
Zetetic Engagement with Fiction

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Résumé

In this paper, I introduce zetetic engagement, a mode of intellectual interaction with fiction that involves active inquiry into the fictional universe itself. Unlike emotional, aesthetic, or reflective responses, zetetic engagement treats a story-world as a system to be investigated, drawing inferences and solving problems based on real-world knowledge. This approach encourages questioning, speculation, and resolution of apparent inconsistencies, deepening the reader's understanding of the fictional world.

However, such inquiries are often dismissed as "silly" in formalist literary criticism. Kendall Walton's concept of "silly questions" in the philosophy of fiction reflects this view, suggesting that probing character motivations, questioning plausibility, or addressing contradictions distracts from the intended appreciation of the text. Formalist approaches prioritize structural and aesthetic analysis over speculative or interpretive engagement.

I argue that these "silly questions" are not distractions but valuable tools for engagement. They enhance comprehension by exploring internal consistency, resolving anomalies, and deepening connections to characters and plot. Zetetic engagement transforms fiction into an intellectual exercise, making it both epistemically and hedonically rewarding.

Epistemically, it sharpens understanding by identifying contradictions, unraveling plot intricacies, and speculating about fictional worlds. Hedonically, it provides pleasure through intellectual challenge, turning the activity of inquiry into an enjoyable pursuit. This playful problem-solving produces a more immersive relationship with fiction, encouraging readers to treat fictional worlds as worthy of serious exploration.

In conclusion, zetetic engagement—through the pursuit of "silly questions"—should not be dismissed as trivial. Instead, it offers intellectual enrichment and a deeper, interactive connection with fictional works, demonstrating that inquiry into imagined worlds can be just as meaningful as inquiry into the real one.

Mots-Clés: fiction, inquiry, questions, understanding, value, hedonic, literature

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