shared. Their joy may prove distressing, instead. Analogously, their pains from coming to harm are not to be shared. Those who witness the demise of bad characters can freely applaud it, instead.

Aristotle thought it self-evident that the narrative transitions on which he had focused could not foster joy. He simply stated that these transitions would be odious. In discussing tragic plots, however, he articulated his reasons for projecting reactions of displeasure and vexation. Aristotle specifically implicated moral judgment with the mediation of reactions of joy versus revulsion to the resolution of various forms of dramatic narrative. He essentially argued that persons pursuing good causes (i.e., consensually approved causes) are considered good people, and that good people are judged deserving of good fortunes. Analogously, persons pursuing bad causes (i.e., consensually condemned causes) are bad people, and bad people are judged deserving of bad fortunes; or, at the very least, undeserving of good fortunes. Outcomes in accord with moral considerations thus can be enjoyed. In contrast, outcomes that violate moral considerations are those thought to squelch enjoyment and to foster irritation and contempt, instead.

One is inclined, therefore, to expand on Smith's reflections about empathy and complete his thought by considering the abandonment of empathy, transitory as this abandonment may be.

There are evidently some principles in human nature that make individuals take an interest in the fortunes of others and that, in case good fortunes are judged unwarranted and bad fortunes are deemed just and called for, render these others' demise necessary, although onlookers derive nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.

Considerations of morality have assumed a central position in drama theory ever since (e.g., Bordwell, 1985; Carroll, 1990; Tan, 1996), and in the form of moral sanctions they have entered into the contemporary psychology of drama appreciation as well (Jose & Brewer, 1984; Zillmann & Bryant, 1975). In particular, moral assessments have become an integral, pivotal part of the disposition theory of emotion that has been employed to explain the enjoyment of drama in subordinate plots as well as in major, overarching plots (Zillmann, 2000a).

Dispositional Mediation of Emotion

The indicated intertwined operation of moral judgment and emotional disposition is outlined in Figure 13.3. Witnessed behavior, as can be seen, is assessed in moral terms (i.e., good vs. bad, to varying degrees), and such assessment is expected to determine emotional dispositions. The approval of actions and their apparent purpose is thought to prompt dispositions of liking and caring. Their disapproval, in contrast, is thought to prompt dispositions of disliking and resenting. Liking defines protagonists, disliking antagonists. Character development thus is considered a function of moral evaluation. Without such evaluation, dispositions of indifference would prevail, and witnesses to social happenings would show little emotional involvement, if any. Witnesses to socially relevant events in cinematic narratives may be thought of as untiring moral monitors. Their continually rendered verdicts are bound to yield the approval of the conduct and the resultant adoration of some characters, and the disapproval of the conduct and the resultant detestation of others. The interdependence between moral assessment and emotional disposition is further apparent in loop c of the figure, which indicates the possibility of feedback from disposition to judgment. It has been observed that liking invites overly favorable, forgiving assessments, whereas disliking biases in the opposite direction.

Emotional dispositions, once firmly established, are thought to foster anticipatory emotions. These anticipatory emotions are either positive or negative, their hedonic valence reversing as a function of morally determined dispositions. As the figure shows, positive dispositions foster hopes for positive, rewarding happenings along with fears about negative, punitive ones. Negative dispositions foster the opposite hopes and fears. If and when the hoped for or feared events materialize, the evoked emotions will be in accord with anticipations. Specifically, hoped for and morally sanctioned outcomes (i.e., rewarding events for protagonists and punitive events for antagonists) will foster euphoric, joyous reactions, whereas feared and morally unwarranted outcomes (i.e., rewarding events for antagonists and punitive events for protagonists) will prompt reactions of dysphoria, discontent, disappointment, and contempt.

