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ON FICTION: WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT DOES, AND WHY WE CARE ABOUT IT

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ABSTRACT

James N. Brantner: On Fiction: What It Is, What It Does, and Why We Care About It
(Under the direction of William G. Lycan)

The phenomenon of fiction provides a topic ripe for philosophical investigation, prompting questions in the philosophy of language, metaphysics, and aesthetics. In this dissertation, I will explore several such questions, ultimately providing an account of the metaphysics of fiction, our reference to fictional objects, and our emotional response to fiction. I will begin by arguing for an artifactual account of fictional objects, on which fictional objects are abstract artifacts created by their authors. In doing so, I will provide reasons to prefer an artifactual account over competing theories, and I will respond to a few basic objections against artifactual accounts. I will argue that creation on the artifactual account should in many ways parallel the creation of material objects and that the artifactual account allows us to refer to actually existing artifacts in our discourse about fiction, while providing a reasonable paraphrase for non-existence claims.

Next, I will address predication in fiction. I will provide an account of predication that distinguishes between actual and non-actual predication, which I argue is the best way to make sense of predication in fiction on an account on which fictional objects are abstract. Additionally, I will argue that this account of predication generalizes to non-concretist accounts of possible worlds. After discussing predication in general, I will specifically examine modal properties in fiction, which I will argue do not derive from the essences of fictional objects but rather from fictional accessibility relations between impossible worlds.

Finally, I will consider engagement with fiction. I will argue that we are able to engage emotionally with fiction because emotions stem primarily from imagination and not from belief. This answers the paradox of fictional emotions and explains much of the differences between our emotional engagement with works of fiction and real life events. I will argue that this is not only consistent with the metaphysical account of fiction presented earlier in the dissertation but that this metaphysical account allows us to properly identify fictional characters as the objects of our fictional emotions.

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INTRODUCTION

Fiction grabs us early in life and often doesn't let go. Children commonly devour favorite stories, excitedly learning more about beloved characters and wishing ill on villains. But this behavior, while common in children, is not unique to them. Adults also, whether it's through favorite books or summer blockbusters or Netflix binges or some other medium, spend significant time interacting with works of fiction. Engagement with fiction is commonplace across age groups and across cultures.

But the enterprise of fiction gives rise to several philosophical questions. First, what sort of objects are these fictional characters? We happily talk about them as if they are real people doing real things, but we are also quick to assert that they are purely imaginary. So what are they? Abstract objects? Non-existent objects? Denizens of other worlds? Sophisticated language games? Second, in what sense do fictional objects *do* anything? Again, we are quick to talk about characters storming castles or smoking pipes or taking up residence in familiar towns. But at the same time, we know that if we were to travel to the town in which a character resides, we would not find him there. So how are we to understand these properties predicated of fictional characters? Are they purely make-believe? Are they properties held in other worlds? Or are they something else? And third, why is it that we care about the fates of objects which we are quick to assert are imaginary? If they aren't real, why should anyone care what happens to them?

Here, we will address all three questions. We will begin in chapter one by discussing what sort of object a fictional character is, and we will advance the argument that fictional objects are abstract objects that are created by their authors. Then, in chapters two and three, we will address

fictional predication, arguing in chapter two that fictional predication is predication in another world and that we should distinguish between ordinary predication—predication in the actual world—and predication in other worlds. In chapter three, we will zoom in on a particular sort of predication about fiction, examining the modal properties that we ascribe to fictional characters and providing a way to ground such predication. Finally, in chapter four, we will examine why it is that we care about works of fiction, arguing that our emotions are much more closely tied to how vividly we imagine something than to how strongly we believe it.

CHAPTER 1: HOW TO BE A CREATIONIST ABOUT FICTION

Sherlock Holmes. Hercule Poirot. Constantine Quiche. Elizabeth Childs. Some of these names are more famous than others, but all four are easily identifiable as detectives. However, to complicate matters, all four as also easily identifiable as fictional. So how is it that they became detectives? In one sense, it is in the normal way. They had some relevant skills, underwent some sort of training, and were hired to solve crimes. But in another sense, they became detectives because they were created to be detectives. Holmes is a detective because Sir Arthur Conan Doyle decided that he should be so. Poirot is a detective because Agatha Christie decided that he should be so. In fact, Holmes exists at all only because Doyle created him. Poirot exists only because Christie created him.

While claims like this seem plausible enough, they are the subject of debate in the philosophical literature on fiction. These claims are indicative of a position known as creationism[1]—which holds both that fictional objects exist and that they owe their existence to the creative acts of their authors. Creationism can be contrasted with antirealism[2], which does not postulate fictional objects, holding that fictional names do not refer, and with other views—

[1] Notably defended by Nathan Salmon in "Nonexistence" (1998) and Amie Thomasson in *Fiction and Metaphysics* (1999), among others.

[2] Which dates back at least to Bertrand Russell's "On Denoting" (1905), and more recently received a spirited defense from Stuart Brock in "Fictionalism about Fictional Characters" (2002).

notably Platonism[3], possibilism[4], and Meinongianism[5]—holding that there are fictional objects but that those objects do not owe their existence to the author of their stories. In this chapter, I will argue that creationism is the best position to take on the subject and lay out some of the details of what I take to be the best version of the creationist position, one that can satisfy the intuitions motivating the view, answer the objections levied against creationism, and lay the groundwork for further theorizing about fictional objects.

The Case for Creationism

Why be a creationist? The thesis that fictional objects are created by their authors gives us the best answer to two important questions in the discussion of fiction. First, it answers questions like those raised above: where do fictional characters come from, and how do they get the properties that they have? Second, it answers questions about the creative act of authors of fiction: in what does this act consist?

There are, of course, other answers to these questions, but the creationist answer is the simplest and most immediately plausible. Fictional objects come from their authors. They exist because their authors created them. They have the properties they have because that's how they were created. And the creative act of the author consists, at least in part, in bringing characters into being that previously were not in being.

Opponents of creationism certainly have things to say in defense of their views, but they don't have the straightforward plausibility of the creationist answer. The antirealist, who holds that fictional objects do not exist and do not have any properties at all, must say that the first

3 Defended by Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Works and Worlds of Art* (1980) and Harry Deutsch in "The Creation Problem" (1991).

4 Most famously defended by David Lewis in "Truth in Fiction" (1978)

5 Owing its inspiration to Alexius Meinong himself in "Über Gegenstandtheorie" (1904) and being defended more recently by Terence Parsons in *Nonexistent Objects* (1980)

question is ill-formed, despite the fact that it seems perfectly reasonable and has an obvious answer. They go on to answer the second question by saying that an author does not in any real sense build worlds or characters, but rather leads an elaborate language game. The Platonist and Meinongian say that fictional characters never come into being at all—they have always been there, as abstract objects or as non-existent objects—and the possibilist says that they owe their existence to their parents and not their authors. And these three agree in response to the second question: authors do not build characters at all, they merely identify and refer to objects that are already there and ready for use, whether in the realm of abstracta or non-existence or possibilia. All of the competing views fail to do justice to the creative act on the part of authors of fiction, while the creationist view is designed specifically to take such creation seriously. And none of these competing views can answer "where did Sherlock Holmes come from?" with the eminently natural response of "from the mind of Arthur Conan Doyle."

So the primary reason to be a creationist is because creationism makes the most sense of what seems obvious about where fictional characters come from (the author) and what it is that authors create (the characters, among other things). But in addition to the positive reasons to become a creationist, there are reasons to avoid the competing views.

The antirealist is unmoved by concerns about creation, as the antirealist—motivated by concerns over parsimony and the seemingly obvious truth of statements like "Sherlock Holmes does not exist"—holds that fictional characters do not exist (and have never existed) and thus could not have been created. Of course, anyone who takes these questions more seriously will be initially skeptical of an antirealist position, but an antirealist has further problems to deal with. The antirealist faces a difficult task in just making sense of normal talk about fiction. We have already claimed that Holmes, Poirot, Quiche, and Childs are detectives, but how can the

antirealist—who believes none of those four exist—make sense of such statements? They could argue that the vast majority of our statements about fiction are false[6], but this is implausible. There's no obvious mistake that everyone who talks about fiction is making. After all, people assert “Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street” without expecting to actually find him at 221B Baker Street. Alternatively, the antirealist could argue that such statements are just linguistic shorthand for other statements which are true. For instance, “Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street” may be shorthand for “according to the stories, there is a being—Holmes—who lives at 221B Baker Street.”[7] The paraphrase tactic is the most plausible for antirealists to use in escaping this problem, but finding paraphrases that do justice to our talk of fiction is more difficult than it may seem. For instance, while “Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street” is handled nicely by an “according to the story” operator, “Smith admires Holmes” is not (supposing that Smith is not a character in the Holmes novels)—Smith does not admire Holmes according to the story.[8]

There are more sophisticated attempts at paraphrase, but even should they succeed at providing meaningful sentences with intuitively correct truth values corresponding to each statement that appears to refer to a fictional character, there is reason to question the project in general. In some cases, paraphrases are natural. It is true that according to the novels, Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street, and it is true for the same reasons we will readily assert that Holmes lives at 221B Baker Street. But at some point, after seeing enough statements that seem to refer to a fictional object and that don’t admit of simple paraphrase—“everyone in this room is talking about the same character,” or “Smith admires Holmes”—it becomes time to stop bending over

[6] Following Bertrand Russell (1905).

[7] Following Stuart Brock (2002).

[8] To take an example from Frederick Kroon in “Make-Believe and Fictional Reference” (1994).

backwards to excise any reference to fictional entities and to start considering whether an ontology that includes fictional entities may not be a better solution.[9]

So let's have a look at the realist alternatives. The other opponents of creationism are more disparate on their answers to the first question, of where it is that fictional characters come from. The Platonist and the Meinongian both think that fictional entities don't come into being at all. The Platonist argues that fictional objects have always existed in the realm of abstract objects, and the Meinongian claims that fictional objects have always been in the realm of non-existent objects. In neither case is there any way for the author to bring such an object into being, because the object is already there. The possibilist, on the other hand, claims that fictional objects exist in other possible worlds, and so they are brought into being in the sort of way befitting the sort of object they are. Fictional people owe their existence to their parents, fictional planets owe their existence to the initial state of some possible universe together with its laws of nature. So the possibilist allows that fictional objects must be brought into being, only rejecting that it is the author that is responsible for bringing them into being.

Where these three positions agree is on the claim that there are fictional objects but that these objects are not there in virtue of creative acts on the parts of their authors. So how do they explain the creative act on the part of the authors? Again, the views here will diverge to some degree, but they maintain enough similarities that some of the same considerations will apply to all three. The possibilist must claim that the creativity on the part of the author amounts to an ability to imagine other possible worlds rather than in the creation of any new object. And some Platonists will agree—Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that fictional characters are pre-existing "person-kinds" and that the creativity of the author lies in the "freshness, the imaginativeness,

[9] Thomasson (1999).

[and] the originality" of the selection.[10] But this is not the only explanation the Platonist and the Meinongians have available. They also have a option that has been known as Deutschian creation, after Harry Deutsch, who notably advocated for it. The Deutschian answer is that an author can be truly understood to create a fictional object even if he or she does not bring that object into being. An author is really creating the fictional object as long as the author is in a position to stipulate the object's properties without the possibility of error.[11]

Because there are already fictional objects, Deutsch admits, they cannot be brought into being. But Deutsch resists the claim that the creative process on the part of the author is one of mere discovery. Because of the infinitude of objects, with one corresponding to each set of properties, an author can pick out one of these objects by stipulating which properties it has. So Deutsch does not attribute Holmes' existence to Doyle's creative act, and he similarly does not attribute Holmes being a detective to Doyle's creative act, but he does say that the character Doyle created is Holmes—rather than some other fictional object—because of Doyle's creative act. This, Deutsch claims, is true creation.

Deutsch's claim that this is true creation is certainly debatable—after all, on this account, nothing owes its existence to the author's creative act, and no object even owes its properties to the author's creative act—and while Deutschian creation and the discovery picture do involve a degree of creativity, the creationist account of the phenomenon remains a much more robust account and the only one to give the obvious answer to the questions we have asked. But this is not the only advantage that creationism has over these opponents.

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[10] In *Works and Worlds of Art* (1980).

[11] In "The Creation Problem" (1991).

The possibilist, the Platonist, and the Meingonian all face the same question: how is it that an author is able to refer to a fictional object that is already there? For the possibilist, how do authors so consistently succeed in referring to particular possible objects? For the Platonist, how do authors so consistently succeed in picking out particular abstract objects? For the Meinongian, how do authors so consistently succeed in picking out a particular non-existent object?

This question provides the first horn of a dilemma that catches all three positions. The possibilist cannot explain how authors succeed in referring to possible objects when they have no acquaintance whatsoever with the possible objects. And the Platonist who takes a view like Wolterstorff's has the same problem. How is it that an author can pick this person-kind from all of the other person-kinds and succeed in referring to it?

The Platonist or Meinongian with Deutschian sympathies can answer this question by noting that because there is an object for each set of properties, the stipulation of a set of properties also determines which abstract or non-existent object is being picked out by the stipulation. But this just brings the Deutschian to the second horn of the dilemma. If fictional objects are individuated by their properties—as they must be for the author to be able to stipulate properties and be assured that there is an object with those properties—they must have their properties essentially. But this means that if Doyle had written Sherlock Holmes to play a viola instead of a violin, he would have been writing about a different character.[12] Once the author has settled on a character, he or she has no freedom at all to change that character's properties. Even the smallest change will result in reference to a different object. This leads to two unpalatable

[12] Of course, Holmes could have both the properties "plays the violin" and "could have played the viola." But suppose Doyle had written Holmes with the properties "plays the viola" and "could have played the violin." Those are not the same as the properties that Holmes does have, and if non-existent objects are individuated by their properties, then Doyle would still be writing about a different character.

results. First, it means the authors have no control over what properties a particular character will possess, and second, that the vast majority[13] of modal claims about fiction, statements like “Sherlock Holmes played the violin, but he could have played the viola,” are false.

