

Why Fiction May Be Twice as True as Fact

Fiction as Cognitive and Emotional Simulation

by Keith Oatley (August 2010)

Abstract. Although fiction treats themes of psychological importance, it has been excluded from psychology because it is seen as flawed empirical method. But fiction is not empirical truth. It is simulation that runs on minds of readers just as computer simulations run on computers. In any simulation coherence truths have priority over correspondences. Moreover, in the simulations of fiction, personal truths can be explored that allow readers to experience emotions – their own emotions – and understand aspects of them that are obscure, in relation to contexts in which the emotions arise.