Positive emotional dispositions are known to foster hedonically compatible reactions to events that evoke emotions in witnessed persons. Negative emotional dispositions, in contrast, are those that relax and overwhelm empathic inclinations, and that enable witnesses to rejoice in response to others' misfortune and agony. Negative dispositions also get in the way of empathizing with gratified others who are deemed undeserving of such fortune. In fact, the perception of undeserved gratification can stir intense emotions of righteous indignation. Anti- or counter-empathic emotional reactions of this kind are obviously the result of moral considerations. Villains are to get their just deserts, and concerns about their welfare would amount to misinvested efforts at emotion control. Villains, moreover, are simply not entitled to good fortunes. Oddly, then, it is morality that liberates observers, allowing them to take pleasure from the punitive torment of others who are judged deserving of such fate. But it is morality also that fosters infuriation and indignation upon witnessing the benefaction of those who are deemed utterly undeserving of being rewarded.

These considerations lead to the following predictions of euphoric and dysphoric emotions in response to the resolution of dramatic conflict in cinematic narratives. The classification

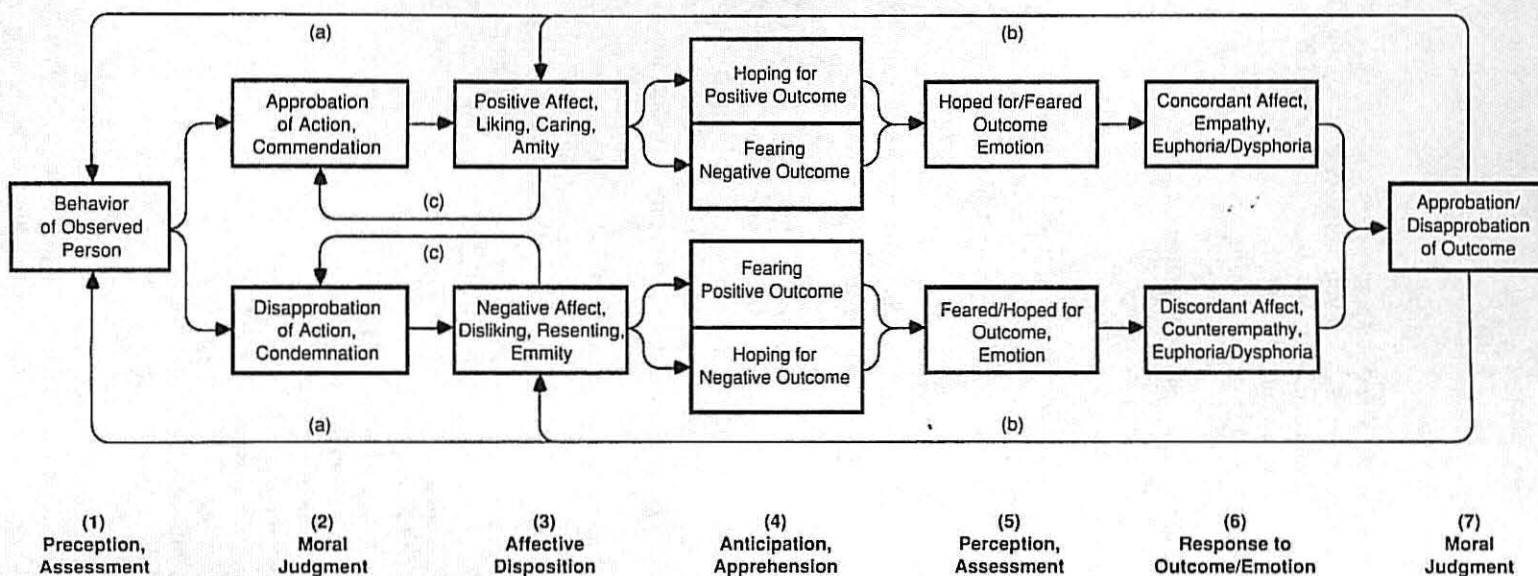


FIG. 13.3. A model of the dispositional mediation of emotion from witnessing the actions and contingent emotional experiences of others. Stages 2 and 7 indicate the involvement of moral considerations in the formation of emotional dispositions, and stages 3 and 4 the resulting emotional dispositions and their influence on anticipatory emotions. Stages 5 and 6 specify emotional reactions to pertinent outcomes, such as gratification or aversion, and to their expressive consequences, such as elation or distress. Feedback loop *c* indicates the influence of formed dispositions on moral judgment, such as amity fostering tolerance and enmity fostering strictness. Loop *b* suggests a similar influence of witnessed outcomes through their impact on dispositions. Loop *a* indicates that the process described in stages 1 through 7 is recursive and can be chained to arbitrary length (i.e., short dramatic plots can be chained within overarching dramatic plots).

in moral terms is to highlight the significance of moral assessments in the mediation of the emotions of witnesses.