The creationist, of course, doesn't face this problem, because according to creationism, the author creates the character. On a creationist account, it is easy for an author to refer to a character, and there is no need to mandate that each character has all of its properties essentially. But while this dilemma catches all of the other realist positions who view fictional characters as determinate objects, there is one other realist strategy to escape the dilemma: remove the requirement for unique, determinate reference. This strategy is most appealing to the possibilist, who already admits that there are many possible worlds in which people do the sorts of things described in stories. The possibilist can say that instead of a character being a determinate object in another possible world, there is a set of possible objects that satisfy the descriptions in the story, and either all are the character or it is indeterminate which is the character.[14] And this response may indeed escape the dilemma, but it does so only for stories that are possible. If the character description is inconsistent or if the character performs impossible tasks, there will be no possible objects that fit the story's descriptions, and thus reference is not guaranteed.[15] But a possibilist may admit that authors can intend to refer to possible objects and fail. So what of situations where they succeed in describing something possible? In this case, the possibilist response does indeed escape the dilemma, but it does so at the cost of plausibility: it hurts the

[13] I say “vast majority” rather than “all” because I do not want to rule out fictional objects with inconsistent properties.

[14] This response is suggested in Lewis (1978), as he argues that there is not one “story-world” in which a given fiction takes place, but that there are multiple possible worlds in which the events of the fiction are told as true fact.

[15] This is a problem for possibilism independent of the reference argument, but this is as good a place as any to draw it out.

sense in which stories are about their characters. If Doyle's Holmes stories are about a possible person Holmes, they should not also be about some other non-identical possible person. And indeterminacy is no help—if it is indeterminate which person the story is about, it's hard to see how it is really about a person at all. Furthermore, if the set of possible referents is fixed by description, it is possible that we could find an actual, historical figure who satisfies the description of a purportedly fictional character. If, unbeknownst to Doyle, there were a historical figure who did all the things he attributed to Holmes, would it be correct to say the story is about that figure? The natural answer is no.

With that response handled, all the realist alternatives to creationism have been shown to have problems related to reference and essence. So, in addition to the positive reasons to be a creationist, there are flaws in its major opponents. Our discourse about fiction makes trouble for the antirealist, and other realist positions all fall to implausible indeterminacy or to the dilemma with the problem of reference on one horn and the problem of essentialism on the other. So with all of the reasons to be a creationist on the table, it is now time to turn to its critics and consider the objections to creationism.

The Case against Creationism

There are four major objections to creationism that warrant responses. Considering these objections and how the creationist should respond will both bolster the creationist position and also help to fill out some of the details about how a creationist theory of fiction should look. We will take all four in turn.

Objection #1: Creationists cannot make sense of ordinary talk about fiction.

The first objection we will consider is raised by Takashi Yagisawa at the end of “Against Creationism in Fiction.” In this “devastatingly simple” objection, Yagisawa notes that being

fictional entails non-existence. In our ordinary discourse about fiction, we readily assert propositions like “Boojums do not exist” or “All fictional individuals are unreal.” Yet the creationist (and some of their realist brethren—the Platonist and the possibilist) argues that fictional individuals, including boojums, do exist. According to the creationist, fictional objects have been created, and so they must exist. How does the creationist make sense of such talk? [16] [17]

Reply to Objection #1

To begin, it is worth pointing out that the creationist is not the only one who faces such problems. The antirealist has just as much explaining to do regarding assertions like “Boojums do not exist,” because the antirealist holds that “boojums” does not refer to anything, and therefore the proposition “Boojums do not exist” is meaningless without some kind of paraphrase. In fact, the antirealist must explain away almost all of our discourse about fiction, while the creationist needs a special explanation for only a small portion, claims like “Boojums do not exist” or “Fictional characters aren't real.” And while it may appear that these considerations favor the Meingonian, who holds that fictional terms do refer and that they refer to non-existent objects, we must recall that Meinongians were unable to explain other assertions like “Sherlock Holmes is a detective because Doyle wanted him to be.” So every theory has some work to do in explaining fictional discourse.

Furthermore, the creationist actually can explain the propositions at issue. In order to do so, we must go into a little more detail about the metaphysics of fictional objects. We have already argued that objects like Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot exist and that they do so contingently, as a result of the work of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. But what

[16] Yagisawa (2001).

[17] Or have existed and been destroyed, a complication which I will ignore for now, as it doesn't affect the argument.

exactly are they? Creationists do not believe that they could find Sherlock Holmes by visiting 221B Baker Street in London, which suggests that fictional objects are not actual or not concrete. A bit more thinking about the process of creation leads us to the same conclusion. Yes, authors create fictional objects, creationists say. But they do not do so out of concrete materials, so it makes sense to say that their creations are non-concrete. This suggests that creationists should follow Amie Thomasson in saying that fictional entities are dependent abstracta. Holmes is abstract, which is why he cannot be found in London. And Holmes is dependent, which is why he would not have existed without Doyle's creative act—his existence depends on an act of creation.[18]

How does this help? It provides a plausible paraphrase candidate for statements like "Boojums do not exist" and "All fictional entities are unreal." If taken as existence claims with an unrestricted quantifier, according to the creationist, those statements are false. But ordinary folks are neither metaphysicians nor particularly philosophically precise with their language, so we should not assume that such statements mean to assert ontological claims with unrestricted quantifiers. But it is easy to see what a non-philosopher means to communicate when he or she makes claims like this. They mean to say that boojums are not the sort of thing that you will find in the material world that we inhabit, and furthermore that fictional objects in general are not to be found in the material world. The non-philosopher's non-existence claims regarding fictional objects have an implicitly restricted quantifier that ranges only over things that are both actual and concrete. So "Boojums are not actually concrete" or "All fictional individuals are not actually concrete" would serve perfectly well as true propositions that accurately precisify the

[18] Thomasson (2001).

surface ambiguity of the non-philosopher's claims.[19][20] As we observed before, any theory will have to resort to paraphrase at some point (unless they want to accuse ordinary people of being wrong in a significant portion of their claims about fiction), and this is a simple paraphrase that has no problem handling such statements.

Objection #2: Creationists claim that fictional objects are created to be x *but are not* x.

Supporting a theory of fiction on which fictional objects are abstract objects does leave the creationist open to a second objection. Sherlock Holmes, creationists say, was created as a detective. He was created as a man. Yet he is also an abstract object. And Yagisawa notes that abstract objects are neither men nor detectives. So Holmes is created to be a man, but he is not a man. And if he is not (and was never) what he was allegedly created as, why would anyone argue that Holmes was truly created at all? This can also be put as a further problem with discourse about fiction. People say things like[21]"Holmes is a detective," but according to the creationist, such statements are literally false.

Reply to Objection #2

This objection is a powerful one against creationism as it has been described so far. Yagisawa is right to note that it makes no sense to deny that Holmes is a detective while at the

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[19] Similar answers are given by Peter van Inwagen in "Creatures of Fiction" (1977) and Salmon (1998).

[20] One may ask here why non-philosophers are not apt to say that numbers do not exist, since numbers are also not concrete. The answer here is in context. Claims about the non-existence of fictional characters are usually made in response to someone who is confused about their nature, thinking that Sherlock Holmes is a historical figure or that one may really expect to find boojums if one sails to the right island. People make the mistake of thinking that characters are actual and concrete (or perhaps just become so invested in a character that they are accused of making the mistake of thinking the character is actual and concrete), and are so corrected. People are not likely to make the same mistake about the number three, and so the rejoinder "the number three does not exist" need not be given. It could be, in the right circumstances (suppose a child asked her parents to set a place for her new best friend, the number three, who was coming over for supper), and in such a situation, the sentence "the number three does not exist" would be rightly interpreted as communicating that the number three is not counted among the set of actual and concrete objects, not that the number three is not in our ontology.

[21] Yagisawa (2001).

same time arguing that Holmes must be a created entity because his being created as a detective is the reason for him being a detective. But the objection is not decisive against creationism. Rather, it shows the creationist has more work to do. Specifically, the creationist must find a way to reconcile the obvious but apparently conflicting claims that Holmes is a man and that Holmes is non-concrete.

How should the creationist do so? By drawing a distinction between different ways of having properties. This strategy has been used by Edward Zalta, who said that Holmes exemplifies the property of being abstract and encodes the property of being a detective, and Peter van Inwagen, who said that Holmes exemplifies the property of being abstract and is ascribed the property of being a detective. Neither Zalta nor van Inwagen's distinctions work perfectly, but while they make mistakes in the specific ways they draw the distinction, the general idea that there is a distinction between different ways to have a property is a good one. Holmes has the property of being abstract in one way of having properties and has the property of being a detective in another way of having properties. The details of this are complex and require much more space to be fleshed out, so we will save a more thorough discussion for chapter two, but the general idea provides a response to Yagisawa: the creationist should say that Holmes is a detective. If the creationist is willing to do so, that will suffice to answer Yagisawa. It is then up to the creationist to provide an account of fictional predication on which it makes sense to say that Holmes is a detective.

Another response, along similar lines, would be to say that according to the story, Holmes is a detective. Our evaluation of this response will depend on exactly how "according to the story" is understood.[22] If it is a genuine way of having a property, then it falls in line with the

[22] That an implicit "according to the story" in statements like "Holmes is a detective" is postulated by the creationist Amie Thomasson, the possibilist David Lewis, and the antirealist Stuart Brock indicates that there is

response given in the previous paragraph, although more work needs to be done in explaining the metaphysical underpinnings of the "according to the story" way of having a property. If, on the other hand, "according to the story" is not a genuine way of having a property, this response will not succeed. Because if it is not a way to have a property, this response must say that Sherlock Holmes does not, in any way, have the property of being a detective. And if Holmes is not a detective, then Holmes could not have been created as a detective. This illustrates that distinguishing between different ways to have a property is the proper way to respond to Yagisawa; furthermore, making that distinction is a key element of any plausible creationist theory of fictional objects.

Objection #3: Stories are not dependent on their authors, so characters should not be either.

This objection, also raised by Yagisawa, relies on the close connection that creationists like to draw between characters and the stories that contain them. So far, we have said very little about the stories, focusing on the characters themselves. But creationists find it obvious that stories are created by their authors for the same reasons that the characters must be created by their authors. In fact, it may be even more obvious in the case of stories—while discourse about fiction is full of statements like "Holmes doesn't really exist," not many will deny that the Holmes stories exist. And the parallelism between characters and stories is used when opponents charge creationists with a lack of parsimony. "You accept that authors create stories," the creationist says, "so why not accept that they create the objects in the stories?" In this objection, however, Yagisawa seeks to undermine creationism by challenging the claim that authors create stories.

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significant disagreement about metaphysical underpinnings of the response.

Yagisawa claims that stories are just sequences of letters in conformity with certain syntactic rules. But while sequences of letters may be written by an author, they are not created by an author. They exist prior to any work that an author does and would be the same sequence no matter which author wrote them down. A bundle of sticks washed up on the shore in the shapes of the English letters that make up *A Study in Scarlet* are just as much an instantiation of the novel as Doyle's original manuscript.[23]

Deutsch makes a similar point, citing Jorge Luis Borges' “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*.” In this story, Borges writes of a 20th century Frenchman, Pierre Menard, who writes a novel that is line-by-line identical to the 17th century Spanish novel, *Don Quixote*. “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” takes the form of a review of Menard's work, which praises it for having a depth and richness lacking in the original and notes that its affected style—a contemporary Frenchman writing in archaic Spanish—contrasts with the original text, written by a Spaniard in the dialect of his time. Deutsch sees Borges here as satirizing the idea that stories are dependent on their authors, and rightly so. Of course Menard's *Quixote* is the same work as the original. It is word-for-word identical. That they were written by different authors in different contexts does not mean they are not the same work. And so, Deutsch and Yagisawa argue, stories exist independently of their authors, and if the same story is written independently by two different authors, or even by a human author and a chimp randomly pecking at a typewriter, it remains the same story. [24]

Reply to Objection #3

[23] Yagisawa (2001).

[24] Deutsch (1991).

The creationist has several responses to this objection, all involving a denial of the claim that the story exists independently of the author's work. The simplest response, and one that echoes our argument for creationism about characters, is that a theory on which stories are just sequences of letters and are not created by their authors is a theory that does not do justice to authorial creativity, and so we have more reason to reject the theory behind the objection than we have to question creationism on its account. But there are other responses as well.

One response, given by Jeff Goodman, is to point out that even if the text of *A Study in Scarlet* is written out by a chimp, it cannot be the same story that was written by Doyle. Why? Because when Doyle uses the word "Holmes," he is referring to a particular object. But the chimp, who has no acquaintance with the object or the referential use of the word "Holmes," has no way of referring to the same object. And so the content of the stories must be different, because Doyle's story includes objects that the chimp's story does not.[25]

Goodman's response is a strong one, but it does depend on a non-descriptivist theory of reference regarding proper names. But there is another way, one that doesn't depend on a particular theory of reference, to show that stories depend on their authors. Consider again "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." Suppose that a philosophy student who held a particularly extreme creationist view, independently of Borges, wrote a story that was word-for-word identical to "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in which he meant to show how much different the same text could be when written by different authors. This student's story would be a straightforward defense of the thesis that a story's author is essential to it, while Borges' story was a scathing satire of this view. While the stories may describe the same state of affairs and use the same words, their messages are totally different. The case of satire in general shows very

[25] Goodman, Jeff. (2004) "A Defense of Creationism in Fiction." 149-154.

clearly the degree to which a story relies on the intent of the author. Good satire can be indistinguishable from ridiculous sincerity without knowledge of the author's intent, but they are not the same. A story is not just a collection of words. It is something that depends on the one who created it.

Objection #4: The creationist has no good account of how creation happens.

We have moved past Yagisawa's three objections and now move to an objection against creationism put forward by Stuart Brock. Brock's main objection to creationism is that the explanation—fictional objects are abstract objects created by their authors—is more mysterious than what was to be explained—what are fictional objects? And no good explanation is more mysterious than what it seeks to explain, so creationism is not a good explanation of the data. The creationist, Brock argues, has no good account of the process of creation. He does not demand a fully fleshed-out account, but if the creationist cannot give even a bare bones account, creation remains a mystery. And if creation is a mystery, creationism cannot be a satisfactory account of the metaphysics of fictional objects.

Reply to Objection #4

Brock gives three potential answers that a creationist could give, but he rejects each one as insufficient. The first two, that a new object is created whenever an author uses a fictional name, and that a new object is created whenever an author uses a fictional name for the first time, are doomed from the start for fairly obvious reasons. For starters, both of them imply that any author who writes a story with two names for the same person—like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, or Clark Kent and Superman—has actually created a different fictional object corresponding to each name. Clearly, something has gone wrong.

His third proposal is more plausible. He proposes that "a fictional character is created whenever an author intends to create a new fictional character and, as a causal consequence of that intention, pretends to refer to or uniquely identify it." By tying the creation of a fictional object to the author's intention, this theory posits that an object is created just when the author wants an object to be created—there is no problem of implying Jekyll and Hyde are two different characters. But Brock is still not satisfied with this proposal. To show its inadequacy, he gives three cases, all of which he sees as devastating objections to the creation by intention view.

Case One: Suppose, presumably contrary to fact, that Robert Louis Stevenson's first draft of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* include what Stevenson intended to be two characters. But Stevenson's wife, after reading the draft, exclaimed "how trite," prompting Stevenson to rework the novel into a story where Jekyll and Hyde were the same character.

Case Two: Suppose, presumably contrary to fact, that Arthur Conan Doyle, throughout the course of the Sherlock Holmes stories, dropped hints that Dr. Watson was an unreliable narrator (notably, Watson's war wound is presented on his arm at one point and on his leg at another). His plan was to write a final novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Watson and Mr. Holmes*, in which it is revealed that Holmes and Watson were one and the same character.

Case Three: Suppose, presumably contrary to fact, that J.K. Rowling, in addition to being a famous author, is an amateur philosopher and a staunch antirealist about fictional objects. She wrote the Harry Potter stories with no intention to create any fictional objects at all.

Brock insists that the creationist has no good explanation for what has happened in any of these three cases. If he is right, the creationist is still left seeking an explanation for how creation

happens. However, while Brock's objection is the most difficult to answer, it is answerable. The creationist does have an explanation for how creation happens.[26]

In beginning to give a creationist response, we should first look in more detail at Brock's proposal, particularly in regards to the problem presented in Case Three. Tying the creation of a fictional object to the intention of an author is an extremely promising explanation, but Case Three shows the problems with it: what if the author does not intend to create anything? But this does not show that no authorial intention view will be correct, it just shows a flaw in this one. Consider the creation of ordinary objects. A carpenter intends to create a table and then fashions one out of wood. The creation of a table is a causal result of the intention, just as the creation of a fictional object, according to this proposal, is a causal result of an intention to create a fictional object. But what if the carpenter is a staunch ontological nihilist and believes that tables do not exist? The carpenter would have no intention to create a table. But does that mean that a table has not been created? Of course not. The carpenter intended to do something that—unbeknownst to him or her—would constitute the creation of the table, even though the carpenter did not intend to create a table.

What is the lesson here? Artisans don't have to have their philosophy right in order to create something. Neither do authors have to have their philosophy right in order to create something. Some sort of authorial intention view is correct, but not one that requires authors to have true philosophical views. So when are fictional objects actually created? Fictional objects are created when an author refers (or pretends to refer) with the intention to refer (or pretend to refer) to an object (or pretend object) that does not exist in the material world and has not been previously referenced (or pretend referenced) by the author or anyone else.

[26] In "The Creationist Fiction" (2010).

This first reference, of course, is just the very beginnings of the fictional object. It is like when a potter first begins to shape the clay. It is not yet in its finished form, and it remains to endow the created object with a whole host of other properties, but the creation process has begun. Like the potter, the author then continues to shape the fictional object by ascribing various properties to it, like the potter continues to mold the clay into its desired shape. Of course, there remain lots of questions about the details of this process. For instance, exactly when do we say that a partially formed fictional character is Sherlock Holmes? But these are similar questions to those that we may ask of everyday acts of creation, like that of the potter. The general picture of creation in fiction has been given, and it is much less mysterious than Brock supposes.

But what about Brock's Case One and Case Two? Do these objections not apply to the view of creation as much as they apply to the rejected view? They do, but they are successful objections to neither view. In the first case, it is clear that Stevenson created two distinct characters in his first draft. He intended to create two characters, and everything in the draft indicates that two characters are present. What happened when he revised the draft will depend on the details of the story. It is plausible to suppose that he discarded the Hyde character entirely and modified the Jekyll character to involve a second personality with distinct similarities to that of the discarded Hyde character. Remember, fictional objects are not determined by their properties, so Stevenson could change elements of Jekyll's character while still writing about Jekyll. But it is also plausible to suppose that he discarded both characters and wrote a different story about a different characters that bore some similarities to both discarded characters. Which of these is correct will depend on the details of the case, but both are plausible explanations, and neither poses any trouble for the authorial intention view we have presented.

In Case Two, the best analysis is that Doyle created just one character but that, because he was unable to publish his final installment, his readers falsely believe that he has created two characters. Brock argues that it is implausible to claim that there is just one character here, but it is hard to see why. Think of your favorite example of a work of fiction whose twist ending reveals that characters previously thought to be distinct are in fact the same. Now suppose this work of fiction was presented serially. Would your analysis be that the characters were distinct during the first few episodes and were fused together during the later episodes? Of course not. And Case Two is no different. Of course, because we are never presented with the final installment in Case Two, we never have any way of knowing that Holmes and Watson are the same character. But they are the same nonetheless.[27]

Lessons Learned

Now that the objections have been answered, we have a stronger case for creationism, but we also have a clearer picture of how the details of a creationist view should go. The objections have shaped our understanding of how a creationist should view the creation process itself and the kind of objects being created, which in turn will allow us to say more about the properties of these created objects.

In responding to Yagisawa's objections, we saw that we should be creationists about both characters and stories, and that the best creationist view is one on which the objects being created are abstract objects—after all, the author uses no concrete materials in the creation process, and the resulting objects are not those that we can bump into in the material world. And in handling Brock's objection, we saw that the creation of characters is process, which begins with an

[27] There are numerous examples here, whether from *Fight Club*, *Identity*, the third and fifth seasons of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* or another story.

intention to refer to (or to pretend to refer to) something new and continues as the author endows this new object with more and more properties.

In dealing with Yagisawa's third objection, we also learned more about the stories themselves. We explicitly concluded that the stories being created depend to at least some degree on the author's intention and are not identical to bits of language. A consequence of this is that if driftwood washes up on the seashore in the pattern that seems to resemble a sequence of words that seems to tell a story, this would not constitute a story. It may closely resemble a story on its surface, but without any authorial intention at all, there is no story, if for no other reason, because the apparent names in the driftwood don't refer to anything. Someone who happened upon the book of driftwood could make a story out of that set of words by coopting them to refer to something, but the book of driftwood itself is not a story.

Another lesson, not drawn explicitly before, but derivable from our discussion of satire, is that the stories are also not identical to the states of affairs that they describe. Determining which state of affairs is being described cannot be done solely from the text—after all, we argued that Borges and our philosophy student wrote about different Menards, so the states of affairs that their stories describe were about different objects and thus were different states of affairs. But the author's intention affects more than just which state of affairs is being described; it also affects how the state of affairs is interpreted, which is a key part of what makes a story. So a story is distinct from a state of affairs, and what the author creates are characters and stories, not the states of affairs that the stories describe or in which the characters are contained. And, in addition to making sense of our discussion of satire, this also allows stories to have a feature that we argued should obviously be a part of our theory of characters. Sherlock Holmes, we said, could have played the viola instead of the violin and still been Sherlock Holmes. And similarly, if

Holmes had played the viola instead of the violin, *A Study in Scarlet* would have still been *A Study in Scarlet*. So stories are the sort of things that can change to some degree while still being the same story. States of affairs are not.

Additionally, having authors creating stories and not states of affairs is an independently appealing feature of a good creationist view. The creation of abstract objects may be somewhat controversial, but there are plausible examples outside fiction. Laws and marriages, for instance, are likely candidates. But states of affairs are the sorts of things that exist independent of human thought or action, so defending a theory of fiction on which authors literally created states of affairs would have been a tough row to hoe.

However, while authors do not create states of affairs, it is important not to confuse this with the world-building that many authors engage in. A certain type of states of affairs—maximally consistent ones—serve as possible worlds on some theories of modality[28], and so it would be easy to identify fictional states of affairs as fictional worlds. And in one sense, this would be correct. But there is an ambiguity in the term "fictional worlds." One sense of the term just refers to the complete set of things that happen in the fiction. But another sense of the term describes a culture, a planet, or a universe. While many authors borrow real settings, like 19th century England or 21st century New York, a key element of much speculative fiction is the world built by the authors. Perhaps the biggest strength of Lois McMaster Bujold's *Vorkosigan Saga* is her talent for building a universe full of different planets and different cultures. If our theory of fiction robs her and other world-builders of their world-building, that would be to its detriment. Fortunately, our theory does no such thing. While she does not create the states of affairs her stories describe, she does create the characters contained in those states of affairs. And

[28] For instance, in Alvin Plantinga's *The Nature of Necessity* (1974).

“characters” should not be understood so narrowly as to include only people. The planet of Barrayar, in Bujold's series, is as much a character as any of the people.

The final lessons learned from this exploration of creationism deal with the properties that characters have. In our response to Yagisawa's second objection, we argued that characters literally have the properties ascribed to them by their authors, but that the way in which they have those properties is different than the way that actual, flesh-and-blood individuals have their properties. Our description of this distinction was little more than a promissory note, but any satisfactory creationist theory of fiction must have such a distinction.

But there is a little more to say about how characters get their properties. As we argued in the response to Brock, endowing a character with properties is a process that continues after the character is initially created. And, as could be easily inferred from that discussion, authorial intention is key in determining which properties a character has. But authorial intention is not sacrosanct. Consider the case of *The Phantom Menace*, in which George Lucas creates a character—Jar-Jark Binks—who he clearly intends to be amusing and endearing but who is universally understood to be neither. In this case, Lucas does not explicitly say that Binks is amusing and endearing, but he means to show it, and he could have easily said so, particular if he had been writing for print rather than for the screen. Imagine that he had said so. Would that have given Binks the properties of being amusing and endearing? Not necessarily.

Both of these properties depend on other properties that Lucas vested in Binks and showed the world in the film. But those other properties clearly made up a character that was neither amusing nor endearing. All of these other properties are properties that Lucas intended to give and successfully gave to Binks. He was simply wrong about how to describe them. He thought they should be described as amusing and endearing, when in fact they were no such

thing. An author making a mistake in a description does not endow his character with the mistaken property.

Of course, this does not mean that an author cannot endow a character with contradictory properties. Human authors are fallible, and both their intentions and their texts are prone to have contradictions that the authors themselves do not see. What should we say in this case? The most natural answer is that the characters have contradictory properties. We are not supposing them to be material objects or residents of some possible world, either of which would require that their properties are consistent. So when an author ascribes contradictory properties to his or her creation, the result is that that creation has contradictory properties.

An important consequence of this is that the essential properties of a fictional person will not be the set of properties that the fictional person has necessarily. It is not possible for anyone to have contradictory properties, but fictional characters sometimes do. Any satisfying discussion of fictional essences must note this distinction, but again, we must leave this point with a promissory note. There is not space to give a full account of fictional essences in this chapter, but when we do give one, it will have this feature.

This leaves us with plenty of work—particularly regarding fictional essences and regarding the distinction between different ways of having properties—to give a truly complete account of fictional objects. But here we have given the reasons to be a creationist, responded to the best objections against creationism, and in doing so worked out many of the details that must be included in a satisfying creationist theory.

CHAPTER 2: ARE FICTIONAL DAGGERS SHARP?

In chapter one, we argued that fictional objects are abstract artifacts that exist in virtue of being created by their authors. For instance, Sting, an elvish dagger said to glow blue when orcs or goblins are near, and Bilbo Baggins, the hobbit who wielded it, were both created by J.R.R. Tolkien in the early 1930s. But when Tolkien created Sting and Baggins, he endowed them with certain properties. Sting, for instance, was created to be sharp. It had to be sharp enough to slice through the giant spider webs in Mirkwood and to wound the spiders themselves. Yet at the same time, because it is an abstract and not a concrete object, even the most reckless reader need not worry about being cut by it.

This leads to an objection against creationism that we did not fully answer in chapter one. Takashi Yagasawa argues that, according to the creationist, fictional objects are created to have certain features, but that the creationist denies that fictional objects have those features that they were created to have. Sting was created to be sharp, but it isn't sharp. It's an abstract object, and abstract objects aren't sharp. The creationist account is trying to have it both ways, saying that Sting is sharp because Tolkien made it to be sharp, while at the same time saying that Sting is not sharp, because it is abstract.[29]

So is Sting sharp, or is it not? It cannot be both—nothing is both sharp and not sharp. How can the creationist resolve this conflict? This question has led philosophers of fiction in two competing directions, both of which we touched on in chapter one. Some philosophers have

[29] Yagisawa (2001).

developed the Encoding Account, which involves drawing a distinction between two types of predication, one applying to concrete objects and one applying to fictional characters. Other philosophers have developed a Story Operator Account, which posits an implicit "according to the story" operator that applies to statements purporting to express fictional truths.

The Encoding Account attempts to provide a way in which we can plausibly claim that fictional objects genuinely have the properties ascribed to them in the stories. *The Hobbit* says that Sting is sharp, and Tolkien created Sting to be sharp, so the Encoding Account says that Sting is sharp. Of course, on the creationist account, Sting is an abstract object, and abstract objects aren't sharp, so the Encoding Account faces a non-trivial task in trying to show how it is that Sting is indeed sharp. It does so by positing two types of predication, saying that Sting genuinely has the property of sharpness but does not have the property of sharpness in the same way that actual daggers have the property of sharpness. This distinction between two types of predication allows the account to claim that Sting is both sharp and abstract. But I will argue that it also leaves the account open to an important question in the case of historical fiction: what type of predication applies when real people appear in works of fiction?

The Story Operator Account, on the other hand, holds that all fictional predication, regardless of the object of the predication, is of the same type. This account admits that it is true *according to the story* that Sting is sharp, but it also asserts that sharpness is not a property of Sting, thus respecting the urge to deny that Sting is sharp. The Story Operator Account is strongest precisely where the Encoding Account is weakest. It has an easy explanation for the case of historical fiction, saying that the story operator applies just the same in historical fiction as it does in ordinary fiction. But recall that this weakness of the Encoding Account arose from

respecting the pull to say that Sting is sharp, and the Story Operator Account explains away—rather than respects—this pull, denying that sharpness is in any way a genuine property of Sting. And if sharpness is not a genuine property of Sting, it seems as though the Story Operator Account has failed to really respond to the objection. If Sting isn't sharp but is only sharp according to the story, how can we still say that Tolkien created Sting to be sharp?