Conditions of Justice

1. Witnessing the victimization of a disliked antagonist at the hands of a liked protagonist fosters delight, the experiential intensity of which increases with (a) the liking of the protagonist; (b) the disliking of the antagonist; and (c) the extent to which the antagonist is deemed deserving of a particular victimization.
2. Witnessing the benefaction of a liked protagonist fosters delight, the experiential intensity of which increases with (a) the liking of the protagonist; and (b) the extent to which the protagonist is deemed deserving of a particular benefaction.

Conditions of Injustice

3. Witnessing the victimization of a liked protagonist at the hands of a disliked antagonist fosters repugnance, the experiential intensity of which increases with (a) the liking of the protagonist; (b) the disliking of the antagonist; and (c) the extent to which the protagonist is deemed undeserving of a particular victimization.
4. Witnessing the benefaction of a disliked antagonist fosters repugnance, the experiential intensity of which increases with (a) the disliking of the antagonist; and (b) the extent to which the antagonist is deemed undeserving of a particular benefaction.

Support for these predictions comes from research on the enjoyment of a variety of dramatic formats (Zillmann, 1996b; Zillmann & Knobloch, 2001; Zillmann & Paulus, 1993). It comes, obviously, from the exploration of drama proper, but also from the exploration of specific genres (such as suspenseful narrative or comedy) and genre-like nonfictional exposition (such as sports and the news). Suffice it here to exemplify the outlined moral-dispositional mechanisms with two selected investigations.

The most direct demonstrations of the power of moral judgment in the mediation of emotion in response to others' emotion come from empathy research (Wilson, Cantor, Gordon, & Zillmann, 1986; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). School children were exposed to specially produced films in which either a loved or a hated character was developed, and in which this character was either victimized or benefited during resolution. His victimization showed him in excruciating pain, his benefaction in extreme joy. The children's facial reactions to these final scenes were unobtrusively recorded and then scrutinized. The findings were entirely in line with the specifications of stages 5 and 6 of Fig. 3. Respondents empathically cringed when the beloved character was in pain, and they exhibited joy when he was euphoric. They responded counter-empathically, however, to the behavioral displays of the resented character. They cringed when he jumped for joy, and they expressed pleasure when he was hurt. In the latter condition, he apparently got what he deserved; in the former, the outcome was unjust and hence annoying and detestable.

A parallel investigation with mentally challenged children demonstrated that, when the capacity for moral judgment at the level of equitable retribution is not developed, empathy becomes mechanical. In particular, counter-empathic reactivity does not materialize. Such mentally challenged children invariably expressed joy in response to witnessed joy, and they invariably expressed distress in response to witnessed distress. Whether the witnessed emotions were exhibited by a beloved or by a resented character was immaterial.

This latter investigation shows compellingly that empathy functions as a basic default mechanism that, if not opposed and overpowered by affective dispositions that derive from

assessments of deservingness, governs emotional reactivity to the observed fate of others. The condemnation of others' conduct and the resulting disliking, then, are indeed prerequisite to joy over their demise as well as to distress over their good fortunes.