What we need is a way of treating fictional predication as uniform that still respects the witness of the stories themselves. After exploring in more detail these two accounts and what we can learn from them, I will present a third account that does just this: the World-Relative Account, which sees all predication as a three-place relation involving an object, a property, and a world-time. The World-Relative Account argues that we have independent reason to move from the traditional understanding of predication as involving a two-place relation to an understanding that requires a third place, and once we have a new account of predication, it allows us to both treat fictional predication as uniform and and adequately respond to Yagisawa's challenge.

The Encoding Account

The Encoding Account, developed most famously by Edward Zalta,[30] [31] takes the stories at their word. It respects the intuition that Sting is sharp, just as depicted in *The Hobbit*, but that it is sharp in a different way than the way in which actual daggers are sharp. It works by drawing a distinction between two types of predication: exemplification and encoding. According to this account, concrete objects exemplify properties. Neyland Stadium exemplifies the property of being in Tennessee. The White House exemplifies the property of being white. A soccer ball

[30] In *Abstract Objects* (1983).

[31] Although Peter van Inwagen offers a less detailed account of this type in "Existence, Ontological Commitment, and Fictional Entities" (2003).

exemplifies the property of being round. All of this is quite unremarkable. But Sherlock Holmes, the account says, is not concrete. Holmes is an abstract object, which is why even the most thorough searches of Baker Street will not find him. And abstract objects can exemplify some properties as well, generally intentional properties, ontological properties, and negations of ordinary properties. For instance, all abstract objects exemplify the property of being abstract. And Sherlock Holmes may exemplify the property of being written about by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But abstract objects, unlike concrete objects, can also encode properties, and according to Zalta, for every set of properties, there is exactly one abstract object that encodes exactly those properties. Holmes, for instance, despite being abstract, encodes the property "is concrete," along with "smokes a pipe," "plays the violin," "lives on Baker Street," and others.[32] These properties distinguish Holmes from Bilbo, who encodes the properties "is a hobbit," "lives in the Shire," and "carries a dagger," among others.

It is easy to see how this applies to the question at hand. Yes, Sting is sharp, because Sting encodes the property of being sharp. This sharpness is evidenced by Sting's other encoded properties—the properties of slicing through giant spider webs in Mirkwood and of wounding the spiders. But Sting does not exemplify the property of being sharp, as actual sharp daggers do. This is why you are in no danger of being cut by Sting, though you may be cut by an actual sharp dagger. The handling of such cases demonstrates the virtues of this account. It respects the truth of statements like "Tolkien created an exceptionally sharp dagger that would allow Bilbo to

[32] Linsky, Bernard and Zalta, Edward. "In Defense of the Simplest Quantified Modal Logic." Zalta's theory is worked out in detail in *Abstract Objects* (1983) and *Intensional Logic and the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (1988).

escape the Mirkwood spiders."[33] But at the same time, it explains the clear difference between a real dagger being sharp and a fictional dagger being sharp. And so, it allows us to say both that Sting is abstract and that Sting is sharp.

So the Encoding Account provides a compelling analysis of Bilbo and Sting. But cases like these are not the only ones at issue in a discussion of fiction. After all, not every fictional object is created by its author. Otherwise, the Sherlock Holmes stories could not be set in London, the BBC television series *Orphan Black* could not be set in Toronto, no work of fiction could be set on Earth, and the entire phenomenon of fanfiction would be pulled up by its roots. How does the Encoding Account handle these cases? Particularly, how does it handle the case of historical fiction?[34]

While *Orphan Black* could have been set in any major Western city, real or fictional, there are some stories that rely heavily on settings or characters that are borrowed from history. The Parisian setting of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is one of the key building blocks of the story, and *Past Master* relies on the historical Thomas More. Even sillier fictions like *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* make no sense in the absence of Napoleon, Socrates, Beethoven, etc.

But these cases pose a puzzle for the Encoding Account. It seems clear that if there are any concrete objects at all, then Paris, Thomas More, Napoleon, Socrates, and Beethoven are concrete. But concrete objects cannot encode, and so the Encoding Account seems to suggest that there cannot be any story in which More or Napoleon encode any properties at all.

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[33] Or, at least, it is able to respect such sentences. Zalta, not being a creationist, would not affirm that Sting was created by Tolkien, although he would affirm "Tolkien wrote about an exceptionally sharp dagger that allowed Bilbo to escape the Mirkwood spiders."

[34] We could ask the same question regarding fanfiction, but the case of historical fiction will suffice.

There are two general responses available to the partisan of the Encoding Account. The first would be to deny that there are any works of fiction that contain historical figures. While "Napoleon" is usually used to denote a certain man, they might say, it may be the case that in discussions of *War and Peace*, "Napoleon" does not have the normal denotation but rather refers to a creature of fiction that is described similarly to—but is numerically distinct from—the man Napoleon.[35] But while this account is coherent, it is unpalatable. Without a doubt, we do have works of fiction containing characters that are meant to be creatures of fiction based on historical figures. KFC has run a line of commercials between 2015 and 2017 that relies on this very phenomenon—the audience is supposed to find humor in the character in the commercial claiming to be Colonel Sanders, a real, historical individual, when it is clear to the audience that the character is really not Colonel Sanders. But we also have works of fiction that are really about the historical figures on which they are based. Often, movies based on true events, although they admit to have told a story that is at least partially fictional, will close by telling what various characters *actually* went on to do. These sorts of stories are not like the KFC commercials, containing creatures of fiction that purport to be historical people. These sorts of stories are about the real, historical figures.

But if there are any works of fiction that are really about historical people, what response is left for the Encoding theorist? How can we understand works of fiction containing historical figures if those figures cannot encode properties? The Encoding theorist can do so only by denying that predication in historical fiction works as it does in ordinary fiction. This second response available to the Encoding Account can be developed in two directions. The first would

[35] This explanation is considered by Peter van Inwagen in "Creatures of Fiction" (1977).

be to say that historical figures exemplify whatever properties are attributed to them in fictions, and the second would be to say that historical figures contained in fiction cannot in any way have any properties that they did not exemplify in life. While different criticisms can be levied against the two different ways of taking this response—against the first way, it seems mad to say that we can make historical figures exemplify any properties we want just by making up stories about them; against the second way, it is true that Thomas More time travels in *Past Master*, though he didn't in life—they ultimately both fall to the same objection: predication in fiction should be consistent. If someone were to write a bit of historical fiction in which Richard Nixon became a prince, he should be a prince in exactly the same way that Hamlet is a prince.[36] Or, to take an example from an actual bit of fiction, consider a scene from *The Man in the High Castle* in which Adolf Hitler makes a phone call to the historical Reinhard Heydrich and the fictional John Smith. In the story, all three speak together. But because Hitler and Heydrich are actual, concrete people, they cannot encode speaking to each other over the phone, and because Smith is fictional, he does encode speaking to Hitler and Heydrich. So when the three speak together, do they exemplify speaking to each other, encode speaking to each other, or not have the property at all? The Encoding Account cannot give a consistent answer. One character must encode, and the other two cannot.

Here is a summary, for reference, of how the Encoding Account applies to to the film *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*:

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[36] To take an example from Amie Thomasson's *Fiction and Metaphysics*.

The Encoding Account					
	Fictionality	Abstractness	Manhood	Beardedness	Presence at San Dimas HS
Ted Logan[37]	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Encodes	Neither exemplifies nor encodes	Encodes
Socrates	Neither exemplifies nor encodes	Neither exemplifies nor encodes	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Does not encode[38]

The Story Operator Account

The main consideration driving against the Encoding Account was that fictions can contain historical figures, and that historical figures in works of fiction should have properties in the same way that purely fictional objects have properties. They are, after all, both part of a fiction. But this is precisely what is not allowed under the exemplification/encoding distinction, which affords purely fictional objects a mode of predication that is simply not available to historical figures, no matter how many times someone writes fictions about them. This is reason to reject the Encoding Account.

However, this consideration is exactly the insight that underlies the Story Operator Account. It argues that all fictional predication should be the same, whether in historical fiction or science fiction or any other sort of fiction. How? By saying that predication regarding fiction

[37] One of the title characters in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*.

[38] Whether Socrates exemplifies or does not exemplify presence at San Dimas High School will depend on the particular line of response chosen by the partisan of the Encoding Account to the historical fiction objection.

is implicitly prefixed by "according to the story," so that properties predicated of a fictional object in the fiction are not genuine properties of the object at all. We can truly predicate of Sting that it was created by J.R.R. Tolkien, and we can truly predicate of Sherlock Holmes that he is famous. But we should understand statements like "Holmes smokes a pipe" or "Sting is sharp" as really stating "according to the story, Holmes smokes a pipe" and "according to the story, Sting is sharp." It is true, the account says, that Sting is sharp according to the story. But it is false or truth-valueless that Sting is sharp.[39]

So the Story Operator Account respects the insight that predication regarding fiction should be uniform, thus answering the biggest objection to the Encoding Account. But does it allow us to say all that we wish to say about fictional objects and their properties? This will require further examination. The Story Operator Account does allow us to truly say that Sting and Bilbo exemplify the property of being created by Tolkien. It is not true according to the story that that Sting and Bilbo were both created by Tolkien, but it is true in the real world, outside the story. And of course, it allows us to truly say that Sting was sharp enough to allow Bilbo to escape the Mirkwood spiders. After all, according to the story, Sting was sharp enough to allow Bilbo to escape the Mirkwood spiders. But suppose we were to find out (contrary to fact), that *The Hobbit* was actually a collaboration between Tolkien and C.S. Lewis and that each had been responsible for creating different characters and objects. In that case, we might wish to say that it

[39] Like with the Encoding Account, the general strategy of the Story Operator Account may be shared by different distinct theories—there are several different accounts with different ontological commitments that make use of the "according to the story" operator. Anyone with a story operator account *can* accommodate statements like "Sting was created by Tolkien," but story operator accounts are not obligated to respect such statements. David Lewis (1978) and Stuart Brock (2002) have non-creationist story operator accounts. To keep continuity with the rest of the discussion, we will focus on the versions of story operator accounts that do, particularly that of Amie Thomasson (1999).

was Tolkien (not Lewis) who created the exceptionally sharp dagger that allowed Bilbo to escape the Mirkwood spiders. But that is precisely what the Story Operator Account does not allow us to truly say. For it is neither true according to the story nor actually true that Tolkien created an exceptionally sharp dagger that would allow Bilbo to escape the Mirkwood spiders. That Bilbo did escape, thanks to a sharp dagger, is true only according to the story. But that Tolkien created the dagger is not true according to the story. We cannot make the combined claim. And the inability to make such claims is a counterintuitive feature of the Story Operator Account that runs directly contrary to the insight given by the Encoding Account.

We can try to delve deeper into how the Story Operator Account's claims about truth in fiction affect what is true of the creation of fictional objects, but attempts to do so reveal another limitation of the account—the Story Operator Account resists closer examination because the story operator provides us with a semantic theory and not an ontological one. So even if story operator accounts can tell us whether statements like “Sting is sharp” should be evaluated as true or false, it tells us nothing about the features of Sting itself. As far as the story operator is concerned, absent a semantics for the story operator itself, Sting could be an abstract object created by Tolkien, a possible but non-actual object, a non-existent object, or nothing at all. We have already said that Sting is a created abstract object, but even this more specific claim added to the story operator account doesn't give us much further explanation. It tells us that Sting isn't sharp—it is merely sharp according to the story—and fails to provide anything further to account for our pull to say that Sting is sharp.

But if we stop here, we have an account that respects basic claims about the creation of fictional objects but totally sidesteps Yagisawa's objection. We can truly say, on the Story

Operator Account, that Sting was created by Tolkien, but if Sting doesn't genuinely have the properties ascribed to it in the story—but is merely said by the story to have them—how can we say that Tolkien created Sting to be sharp? How can we say Tolkien created Baggins to be a hobbit? We have two objects that Tolkien created, but we don't have any objects that are what Tolkien created Sting and Baggins to be. Neither object is a hobbit. Neither object is a dagger. Neither is made of flesh. Neither is made of metal. We just have two, relatively featureless abstract objects. And so the Story Operator Account can respect the basic creationist claim that Tolkien created the two objects, but if it cannot say that Tolkien created either a person or a dagger, it has not answered Yagisawa's objection. To provide an answer requires us to do further ontological work.

Here is a summary, for reference, of the Story Operator Account applies to *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*:

The Story Operator Account					
	Fictionality	Abstractness	Manhood	Beardedness	Presence at San Dimas HS
Ted Logan	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Does not exemplify, but exemplifies according to the story	Does not exemplify	Does not exemplify, but exemplifies according to the story
Socrates	Does not exemplify	Does not exemplify	Exemplifies, and exemplifies according to the story	Exemplifies, and exemplifies according to the story	Does not exemplify, but exemplifies according to the story

The World-Relative Account

In these two accounts, we have seen two primary insights that must work together for a satisfying account of fictional predication. From the Encoding Account, we see that the mode of predication in fiction must be different than in ordinary life. If fictional objects are abstract, they simply cannot exemplify the sorts of properties that concrete objects do. But if the ascriptions of properties in the stories can't be said to be true in any sense stronger than "according to the story, *x* is F," it doesn't answer the objection. If we are to be able to say that Tolkien created Sting to be sharp and Baggins to be living, we must have genuine predication. And the only way to have genuine predication for fictional objects without making unreasonable demands of abstract objects is to endorse some sort of distinction between modes of predication. However, the distinction we considered in the Encoding Account didn't work. And to introduce a better one, we must use an insight from the Story Operator Account: statements within historical fiction should be treated the same as statements within other sorts of fiction. If there is a novel in which Nixon marries into a royal family and becomes a prince, he should be a prince in the exact same way that Hamlet is a prince.

My account, the World-Relative Account, combines these insights by introducing a distinction, not between two species of predication, as the Encoding Account did, but between a genus and a species. The Encoding Account presented a sharp distinction between exemplification and encoding, the usual type of predication and a type that can apply only to abstract objects. But the World-Relative account introduces a distinction that relies not on the type of object but on the world-time relative to which the predication occurs—that is, on what

world the predication is in and on what time in that world the predication is at. This account emphasizes that all properties must be held at some world or another, whether at a possible world, a fictional world, or any other type of world in our ontology. Accordingly, predication must be a three place relation, taking an object, a property, and a world. When the third place is the actual world, however, we have a special kind of predication: exemplification. So rather than exemplification being a distinct sort of predication that relies on the object of predication, as in the Encoding Account, the World-Relative Account holds that exemplification, or predication$_{actual}$, is just a special case of general predication.

Such a distinction allows us to make all the claims we are inclined to make about creatures like Sting, Baggins, and Holmes. In the actual world, all three exemplify the property of being abstract. As such, Sting does not exemplify sharpness, Baggins does not exemplify spider-fighting, and Holmes does not exemplify pipe-smoking. After all, abstract objects are not sharp, do not fight spiders, and do not smoke pipes. But in the relevant fictional worlds, all three objects have—but do not exemplify—the property of being concrete, and so can also have properties like sharpness, spider-fighting, and pipe-smoking. Similarly, in the relevant fictional world, John Smith shares a phone call with Adolf Hitler; after all, despite Smith actually exemplifying abstractness and Hitler actually exemplifying concreteness, both have the property of being flesh-and-blood human beings in the world of the fiction.[40] Of course, these fictional

[40] One who is inclined toward a Lewisian view of worlds, in which all possible worlds exist concretely, will doubtless object to this distinction between the way of having a property in the actual world and a way of having a property in other worlds. But to anyone who is inclined to say that the actual world is the only state of affairs that obtains, this claim that exemplification can only occur in the actual world dovetails nicely with the already-held view that the actual world is significantly and objectively different from all other worlds, possible or impossible.

worlds may well be impossible,[41] but possible or not, they provide us with a place in which the fictional objects have all the properties we wish to say they have.

Thus, the World-Relative Account has all the strengths of the Encoding Account. Like the Encoding Account, it respects the witness of the stories, affirming truths like "Sting is sharp." Also like the Encoding Account, it denies that Sting exemplifies sharpness, which explains the pull to deny that Sting is sharp. And because the World-Relative Account affirms that Sting is sharp, it can answer the objections raised against the Story Operator Account. It does not posit generic creation, in which an author brings an abstract object into being but has little to no say in any of that object's properties beyond "*x* is said to be *y* in the story." Instead, it fills in the gaps left by the Story Operator Account, affirming that as an author creates a fictional character, they also shape that character by endowing it with a host of properties that it really has in the relevant world. Tolkien doesn't just create a generic abstract object that he calls "Sting" and alleges to be sharp, but rather creates an object that genuinely has, in the world of *The Hobbit*, both the properties of being a dagger and of being sharp. And unlike the Story Operator Account, it has no problem saying that Tolkien created an exceptionally sharp dagger that helped Bilbo escape the Mirkwood spiders. After all, Tolkien exemplifies the property of having created the dagger that has the properties of being exceptionally sharp and helping Bilbo escape the Mirkwood spiders.

But, while the strengths it shares with the Encoding Account allow the World-Relative Account to avoid the problems that plagued the Story Operator Account, it also avoids the weaknesses of the Encoding Account. The failure of the Encoding Account came because there were only two ways of having properties—exemplifying and encoding—and encoding was

[41] I argue elsewhere that they are impossible, and one's agreement with that conclusion will turn on whether or not they view abstract objects as necessarily abstract.

limited to abstract objects only. This prevented Nixon from being a prince in a hypothetical work of fiction in the same way that Hamlet is a prince in *Hamlet*; Hamlet encoded princehood and Nixon, being concrete, could not. But the World-Relative Account employs an account of predication that requires us to look not to the object but to the world-time. Abstract objects can have properties that they don't exemplify. Concrete objects can have properties that they don't exemplify. So unlike the Encoding Account's exemplification/encoding distinction, the World-Relative Account allows us to say that Nixon would have the property of being a prince in just the same way that Hamlet does. Neither exemplify princehood, but Nixon would still have the property of princehood in the theoretical fiction, just as Hamlet has the property of princehood in *Hamlet*.

As we saw, the World-Relative Account gives the same general answer to our initial question that the Encoding Account did: Sting is sharp, but not in the same way that actual daggers are sharp. Sting, while sharp, does not exemplify sharpness. So like the Encoding Account, it answers the objection, allowing us to say that Sting is sharp and that Sting is abstract. But this account's divergence from the Encoding Account in the cases where actual objects appear in works of fiction allows it to respect not only the insight from the Encoding Account—that predication in fiction is different from actual predication—but also the insight from the Story Operator Account, holding that all fictional predication is of one kind. Holmes is not a man in the Doyle stories in the same way that Barack Obama is a man, as he does not exemplify manhood. But Holmes is a man in the Doyle stories in the same way that Napoleon is a man in *War and Peace*—both have the property of manhood in the relevant fictional worlds. This shift from the object of predication to the world-time of predication gives the World-Relative Account a natural

application to the case of historical fiction, giving it all of the intuitive benefits of the Encoding Account with none of the drawbacks.

Here is a summary at a glance of the World-Relative Account, with summaries of the other two accounts repeated for reference:

The World-Relative Account								
	In the actual world				In the *Bill and Ted* story world			
	Fictionality	Abstractness	Manhood	Beardedness	Fictionality	Abstractness	Manhood	Beardedness
Ted Logan	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Does not have	Does not have	Does not have	Does not have	Has, does not exemplify	Does not have
Socrates	Does not have	Does not have	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Does not have	Does not have	Has, does not exemplify	Has, does not exemplify

The Encoding Account					
	Fictionality	Abstractness	Manhood	Beardedness	Presence at San Dimas HS
Ted Logan	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Encodes	Neither exemplifies nor encodes	Encodes
Socrates	Neither exemplifies nor encodes	Neither exemplifies nor encodes	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Does not encode[42]

[42] Whether Socrates exemplifies or does not exemplify presence at San Dimas High School will depend on the particular line of response chosen by the partisan of the Encoding Account to the historical fiction objection.

The Story Operator Account					
	Fictionality	Abstractness	Manhood	Beardedness	Presence at San Dimas HS
Ted Logan	Exemplifies	Exemplifies	Does not exemplify, but exemplifies according to the story	Does not exemplify	Does not exemplify, but exemplifies according to the story
Socrates	Does not exemplify	Does not exemplify	Exemplifies, and exemplifies according to the story	Exemplifies, and exemplifies according to the story	Does not exemplify, but exemplifies according to the story

Objection #1: Exemplification Isn't a Three-Place Relation

We have argued that the World-Relative Account respects the key insights of each of the first two accounts but does so without any of the drawbacks. But both of the first two accounts claimed to respect key insights but ended up failing when we considered objections. So now, we must consider objections to the World-Relative Account. First, one may object that this account unduly revises what we know about predication. By making the place so important, it makes predication a three-place relation, taking an object, a property, and a world-time, rather than just a two-place relation that takes an object and a property. But predication should be a two-place relation. Exemplification, so the objection goes, is just a matter of whether or not an object has a property. It has nothing to do with world-time. If someone were to assert “the flame is green,” and an interlocutor were to ask “in what world?,” the response would likely be a confused stare, whereas asking “what color is the flame?” would be treated as a straightforward question.

Reply to Objection #1:

This third place in the relation is a feature, not a bug. We needed world-time all along, although we might not have realized it, as we often left it implicit. If we were to ascribe to Barack Obama the property of being President, we mean in the actual world, not in some possible world. And we would mean at some time between 2008 and 2016, as opposed to some other time. When one makes a statement like "Barack Obama is President," the temporal element of the world-time is specified by the present tense verb, and the modal element of the world-time is assumed. If we don't use language like "could," "should," or "possibly," we typically assume (correctly) that the world in question is the actual world. But being left implicit doesn't mean that world-time isn't important. Obama can't just be President regardless of temporal and modal location—he must be President at some time or another and in some world or another. So we see that even in exemplification, world-time is important, even if we don't often examine that importance. And that importance is just as significant for actual objects as it is in fiction. Just like Hamlet is not a prince in *Fourth Mansions*, Obama is not President in *Fourth Mansions.* [43]

Objection #2: Can This Account for our Engagement with Fiction?

So we have seen that the third place in the relation is required independent of concerns about fiction, showing objections to the third place to be in error. But we must still ask whether the World-Relative Account is compatible with our experiential data on how we engage with fiction. A full analysis of engagement with fiction is a project for another time, but some very

[43] There are those, like A.N. Prior (1959), who, because of their views on time, would object to building time into the predication relation, preferring statements of predication that can change from true to false (or vice versa) depending on the time at which they are evaluated. I do not sympathize with this view, but I will not argue against it here, and someone with these sympathies could still endorse the World-Relative Account with only a minor change, replacing the "world-time" place with simply "world."

general observations are enough to get the question off the ground. When someone loses themselves in a book, a movie, a play, or some other form of fiction, it seems that they are, to some degree, engaging in make-believe.[44] They pretend that the words on the page or the images on the screen depict real flesh-and-blood objects engaging in real crime-solving or spider-battling or whatever the case may be.

On the surface, this may not seem to have much to do with a metaphysical account of fiction. But Stephen Yablo, in his review of Thomasson's *Fiction and Metaphysics,* objects that if fictional characters are abstract objects, then engagement with fiction requires us to pretend that abstract objects are people. But if Holmes is an abstract object, is it not strange to pretend he's a detective? And why do we pretend that an abstract object is a dagger if it isn't a weapon and can inflict no harm? Even children, when seeking props for games of pretend, try to find something that at least vaguely resembles what it is meant to be. They are more likely to use a long, pointy stick than a milk carton if they mean to represent a sword. Perhaps a particular sort of writer, a Jorge Luis Borges or an R.A. Lafferty, might write a story in which the number seven enters into a plot to overthrow modern society, but it doesn't seem like the sort of thing that's going on in the writing or reading of ordinary works of fiction.[45] Since the World-Relative Account, along with Thomasson, holds that many objects appearing in works of fiction are abstract, it must also answer this objection.

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[44] It is important to note that one can affirm that we, to some degree, pretend when engaging with fiction without being what is called a *pretense theorist*—someone who thinks that our statements about fiction actually include no ontological commitments and only pretend to commit us to the existence of fictional objects.

[45] In “The Thing about the Figure in the Bathhouse,” a review of *Fiction and Metaphysics* (1999).

Reply to Objection #2

But when the objector asks why it is not bizarre that we pretend that a generic abstract object is smoking a pipe, the World-Relative theorist has an answer that Thomasson does not. On our theory, Holmes is not a generic abstract object but an object that has been endowed with properties like being a detective, playing the violin, and smoking a pipe. We are merely pretending that those properties are exemplified properties.[46] It is not like a situation where one pretends a number would smoke a pipe, because a number does not have the property of pipe-smoking at all.

The difference may be better understood by means of an analogy. Consider that, on one television screen, there is a collection of gray pixels in a generally blobby shape. On another, there is a collection of pixels of different colors arranged so that they resemble a man smoking a pipe. It is possible to pretend of the blob of pixels that it is a man smoking a pipe, just as it is possible to pretend of the number seven that it does the sorts of things that only living beings can do. And this is the sort of thing that may be done by authors of a certain sort (like Lafferty or Borges) or by children (after all, any child will tell you that seven ate nine). But it is quite natural to pretend of the man-shaped collection of pixels that it is a man smoking a pipe, because it visually represents a man smoking a pipe.

[46] As before, this pretense has nothing to do with whether we can refer to fictional objects (as it would on a pretense theory) or how to evaluate the truth of propositions about fictional objects. All three accounts that we've discussed here hold that fictional objects exist and are objects of reference, and the World-Relative Account holds that fictional objects genuinely have properties. But when we pretend, we pretend that fictional objects have properties in the same way that real world objects have properties—they exemplify them.

We have not given and will not give a thorough analysis of what it is to have a property without exemplifying it. Certainly, because this kind of predication takes place in stories which can be recounted verbally (or even not recounted at all), we cannot rely on visual representation, as in the example of the television screen. But there is an analogous difference here. A theory that states that Holmes is an abstract object that does not smoke a pipe but that we merely pretend smokes a pipe would do something akin to presenting us with indistinguishable blobs and asking us to pretend different things about them. A theory that states Holmes is an abstract object that has—but does not exemplify—the property of pipe-smoking does something akin to presenting the image of a man smoking a pipe and asking us to pretend the image is really a man smoking a pipe. The latter is much more natural. While a full analysis of engagement with works of fiction is a task for another day, our view on which fictional objects have the properties ascribed to them by their authors allows for a more robust account of authorial creativity, allows for nuanced fictional objects that are significantly different from each other, and provides the audience with objects with a natural basis for their pretense.

Objection #3: Can This Account Handle Cross-World Properties?

But there is yet another question that one may ask of the World-Relative Account: what does one do with seemingly cross-world properties like that of admiring Holmes? On the World-Relative Account, each property must be held at a specific world-time, so statements like "Jones admires Holmes," in which an actual person admires a fictional character, may appear to cause trouble. Is the property of admiring Holmes held in the actual world or the fictional one?

Reply to Objection #3

It turns out, however, that while this question is tricky, the way in which our theory handles it is pretty straightforward. Recall that we claimed that all properties must be held at a modal location. So what of “Jones admires Holmes”? In what world is this property held? If Jones is an actual person and admiring-Holmes is a property she possesses, then this property must be held in the world that Jones is in: the actual world. Yes, she may be admiring Holmes for properties he has in a work of fiction, but she is doing the admiring in the world that she is in. One may be tempted to ask whether she's admiring actual Holmes or fictional Holmes, but upon closer examination, that question evaporates. Actual Holmes and fictional Holmes are the same object—Holmes is a fictional object in the actual world, in addition to being a detective in the world of the fiction—and that object is the object she admires.[47] So if Jones and Watson both admire Holmes, Jones is doing so in her world and Watson is doing so in the world of the fiction, but they are both admiring the same Holmes, an actually abstract object who has the property of crime-solving (and a host of other properties) in the fiction.

What about when we move to the passive voice and consider the property of Holmes that he is admired by Jones? Again, if Jones is an actual person, the answer is in the actual world, for two reasons. First, this is clearly a case of exemplification; for Holmes, being admired by Jones is like being famous or being fictional, not like being a detective or smoking a pipe. Second,

[47] Saul Kripke (in *Philosophical Troubles,* 2011, as well as in the 1973 *John Locke Lectures*) makes a distinction between Holmes the character and Holmes the person. I do not deny that this distinction is helpful for thinking about these issues, nor do I deny that we can meaningfully ask whether Holmes the character and Holmes the person are the same object. What I claim here is that Holmes the character and Holmes the person *are* the same object—Holmes the person is Holmes the character in another (likely impossible) world. There is not time to give a lengthy defense of that position here, but our consideration of historical fiction, in which I argued that it is important to the genre that the stories are *about* the actual historical figures, offers some helpful parallels. A more thorough discussion of this topic will occur at the beginning of chapter three.