Moral Sanction of Resolutions to Dramatic Conflict

In dramatic narratives, plots are known to dwell on hostile confrontation and conflict. Conflict is almost always resolved, however, usually promptly so. Both in minor plots (i.e., minor in terms of duration) and in major plots (i.e., those that span large portions of narratives, if not their entirety), the parties in conflict are disengaged in ways that are more fortuitous to one party than to others. Resolution may simply consist of the cessation of hostility or endangerment. More likely, it entails glorious victory for one party and humiliating defeat for another. In emotional terms, resolutions provide at the very least relief from empathic distress. More characteristically, however, fully embellished resolutions, especially those overarching a narrative, evoke emotions of considerable intensity. Depending on dispositions toward the victorious and defeated parties, respondents will experience happiness or sadness; or at least, emotions with affinity to these experiences. But dispositions are not the only factor that influences emotions in response to resolutions. Resolutions must be sanctioned morally to have their intended effect on emotion. Feelings of joy in response to a protagonist's triumph can be spoiled by his or her actions that are deemed inappropriate, if not deplorable. Analogously, feelings of sadness will suffer impairment if the protagonist's imperfections, her or his 'tragic flaw,' prove intolerable.

The emotions evoked by the resolution of conflict in drama are undoubtedly pivotal to the enjoyment of cinematic narratives. Given that, along with the fact that these emotions hinge on moral considerations and are readily compromised, closer examination of the concept of moral sanction would seem to be warranted.

The assessment of what is morally correct under given circumstances may be a deliberate, reflective process yielding specific verdicts. It may stipulate a particular punishment for a particular transgression or indicate a particular reward for a particular accomplishment. Moral sanction is not thought to have such a high degree of specificity. It is not considered to prescribe and demand particular outcomes. Rather, moral sanction is conceived of as a readiness to accept, in moral terms, observed outcomes. It may well happen that, on occasion, specific harm, such as torture and death, is deliberately wished upon a brutal villain. But, as a rule, expectations of punishment and reward are not specific to particular treatments and outcomes. Moral sanction is characterized, instead, by considerable latitude in accepting punitive and rewarding actions and events. Respondents to drama that features rape, for instance, may in a round-about fashion wish harm upon the rapist, but be satisfied when seeing him either caught and convicted, contract a debilitating disease, or crippled by a falling tree. The latitude of retribution is not unlimited, however. The respondents would probably be distressed if the only punitive consequence was that one of the rapist's victims managed to bloody his nose. The respondents might be similarly distressed when seeing him subjected to castration or having his arms chopped off. Transgression during conflict and punishment during resolution must be roughly commensurate for the punishment to be morally sanctioned and deemed emotionally satisfying. Punishments that fall outside the latitude of sanction leaves the respondents' sense of justice disturbed, which ultimately diminishes the enjoyment of resolutions. The same applies to accomplishments for which the rewards fall outside the latitude of moral sanction.

Also, the exercise of moral sanction is not presumed to involve the use of formal systems of moral judgment, such as Kant's categorical imperative (Kant, 1785/1922) or Bentham's utilitarian formula (Bentham, 1789/1948), and to necessitate the violation of derived precepts in order for punitive happenings to become sanctionable. Reminiscent of Aristotle's afore

discussed suggestions, the morality thought to be involved is truly basic in prescribing good fortunes to good people (i.e., people who are good because they do good deeds) and bad fortunes to bad people (i.e., people who are bad because they do bad things). If moral judgment is thus conceived of as a not entirely systematic evaluation of situational behavior, that is, as verdicts of good versus bad or right versus wrong in idiosyncratic terms, we must expect profound individual differences in moral assessments. For instance, some will consider the death penalty fair retribution for taking the life of a fellow human; others will consider this penalty a crime against humanity. Some will consider sexual preference a moral entitlement; others will deem specific ones morally indefensible. Some will think it good and right to save the big redwoods in California and Oregon; others will think it good and right to sacrifice a bit of nature to ensure continued income and, perhaps, a better life for the loggers. Some will see fit to honor and defend the national flag because it is thought to signify the political doctrine of equal justice for all; others will be ready to burn the flag because they deem this political doctrine wanting in its administration of social justice. Some will embrace the morality manifest in prevailing social conventions; others will consider these traditions decadent and declare them morally bankrupt, thereby elevating themselves into a moral elite that is called upon to challenge the morality of those deemed morally inferior.