Jones, by hypothesis, doesn't exist in the fiction, and it is not true in the fiction that Holmes is admired by Jones. It is true, however, in the actual world.

This concept works the same way in historical fiction. If one admires Napoleon for his character in *War and Peace*, it is Napoleon—and not some fictional character distinct from Napoleon—that one admires. Now this sort of admiration may lead to bizarre consequences, particularly if the historical fiction strays far afield from reality or if the reader is misinformed about reality. We may be left with a case where a reader both admires (for his character in the story) and scorns (for his actual character) the same object. To take a concrete example, one may have a measure of respect for Hitler for his character in the early seasons of *The Man in the High Castle* while reviling Hitler for his actual character. But this strangeness is not evidence that our theory has gone wrong but rather that fictional emotions are strange beasts. One could coherently scorn actual Hitler but admire the way Hitler could have been had he made different choices, but people by and large do not feel strongly about the way someone is in another possible world.[48] And they do sometimes feel strongly about characters in fiction. This may be an odd data point, but it is a data point, not to be rejected but embraced. It deserves further treatment, but such treatment must be on the subject of fictional emotions, and it would take us too far afield in our current discussion of predication. So for now, suffice to say that this oddness is simply a feature of our experience of fiction and not a problem for our theory.

What about comparative relations, like "Jones is smarter than Holmes"? These must be reduced to the properties that make them up, but in a way that is not too strange. Much like

[48] Now they may look at how someone could have been and use that to intensify their feelings about the way the person actually is (e.g. scorning someone all the more because they could've been so much better), but that is a different phenomenon.

"Annalee is taller than Bob" can be reduced to "there is a height that Annalee exemplifies," "there is a height that Bob exemplifies," and "the former height is greater than the latter height," "Jones is smarter than Holmes" can be reduced to "there is a level of smartness that Jones exemplifies[49]," "there is a level of smartness that Holmes has in the stories," and "the former level is greater than the latter level."

Objection #4: This Account Fictionalizes Possibility

While concerns about fiction have been driving this entire discussion, it is important to note that the World-Relative Account makes claims about predication that apply more generally. And when we claimed that exemplification is a special case of predication that occurs only when we are predicating in the actual world, we ruled out exemplification not only in fictional worlds but in all merely possible worlds as well. But fictional worlds are not always possible worlds—metaphysical possibility imposes a constraint stricter than those that bind authors of fiction. And if fictional worlds are not just possible worlds, why is the possible lumped in with the fictional as regards predication in the World-Relative Account?

Reply to Objection #4

Once we have claimed that exemplification is a special case of predication more generally, we have two options for handling predication in merely possible worlds. Either we could claim that predication in any possible world falls under exemplification, or we could claim, as we have done, that exemplification only applies to the actual world, leaving the possible as well as the fictional outside its purview. The former would certainly appeal to someone like David Lewis, who argues that "actual" is merely indexical and that there is nothing objective that

[49] Assuming here that Jones, like Annalee and Bob, are actual people.

sets the actual world apart from other possible worlds—other possible worlds are just as real and just as concrete as this one.[50] But for a non-Lewisian, who sees the actual world as importantly different from other possible worlds as the only possibility that obtains, the second is the more appealing option.[51]

For those who are skeptical of the claim that there are other concrete possible worlds, many of the considerations that pushed us to draw a distinction between exemplification and the sort of predication that occurs in fiction apply equally well to possibility. Just as Sting is sharp in *The Hobbit* but cannot harm an actual reader, my lamp stand is possibly sharp (it could, for instance, be broken, exposing a jagged edge) but actually poses no real threat to those who visit my house. And just as I cannot find the fictional Sherlock Holmes at 221B Baker St, I cannot find the merely possible son that could have been my firstborn child anywhere in my house.

Now it is true that we tend to treat the merely possible much differently than we do the fictional. I would correct someone asking where my firstborn son slept or marveling at how sharp my lamp stand is, while I would not correct someone speaking of Sherlock Holmes' residence or marveling at how sharp Sting is. And it would be quite odd to admire someone's merely possible properties, while it isn't unusual to admire a fictional character. But these considerations should not lead us to treat fictional predication differently from merely possible predication. The first sort of case is easily explained by inferences from context—when discussing one's children or furniture, the third place in the predication relation is assumed to be

[50] In *On the Plurality of Worlds* (1986).

[51] And even the Lewisian, while they will not find the second option initially appealing, should seriously examine the considerations in favor of the second option. Lewis' primary argument that possible worlds should be treated as the same sort of thing as the actual world stems from wanting to respect the linguistic data. But the linguistic data is no more important than the ordinary intuition that there is something special about actuality.

the actual world, whereas when speaking of fictional objects, the third place is assumed to be the relevant fictional world. The second sort is more puzzling, but it has to do with our emotional responses to fiction, which are a different (although no less interesting) topic than the one at hand, and one that will be addressed in chapter four.

So even though we do treat the possible differently from the fictional, we can see that the merely possible has the same features that led us to conclude that fictional predication is not exemplification. And so we should likewise conclude that merely possible predication is not exemplification. And we should not be dissuaded by the differences between the possible and the fictional. Many, perhaps most, fictions are not metaphysically possible, and some may not even be logically possible. But while metaphysical possibility is a philosophically important category, we don't need a distinction between metaphysically possible and metaphysically impossible predication any more than we need a distinction between physically possible and physically impossible predication.

So now, having dealt with four objections to the view, we are now in a position to take stock of what we have accomplished. For starters, we have given a clear answer to the initial objection. Yes, Sting is abstract, but Sting is also sharp, in the story world, just as it was created to be. But in doing so, we have not only provided a way for creationists to respond to this particular objection, we have also provided compelling reasons to shift our understanding of predication in general to one that sees predication as a three-place relation taking an object, a property, and a world-time. This makes explicit what was previously implicit in our ordinary practice, and it applies to the actual, the possible, and the fictional. When we apply it to actual predication, we get exemplification, a special case of the three-place relation. When we apply it

to possibility, we are able to make sense of predications regarding the merely possible without positing concrete possible worlds. And when we apply it to fiction, it allows us to say that fictional objects genuinely have the properties ascribed to them in works of fiction while recognizing that they have them in a different way than the way in which actual objects have their actual properties. And it does so while holding all fictional predication to be the same. So not only can we answer questions about Sting, we can also answer questions about Bilbo, about Holmes, and even about Napoleon. And we can do so in a way that's plausible, respecting the truth of our ordinary statements about fiction, and in a way that doesn't fall prey to the objections that doom the other accounts.

CHAPTER 3: ESSENCE OF FICTIONS AND FICTIONAL POSSIBILITIES

In chapter two, where we introduced a distinction between ways for objects to possess their properties, we considered the case of an actual person, Smith, admiring Sherlock Holmes. We noted that Smith's admiration of Holmes must occur in the actual world—the world in which Smith resides—but then asked whether Smith admires the actual Sherlock Holmes or the Holmes of the stories. The actual Holmes, of course, is an abstract object, a fictional character created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. And it may seem odd to admire such a creature, especially while the Holmes of the stories, a brilliant man known for his crime-solving prowess, is an available target for Smith's admiration. But our answer was not that Smith (strange as it may seem) admires actual Holmes or (more naturally) the Holmes of the stories. It was that both Holmes are the same object.

Depending on how immersed one is in the philosophical literature on the subject, this claim might sound like either a very obvious truth or a laughably naïve falsehood. Those who hear this claim ring true may note that Doyle created actual Holmes to be part of the stories. But if Holmes was created for the sole purpose of being part of the stories, should he not be the object that is in the stories, smoking pipes and solving crimes and doing whatever else Doyle writes of him? Of course he should![52] Now it is still useful to distinguish between Holmes the man and Holmes the character—after all, if we say that Jones admires Holmes for being such a

[52] An argument along these lines is given in Salmon (1998). Additionally, Yagisawa's objection to creationism, which we discussed in depth in chapter two, relies on the fact that the arguments for creationism commit creationists to this sort of reasoning.

compelling and well-written character and Smith admires Holmes for his intellectual prowess, we certainly seem to be conflating something. But when we do distinguish between the character and the man, we must realize that we are not distinguishing between two distinct objects[53] but between two modalities of one object. Holmes is an actual object who actually has the properties that we would attribute to Holmes the character, properties of being abstract, being created by Doyle, etc. But Holmes is also an object that, in the world of the fiction, is a man, solves crimes, smokes pipes, etc. Holmes the character and Holmes the man are the same object, but the properties generally ascribed to Holmes the character are Holmes' actual properties and the properties generally ascribed to Holmes the man are Holmes' story-world properties.

But those who view the identification between the character and the man as naïve falsehood post serious objections which they see as requiring a position on which the character/man distinction must be a distinction between two objects.[54] First of all, ordinary people would affirm that Holmes the character exists but would deny that Holmes the man exists. Second, Holmes the character is an abstract object, and yet Holmes the man (who is identical to said abstract object) does lots of things that abstract objects cannot do. The first concern was addressed in chapter one, and the second was the primary focus of chapter two. But there is a related problem that is even more difficult to solve, one that deals with essences of objects in fiction. And that third problem will be the subject of this chapter.

The Problem of Essences

[53] Or as Kripke (2013) argues, two uses of the name “Sherlock Holmes,” one of which refers to a fictional character and the other of which is thoroughly non-referring.

[54] Or one object and one empty name.

In *Naming and Necessity*, Saul Kripke argues that the origins of a material object are essential to it. For instance, Elizabeth II could not have been born of different parents than she in fact was,[55] and a particular wooden table could not have been made from an entirely different hunk of wood (much less from a block of ice).[56] Unsurprisingly, there are challenges to Kripke's position, but his claims do align with some natural modal intuitions, starting with the popular conception of different sperm-egg combinations representing different possible people and extending to intuitions about the construction of inanimate artifacts. Of course, we have argued that fictional characters are not material objects, so any thesis about the origins of material objects will not directly apply to our discussion. But there is a natural extension of origin essentialism to fictional objects. Holmes comes from the mind of Doyle, and that is essential to him. If another author (say, Agatha Christie) had set out to write about a pipe-smoking, violin-playing, British detective named "Sherlock Holmes," it would not have been Sherlock Holmes.[57] This extension has intuitive pull, and it brings origin essentialism directly to bear on fictional objects.

Another common essentialist claim is that an object could not have been a vastly different sort of object.[58] Socrates could not have been an iguana[59], and a wooden table could not have

55 Factoring out possibilities like egg transplants or sperm donations.

56 Kripke (1980).

57 From James Brantner's "On Unicorns, British Detectives, and Armageddon Operas" (2010).

58 Defended by David Wiggins in *Sameness and Substance* (1980) and Baruch Brody in *Identity and Essence* (1980).

59 One may consider fantastic scenarios like Socrates' mind being somehow imprinted on the iguana body, but it's unclear whether an iguana body with a human mind would really be an iguana (rather than a human or some sort of hybrid object).

been an icicle. Again, this has intuitive pull, and it has even more when the examples cross the concrete/abstract divide. Socrates could not have been a number, and the concept of justice could not have been a grilled cheese sandwich.

Both of these apply to our discussion of fictional objects. For we have claimed that Holmes is actually an abstract object created by Doyle but in the stories is a concrete object born of a woman. Holmes the man was not created by Doyle but by the union of two people. And Holmes the man is a person, not a fictional character. Claiming that Holmes the character and Holmes the man are identical runs afoul of both origin essentialism and sortal essentialism.

In response to this, our first instinct may be to deny essentialism, or at least these strands of it. But, while there may be reasons to be skeptical of some specific essentialist claims, the thoroughgoing denial that would be needed to solve the problem would bring its own counterintuitive consequences. One may take issue with a claim that a particular table could not have been made into a chair while still holding to the less controversial claim that Socrates could not have been a number. And it is the less controversial (not uncontroversial, but less controversial) claims that cause the problems here. Whether or not a person could have been formed from a different sperm/egg combination or a table could have been a chair matters to us much less than whether a manmade abstract artifact could have been a person. So even those who are more than willing to reject some of the more controversial claims of origins and sortal essentialism still have cause for concern. Almost everyone believes that there are some ways that an object could have been and some ways that the object could not have been. Wholesale denial of essentialism would pressure us into explaining away deep and abiding intuitions that seem on the surface to be worthy of defense.

But is there another way around the problem? Can we make essentialist claims while still affirming the identity of character and person? We can, and the first step to that end is to disentangle essence and necessity. While essence and modality are certainly related, it is common for essentialists to define an essential property of an object as one which that object has in every possible world in which it exists.[60] But if we're dealing with worlds that aren't possible, it is easy to see how such a definition could cause problems. Take, for instance, John F. Kennedy. If, as Kripke argues,[61] fictional characters are not people in any possible world, then there is no possible world in which Kennedy meets Forrest Gump. This in turn implies that in every possible world in which he exists, Kennedy does not meet Forrest Gump, which means that “not meeting Forrest Gump” meets the above standard for being an essential property—it is essential to Kennedy that he does not meet Forrest Gump. But in the world described by the movie *Forrest Gump*, Kennedy does meet Forrest Gump. Unless we are willing to say that Kennedy has counteressential properties in the story, we must conclude that not meeting Gump is not an essential property of Kennedy. And for those who are not convinced by Kripke's arguments against fictional characters appearing in other possible worlds, the problem still arises. For those who believe that time travel is impossible, a similar case can be constructed with Napoleon, who travels through time in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure.* And if you are unconvinced by either example, take something you believe is impossible and consider an impossible world in which an actual person does that thing. As long as you believe that some worlds are impossible and that some impossible worlds contain actual people, you should believe that the above definition is

[60] Zalta in “Essence and Modality” (2006) notes that this characterization has been standard for decades. It is notably used in Plantinga's *The Nature of Necessity* (1974) and Robert Stalnaker's “Anti-Essentialism” (1979).

[61] Kripke (1980).

deficient. There are properties that an object has in every world in which it exists that it does not have essentially.