Moral judgment is simply not monolithic, as some ethicists would have us believe. It would seem futile, in fact, to treat people's moral sanction of drama as uniform and normative. Recipients bring their idiosyncratic morality to the screen, sanction or condemn witnessed actions and agents in accord with it, and then experience emotions as a result of their assessment. As moral assessments vary, so will the respondents' emotions. In constructing theories of drama appreciation that involve moral sanction as an essential mechanism, it is imperative to recognize, and to make allowances for, the diversity of basic morality in strata of the population at large. In order to predict more accurately which retributive events foster delight and which repugnance in whom, it will be necessary to stake out existing morality subcultures and to determine the judgmental properties that characterize and distinguish them.

In the face of the indicated profound diversity in moral assessments, common ground should not be overlooked, however. Considering coercive and socially-supportive actions, in particular, the members of different subcultures are likely to render similar judgments. Additionally, apprehensions about others being granted access to gratifications that are denied us, may be widespread and nearly universal. Such apprehensions might also explain why we can take pleasure from witnessing the punishment and torment of those we think have taken unfair advantage of situations and, hence, have done wrong. Perhaps the overarching theme of enjoyable fictional exposition is conveyed in the projection of social justice in the sense that gratifications have to be earned by all our fellow humans just as we, by our own efforts, have to earn them; and that none of our fellow humans be exempt from the punitive contingencies that govern our own lives. Violations of this conception of justice will strike us as repugnant, whereas exposition within these principles will delight us.

fellow?

EPILOGUE ON THE DRAMATURGY OF GOOD AND EVIL

Our discussion of the evocation of emotion by fictional narratives appears to render these narratives' morality plays of one kind or another. Moral monitoring is thought to foster approval or disapproval of the actions of the characters of plays and thereby yield feelings of sympathy toward the well-behaved protagonists and antipathy toward the ill-behaved antagonists. Within this good-versus-evil dichotomy, the strength of these affective dispositions is expected to determine the depth of empathy or counter-empathy, of the anticipatory emotions of hope or

fear, and of joyous emotions as hoped for outcomes materialize versus distressing emotions as feared outcomes do. Throughout the display of relevant actions, the depth of the recipients' emotional reactions is clearly a function of the magnitude of dispositional involvement. Poorly developed characters (that is, characters whose actions and apparent intentions prompt neither applause nor condemnation) will not be engaging. In contrast, the recipients' emotions are bound to be engaged by characters who do and intend to do things that, for whatever particular moral reason, are deemed supportive, courageous, brave, and simply wonderful, on the one hand, or arrogant, malicious, brutal, and plainly evil, on the other. The more we can love or hate the characters that the narrative develops, the more we shall enjoy outcomes that show those we love triumph over those we hate. In fact, if our emotions are sufficiently engaged, we shall applaud the cruelest destruction of evil characters without having moral misgivings about it. We could, after all, morally sanction the brutality involved.

It would seem, then, that those cinematic narratives that develop the most admirable protagonists and the most terrifying antagonists, all within the limits of dramatic credibility, are likely to evoke the strongest emotions. The greatest dispositional separation between protagonists and antagonists promises the most intense emotions in response to the resolution of conflict. Joy will be at a maximum as the best of good triumphs over the worst of evil. And should evil get the better of good, as it does in tragic resolutions, the deepest reactions of disappointment, dejection, and sadness can be expected.

These observations seem to question the wisdom of developing and featuring complex characters; that is, characters who exhibit an admixture of laudatory and evil traits without a clear dominance of the one over the other. Such character complexity, as it violates the purity of good or evil, must be considered a detriment to drama that focuses on the evocation of strong emotions. What should be recognized, however, is that the evocation of emotion is not the only objective of drama, not even necessarily the most desirable one. Drama may captivate and intrigue us in cognitive terms (Zillmann, 1991). It can be thought-provoking and inspiring. Rather than stir our emotions to the fullest, it may gently touch us. Drama that combines the indicated elements, that both touches our hearts and challenges our minds, may arguably define a genre of superior entertainment value.

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