So if an object's essence doesn't just comprise those properties it has in all possible worlds, what is it? The modal characterization is undergirded by the intuition that an object's essential properties are those without which it could not exist. And without impossible worlds, the above rejected definition seems to cash out those intuitions. But the addition of impossible worlds shows a need for something else. An object's essential properties are not just those without which that object could not exist, but without which any object, possible or impossible, would not be *that* object. With that in mind, a first pass revision could just extend the modal characterization to cover the initial flaws. For a property to be essential to an object, there must be no world—possible or impossible—in which the object exists without that property. This is not a definition of essence, but merely a necessary condition for a property to be essential to an object. But it will serve well enough as a placeholder while we continue our discussion.[62]

With essence and necessity distinguished, we now have a new avenue to explore when trying to make essentialist claims fit with what we've said about fiction: claiming that what were presented as theses about essence were actually theses about necessity. Because common conceptions of essence tied it so closely to necessity, the terms were used interchangeably in some contexts. To take an especially relevant example, what we have called "origins

[62] It is worth noting that this addresses a common criticism of the modal characterization of essence. It is objected, by Kit Fine in "Essence and Modality" (1994), among others, that the modal characterization (that an object's essential properties are those it has in every possible world in which it exists) make necessary truths part of an object's essence, when intuitively those truths have nothing to do with the object. For instance, every object in every possible world is such that 2+2=4. But being such that 2+2=4 does not seem like part of the essences of every possible object. But our revised characterization goes to worlds in which necessary truths are false, these do not make it into the essence of an object.

essentialism" is often called "the necessity of origins." It is easy to argue that the concepts of necessity and essence have been conflated, and if they have been conflated, then it is possible that essence claims about origins and sortals were too strong to begin with. Perhaps they should have only been necessity claims all along. And if they were necessity claims, they will not trouble our fictional people, who are people only in impossible worlds.

This is easy enough to believe in the case of sortal essentialism. Liberty, for instance, is an abstract concept. Most philosophers would surely agree that, as such, liberty could not have been a woman. Yet it seems to be exactly that in a host of artwork, like Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. Abstract concepts in general seem to be necessarily abstract, but when it comes to fiction (or impossibilities more generally), that requirement is relaxed. The concretization of abstract concepts seems to be totally fair game, for instance, for children's literature or for magical realism. And the fantasy genre is notorious for stories in which certain objects are turned into objects of a different sort. So while there may be compelling intuitions that an object is a certain sort of thing necessarily, those intuitions are much weaker when we move from discussion of necessity to essence.

But can we dismiss the necessity of origins thesis in the same manner, by claiming that the entire problem derived from a mistaken conflation of essence and necessity? For all that matchbooks may be turned into mice in fantasy stories, it seems a stretch to look at a matchbook in one world and a mouse in another and claim that they are the same object unless their causal history ultimately traces back to the same stuff. And while fantastic stories may coherently include concrete versions of abstract ideas, it's more difficult to find such vastly different origin stories about the same object. While it may seem impossible for certain objects to become

different sorts of objects, an equally drastic change in origins seems more than just impossible, it seems unintelligible. Even if we think it's impossible, we can make sense of a story in which Socrates is turned into an iguana. But what about a story in which Socrates was an iguana all along? And not a talking, philosophizing iguana, just a regular iguana who happened to be Socrates? While the first story is totally comprehensible, even if it's impossible, it's hard to see a sense in which we can understand the individual in the second story to be Socrates.

Now it may seem that this is the wrong result, that the sortal claims and the origins claims are connected, and that viewing one as a necessity claim and another as an essence claim stems from being distracted by unusual examples. But in fact, it may be that the opposite is true, we may be distracted by using examples that are too typical of contemporary fiction. Consider mythology. In mythology, stories that give drastically different origin accounts of actual objects are a dime a dozen. There's a Norse myth in which one of the stars is actually an ancient hero's frozen toe, broken off and thrown into the sky by Thor. There are folk-tales in which the Milky Way is formed by embers being thrown across the sky, stolen straw being dropped, stolen cornmeal being dropped, or milk being squirted from the breast of Opis, mother of Zeus. There are stories in which stars are sentient beings and stories in which stars are luminescent hunks of rock.[63] But all of these accounts are inconsistent with the actual origins of the known heavenly bodies.

And yet, impossible as they may be, it seems clear that these myths are myths *about* the actual heavenly bodies. And if they are about the actual heavenly bodies and yet are inconsistent

63 Some of which also raise the question of whether certain properties of natural kinds are necessary or essential. This question would not affect the argument of this paper, and so it will be set aside for now, but it is one of a number of cases in which we must distinguish between necessity claims and essence claims.

with the material origins of the actual heavenly bodies, then it must be true that the material origins of an object are not essential to it. Origins may be necessary, but they are not essential.

Fictional Possibilities

So if both sortal essentialism and origins essentialism were a step too far, the original challenge has disappeared. It may be necessary of Sherlock Holmes that he is an abstract object created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but as long as it is not essential to him, then there is no puzzle presented by him having properties in impossible worlds of being concrete or of being created through a physical act of conception. However, this answer does present another problem. If we are to have a satisfactory account of fiction, we must be able to explain fictional essences. Before an author shares a character with readers, sometimes even before a pen is put to paper, that character has a nature of some sort. There are things that that character would do. There are things that character would never do. There are ways that character could be. There are ways that character could never be. For instance, Sherlock Holmes could have played the viola instead of the violin, but he could not have been born as a dolphin. But with the above arguments advising us to eschew so many essence claims in exchange for necessity claims, it becomes unclear how they can apply to fiction at all. We can claim of Socrates that he could not have been born a dolphin because he is necessarily not born a dolphin—there is no possible world in which he is born a dolphin. But this same line of reasoning cannot be used in the case of Holmes, or in the case of fictional characters in general. After all, we have claimed that most worlds of fiction are impossible to begin with, some because of internal inconsistencies, some because they are worlds in which actually abstract objects are concrete. But since fictional worlds are not members of the set of possible worlds, ordinary necessity claims have no hold on them. Socrates

may be a man in all possible worlds, but Holmes is a man in no possible worlds—he's an abstract object in all possible worlds in which he exists. Essence claims, not being bound by the possible, would have served well to explain why we say there are some things that Holmes could have done and other things that he could not have. We could have claimed that Holmes could not have been a dolphin because Holmes is essentially not a dolphin, but Holmes could have played a different instrument because Holmes does not essentially play the violin. But our discussion of sortal and origins essentialism casts doubt on the existence of essences that are robust enough to cash out the modal claims we want to make about fictional characters. If an object's essential properties are the ones it has in all worlds, possible or impossible, an object has very few essential properties indeed.[64] So if modal claims such as "Holmes could have played the viola but could not have been a dolphin" are not supported by essence, because essence is not robust enough to do the job, or by necessity, because we are dealing with impossible worlds, how can we make sense of such claims?

Clearly, we can make modal claims about fictions beyond a flat declaration of their impossibility, just as we can make claims about the properties of a fictional object beyond its actual properties ("is abstract," "is fictional," etc.). In the latter case, we argued that an object may have properties that it does not exemplify, and that in the case of fiction, those non-exemplified properties were those bestowed by the author on the object. In the former case, our answer will be similar. We must look beyond what is actually possible and look to the modal

[64] In fact, our arguments regarding essence and fiction push us to an extremely minimal picture of essence that bears some similarity to the extreme haecceitism discussed in Stalnaker (1979) and Penelope Mackie's *How Things Might Have Been* (2007), although Stalnaker would disagree with the decoupling of essence and necessity.

properties bestowed by the author on the object. We have argued that it is actually impossible for Sherlock Holmes to play the violin, let alone the viola. But Doyle has created a character who, in the world of the stories, *does* play the violin and could have played the viola. The author imputes not just actual properties, but modal properties as well.[65]

What are those properties? In some instances, an author will explicitly endow a fictional object with a particular modal property, but in many cases, they piggyback on familiar modal properties. This is not a special feature of modal properties—it applies to ordinary properties as well. We didn't need Doyle to tell us that Sherlock Holmes has a spleen. We can assume that because Sherlock Holmes is human, he has a spleen.[66] Similarly, because Sherlock Holmes was created to be a man, many of his modal properties will follow from his manhood (and many, more generally, from his personhood). For instance, just as it is possible for most actual people to have gone into lines of work other than that which they in fact do, it is possible for Sherlock Holmes to have not become a detective. Similarly, just as it is possible of actual men that they go bald, it is possible of Sherlock Holmes that he went bald.

Now this does not mean that every fictional object has every modal property associated with their kind. It may be impossible for a human child to be born with the sort of magical ability described in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, but despite being a human, it is possible that Hermione Granger be born with that magical ability. And if fictional objects are indeed concrete only in impossible worlds, then the vast majority of fictional humans will have one sort of modal

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[65] While not directly discussing the case of fiction, Alan McMichael discusses the non-actually possible as "the problem of iterated modalities" in his "A Problem for Actualism about Possible Worlds" (1983a) and "A New Actualist Modal Semantics" (1983b). McMichael's discussion is extended to fiction in Reina Hayaki's "Actualism and Higher-Order Worlds" (2003).

[66] Lewis (1978).

property possessed by no actual humans: it will be possible for them to meet other fictional humans that populate their world. But in general, while no fictional object will have modal properties that perfectly line up with the modal properties of actual objects of the appropriate sort, the vast majority of fictional objects will inherit some modal properties from whatever sort of thing they were created to be. How much will depend on how much the fiction deviates from what is actually possible. Objects in particularly realistic fiction will inherit more than objects in more fantastic stories. But in general, fictional objects will have many modal properties in virtue of the sort of object they were created to be and others deriving from more specific features of the world of their story.

Now what do we mean by "possible" and "could"? We've said that Sherlock Holmes could have gone bald or played the viola, but how is it possible for Sherlock Holmes to do anything if Sherlock Holmes is not a possible person? Speaking of actual possibilities—that is, what is possible relative to the actual world—it isn't possible for Holmes to have gone bald or to have played the viola, just as it is not actually true that Holmes is a detective. The possible things that Holmes could have done and possible ways that Holmes could have been are not actual possibilities but fictional possibilities; that is, they are possible within the fiction and relative to the world of the fiction. This should seem like the natural conclusion. Holmes only plays the violin in the fiction, not in the actual world. Similarly, that he could've played the viola is a property within the fiction, not in the actual world. But the conclusion being natural doesn't explain how it works. We distinguished between exemplification and general having of a property in order to explicate the difference between having a property actually and having a

property in a fiction. But the same distinction won't make sense of the difference between actually possible and fictionally possible.

So how do we explain it? In order to do so, we need to talk about accessibility. To those who haven't dabbled in modal logic, it may seem strange to talk about possibility relative to some world or another. If something is possible, one may think, it is possible full-stop, not relative to a particular world. Similarly, if something is necessary, it isn't necessary only relative to certain possible worlds—it is necessary full stop, true in all possible worlds. These may be intuitive, but they are not taken for granted in all systems of modal logic. Rather, modal logic features an accessibility relation between pairs of worlds. While the accessibility relation is used for all sorts of possibility, it may be easiest to grasp regarding epistemic possibility. When we learn a proposition *p*, all worlds in which *p* is false are no longer epistemically possible. The *p* worlds (or whichever *p* worlds are consistent with whatever else we know) are still live options, but the other worlds are not. We can think of the accessibility relation as capturing live options. And the live options for an actual person who just learned *p* may be different than the live options for a person in another possible world who just learned *q*. So the accessibility relation is relative to a world.

Now when we move from epistemic possibility to metaphysical possibility, the accessibility relation allows us to consider whether metaphysical possibility is possibility full stop or is possibility relative to a world. In S5, one of the most popular systems of modal logic, the accessibility relation is an equivalence relation. This means that, within the class of worlds containing the actual world, anything that is possible in any possible world is actually possible and anything that is necessary in any possible world is true in all possible worlds. And this lines

up with our basic modal intuitions, making it an extremely plausible system for the logic of possible worlds.

But in the case of fiction, we're not talking about possible worlds, we're talking about impossible worlds. And while it may be plausible to say that all possible worlds make up an equivalence class, such that anything that's possibly possible is indeed actually possible, this is not a very good candidate for dealing with the logic of impossibility. This should come as no surprise—the impossibility of impossible worlds means they are not subject to many of the fetters that bind possible worlds. And so we should not expect things that are possible relative to an impossible world to be the same things that are possible relative to the actual world. And furthermore, we should not expect things that are possible relative to the world of Sherlock Holmes to be the same things that are possible relative to Norse mythology. But this means that impossible worlds will not make up an equivalence class. Which in turn means that when dealing with impossibility, we should move away from discussion of possibility full stop and talk about possibility relative to a world. Clearly, many (if not all) worlds that are possible relative to a given impossible world will not be actually possible. After all, we are dealing with worlds that are actually impossible. But as long as possibility relative to some impossible world is not confused with actual possibility, this gives us a way to talk meaningfully about possibilities within fiction, even if the worlds of fiction are not actually possible.

One may worry that if the logic of impossibility is not the logic of possibility, writers will not be able to give their characters the sorts of modal traits that reflect the typical modal traits of real world objects. But the logic of impossibility is not more restrictive than the logic of possibility, it is less restrictive. The accessibility relation need not be an equivalence relation

when dealing with impossible worlds, but there may be some impossible worlds that come together to form an equivalence class, so that anything possible with respect to any one of them is possible with respect to all of them. That this is not required of every set of impossible worlds does not mean that it is true of none. Now these equivalences classes might not be the typical cases in fictional modality, but it can happen. And even in the impossible worlds that are not part of equivalence classes, fictional modality will work in a way that's pretty familiar in every case that doesn't involve iterated modalities.[67] And while cases of iterated modalities are not guaranteed to work as they do in S5, many of the same sorts of claims may still be true, depending on which impossible world we're dealing with (which, in the fiction case, depends on what sort of fiction we're dealing with).[68]

This allows us to countenance possibilities within fiction even if both the fictional accounts are themselves impossible and fictional essences are not robust enough to offer any help. Authors endow characters with modal properties in much the same way that they endow characters with regular properties, and those modal properties can be understood in terms of accessibility relations between impossible worlds. And so the dismissal of robust essences that allowed us to answer the puzzle presented in the first part of the chapter does not prevent us from providing a satisfying account of fictional possibilities.

[67] That is, modalities that are iterated beyond claims like "in this fictional world, it is possible that *p*," rather making claims like "in this fictional world, it is possible that it is possible that *p*."

[68] The question of iterated modalities may spark the question of fictions within fictions. But this is no special problem. Just like regular fictions, fictions-within-fictions describe an impossible world. And just like actual fictions exist as abstract objects in the actual world, fictions-within-fictions exist as abstract objects in the world of the original fiction. Neither poses any special problem regarding iterated modalities.

The Problem for the Merely Possible

So now that we have both decoupled necessity and essence and given an account of modal properties of fictional objects, we have a theory of fiction that answers all of the objections raised at the outset. Not only does it answer the general objections to creationism discussed in chapter one and the objection discussed in chapter two that fictional characters cannot be abstract objects because they have properties that only concrete objects have, it also provides an account of fictional modalities on which fictions can do impossible things without running afoul of what we know about essence and necessity. And if our theory were only one of fiction, we would be finished. But in chapter two, we extended our discussion of predication to deal with possibility as well. And that extension may leave us open to similar objections recurring in different places.

In chapter two, we rejected an account of possible worlds in which all possible worlds are concrete existents, and in which "actual" is an indexical—the actual world isn't special in any way except for being the world in which we reside. Rather, we have argued that the actual world is special, that is the only world in which objects exemplify properties, and that predication in other possible worlds should be understood in the same way as predication in fiction. This puts us broadly into the camp of actualists, who believe that modality is not grounded in the existence of other worlds like ours, but rather that there is modal structure built into the actual world. But it does not yet commit us to either strict actualism or what has been called trace actualism (or, derisively, proxy actualism).[69] Strict actualism holds that, not only are there no non-actual things, there are no non-concrete proxies for non-actual things. All possibilities are either general

[69] By Karen Bennett (2006).

possibilities or possible ways that an actual object could have been. There are no singular propositions about merely possible objects.[70] It may be true that I could have had a son as my firstborn child, but that truth must be expressed generally, because there is no object that could have been my firstborn son. Trace actualists, on the other hand, affirm that there are no non-actual things, but they allow traces, or proxies, for non-actual things. They may believe, following Alvin Plantinga, that merely possible objects—objects like my firstborn son or Beethoven's 10th symphony—while they do not actually exist, do have actually existing, but unexemplified, essences[71]. Or they may believe, following Bernard Linsky and Edward Zalta, that such objects, objects that we would pretheoretically call merely possible objects, are actually objects that are contingently non-concrete.[72] Or they may believe something else in this vein. Whatever the specifics may be, trace actualists believe that there is something non-concrete in the actual world that allows us to admit the singular propositions that strict actualists would deny.

For strict actualists, our theory generates no new objections when we shift the discussion to possibility, as strict actualists hold that there are no unexemplified essences or contingently non-concrete objects about which to raise the questions that we raised about fictional objects. The objections to strict actualism itself are still there, of course, but there aren't any new objections in virtue of our theory. For trace actualists, however, we face another problem. While we may have dismissed the charges of origins essentialism and sortal essentialism against our theory of fiction, they return when we shift to possibility.

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[70] Defenders include A.N. Prior in *Time and Modality* (1957) and Robert Adams in "Actualism and Thisness" (1981).

[71] Plantinga (1974).

[72] Linsky and Zalta (1994).

Even if we have successfully shown that humans are not essentially human, it still seems quite plausible that humans are necessarily human. Or, put more precisely, all humans are human in every *possible* world in which they exist, even if not in every world in which they exist.[73] But if there are possible people who are actually non-concrete, then the previous claim is false. The possible person in question fails to be human (in virtue of failing to be concrete) in the actual world, which is a world in which it exists.

Perhaps Plantinga's actualism can avoid this objection on the grounds that merely possible people do not actually exist—only their essences actually exist. But if one favors the contingently non-concrete, this response will fail. So does our theory have anything to say in defense of this stripe of actualism? It does. It asks simply whether it is indeed true that such a creature is human in every world in which it exists. And the answer is “no.” Merely possible people are, by definition, not actual people. So if they exist as a non-concrete object in the actual world, then there is a world in which they exist as a non-concrete object, and in that world, they are not a person. So the necessity claim is false, as it should be.

Now if the necessity claim is false, why did it seem so plausible? Again, there is a relatively simple answer. It seems plausible because there is another very similar claim which happens to be true. A merely possible person exists actually *because* they exist possibly. For an actualist, the modal structure of the actual world—including all other worlds and objects, possible or impossible—is part of the actual world. But the merely possible person is not part of the actual world in the same way that the actual person is part of the actual world. The actual person is part of the non-modal structure of the actual world. The merely possible person exists

[73] This is a sortal case, but a similar origins case can be made without difficulty.

in the actual world only as part of its modal structure. Understanding this, we can revise the original claim to say that all humans, actual or merely possible, are human in every possible world in which they exist as part of the non-modal structure of that world. This statement may be a bit of a mouthful, but it is the true statement that gave our previously rejected statement its initial plausibility.

While we have not argued for a particular version of actualism, this allows us to freely choose between various actualist accounts without having to worry that claims like "all people are necessarily concrete" will render our choice untenable. Positing unexemplified essences or the contingently non-concrete will not violate what we know about necessity or essence.

And with that, not only have we explained how fictions have the modal structures that they do without violating what we know about necessity and essence, we have freed trace actualism from the parallel objection. And this completes our task. Our account of fiction and its extensions to possibility have given rise to three major objections. As it stands, all have been answered.

CHAPTER 4: IMAGINATION AND FICTIONAL EMOTIONS

For the last three chapters, we have dealt with the metaphysics of fiction. What are fictional objects, how do they have their regular properties, and what sense can we make of fictional essences? But there is more of philosophical interest than just the metaphysics of fiction. We also seem to care about what goes on in worlds of fiction, much more than we care about what goes on in merely possible worlds. Millions admire the cunning of Tyron Lannister in *A Song of Ice and Fire,* and millions more loathe everything about *Harry Potter* bureaucrat Dolores Umbridge. When watching *Better Call Saul*, I feel a genuine desire for Kim Wexler to make good life choices—not because it would make for a more interesting story, but because I like her and want it to go well with her.

But if it is true, as we have claimed in previous chapters, that fictional worlds are no more real than other possible worlds, it is difficult to explain why ordinary people care so much about them when we seem to care almost nothing for what goes on in other possible worlds. Are we able to make sense of these reactions in the context of the metaphysical claims put forward in the last three chapters? We can. But before we begin the work of explaining *why* we care about fiction, we will first argue *that* we really do care about fiction by examining and answering a well-known puzzle in aesthetics: the problem of belief

The Problem of Belief

The problem of belief consists of three statements which appear to be true but are mutually contradictory. First, we do not respond emotionally to objects or situations that we do

not believe to be real—we do not fear things we know full well cannot harm us, we do not admire people for actions we know them not to have performed, etc. Second, we do not believe fictional objects and situations to be real. And third, we do respond emotionally to fictional objects and events.[74] The only way out of the puzzle is to deny one of the three statements, but each looks individually plausible. So which is false?

Kendall Walton believes that the culprit is the third statement. We do not, according to Walton, have genuine emotional responses to works of fiction. He admits that some of the physiological features of genuine emotion exist in our responses to fiction, but he argues that these are not genuine emotions. Rather, they are distinct states that merely share some features of genuine emotions. How does he justify the claim that these are not genuine emotions, even though they may appear, from the outside or the inside, to be genuine? By observing the gap between our responses to fictional emotion and regular emotions.

Genuine fear, Walton notes, moves us to avoid the thing that we fear. But plenty of people who claim to be afraid during horror movies don't avoid them, which Walton takes to mean that this is not a genuine emotion but a quasi-emotion, one that has physiological similarities to the real thing but also has notable differences—mainly the lack of motivation to action in response. To support this argument, Walton makes heavy use of the case of Charles, who reports being terrified upon watching a horror movie and seeing deadly green slime rushing towards the camera. But Charles does not run from the theater, which Walton takes to mean both that Charles

[74] By "respond emotionally" here, I mean responses like fear of, concern for, admiration of, etc. fictional objects. While we can be overwhelmed by a particularly beautiful work, or have characters and storylines in fiction bring to mind real life parallels that generate an emotional response, but these are not the sort of reactions at issue here.

does not really believe the slime is dangerous and that Charles is not genuinely afraid of the slime. He is quasi-afraid of it, but not genuinely so. Were he genuinely afraid, he would run.[75]

So far, so good. Walton's response, if acceptable, would solve the puzzle, and he has provided a compelling example that tells in favor of his response. This warrants a closer look. Walton makes heavy use of the Charles example, so we must determine whether the example holds up to close examination. In Walton's example, Charles claims to fear for himself. And if he did indeed fear for himself, we should, as Walton claims, be puzzled by his lack of active response. If he is afraid for himself, why does he not run? It would be entirely reasonable for us, with Walton, to doubt Charles' claim that he is genuinely afraid for himself. But are appreciators of horror typically afraid for themselves? Or are they afraid for the characters? Someone who watched *Alien* and was genuinely afraid that the alien would harm them should be corrected. The alien is fictional and poses no threat to them. But this is not the typical response; on the contrary, watchers of *Alien* are much more likely to be afraid that the alien would harm Ripley or one of the other characters. And if the viewer is afraid for Ripley's sake—knowing that Ripley is a fictional character—it makes perfect sense why the viewer does not respond in action: the viewer can do nothing for her. But this does not mean that the emotion is not genuine. On September 11, 2001, television viewers were horrified to hear that two planes had hit the World Trade Center and that another, United Airlines Flight 93, had been hijacked. Doubtless, many viewers were afraid for the people on Flight 93 and for the people currently in or around high-profile US buildings. But most did not respond by trying to help the people on Flight 93. This doesn't mean that they weren't really afraid. It means they knew there was nothing they could do.

[75] From Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990).

Emotions for the sake of fictional characters—fear for Ripley, pity for Anna, etc.--are the typical cases of emotional engagement with fiction. And emotions for the sake of fictional characters are not subject to Walton's argument. No, they do not motivate us to action, but that lack of motivation is explicable in ways that do not require us to reject these emotions as inauthentic. The lack of motivation is perfectly consistent with our emotional responses to actual circumstances which we can do nothing about. Walton's argument relies on an unusual example that should be met with skepticism. Charles is not behaving like a typical horror-movie goer, and if we trust his self-report of fear for his own sake, we should doubt whether he really understands that the slime is no real threat—perhaps he briefly became so intensely focused on the movie that he temporarily forgot it was fiction. And without Walton's anomalous example, his argument against the authenticity of fictional emotions falls apart.

The failure of Walton's argument leaves us back where we started. We still have three statements that seem true but are mutually contradictory. We have dismissed a prominent argument in favor of rejecting the third statement, the one stating that emotional responses to fiction are genuine. Now, we will turn to different proposal, one that argues that we should reject the second statement, that we do not believe fictional objects and events to be real.

The second proposal, sometimes called the doxastic view, employs on the concept of suspension of disbelief. It argues that we (at least sometimes) suspend our disbelief when engaging in fiction. Even though we know in one part of our minds that the account is fictional, we allow ourselves, while enjoying it, to believe it's actually true, and that is why it can genuinely move us emotionally.[76] This proposal may seem to be a plausible explanation for the

[76] As argued by Christian Metz in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (1982) and Jake Quilty-Dunn in "Believing Our Eyes: The Role of False Belief in the Experience of Cinema" (2014).

case of Charles, if he was indeed afraid for his own sake. Perhaps he really afraid because he was so wrapped up in the movie that he took the slime to be a real threat, and that he didn't flee the theater only because his false beliefs were overridden by true beliefs about the fictionality of the slime before he was able to act. But is this consistent with our experience of fiction more generally? Can it explain not just Charles' fear but the entire spectrum of fictional emotions?

When we examine suspension of disbelief in practice, we find something different than what we need to motivate a rejection of the claim that we do not believe fictional accounts to be actually true. When people talk about suspending disbelief in order to engage with a fiction, they are typically not referring to pretending that the fictional events are real events. On the contrary, the term "suspension of disbelief" refers to overlooking fantastic details in order to view the story as something that could have happened. Suspension of disbelief is often genre-specific. Action movies often allow the hero unlimited ammunition, but genres more focused on realism do not. A (possibly apocryphal, but illustrative) account depicts *The Far Side* cartoonist Gary Larson observing that he got complaints for a comic in which a male mosquito sucks blood (really, only female mosquitoes do this), but no one complained that the mosquitoes wore clothes, lived in suburbs, and spoke English. If suspension of disbelief were about letting yourself believe that the characters and events were actual, it would be hard to explain this variance by genre.

Now the proponent of this answer may certainly admit that our belief in the actuality of the fictional people and events is distinct from what is ordinarily called suspension of disbelief. But without being able to rely on that common practice in engagement with fiction, what more does this answer have to recommend itself? Is it not plainly contradicted by our experience of

engaging with fiction? While we often, as argued before, refrain from action in cases where we are emotionally invested but do not see what we can do, there are surely countless examples of fictions where we should believe that we could help if we believed the events in the fiction to be real. If viewers who invested emotionally in the fortunes of the heroes of disaster movies thought the events depicted were real, we should see a fair number of cases where people contact family members, urging them to get out of some city that is bound to be hit by an earthquake, tornado, tidal wave, etc. that is depicted in the fiction. But we do not.

Now it could be that those engaging with fiction believe these accounts to be actually true while simultaneously believing them to be fictional. And indeed, this is the line of response preferred by Christian Metz and Jake Quilty-Dunn. They draw a distinction between perceptual beliefs and central beliefs, both of which count as beliefs but only the latter of which are actually endorsed by the subject. Our perceptual states, Quilty-Dunn argues, typically cause perceptual beliefs. But watching a movie certainly generates perceptual states. Why should it be that those states suddenly stop leading to perceptual beliefs as soon as we walk into the cinema? Yes, we do already believe that the events being depicted are not actually occurring. But this wouldn't be the only case where our perceptual beliefs conflicted with beliefs we already held. The Müller-Lyer illusion, which depicts two lines that are the same length but appear to be of different lengths, is another case where our eyes generate one belief, even while our reason generates the opposite belief. The reason we do not pull out our phones to warn our friends of impending doom every time we watch a disaster movie, the doxastic theorist claims, is not because we lack the belief that the disaster is occurring but because we have contradictory beliefs, and the more central belief wins out when it comes to prompting action.

But is this really a case of contradictory beliefs? People are, of course, not perfectly rational, and are overwhelmingly likely to believe contradictory things at some point. But why should we believe that this is a case of two contradictory beliefs in which the less central is not strong enough to prompt us to take action? Why not instead analyze this as a case of our perceptual state failing to lead to a perceptual belief precisely because an already existing central belief contradicts it? Unless we are relying on the doxastic theory as our only response to the problem of fictional emotions, there seems to be little reason to prefer the former analysis over the latter. And the perception-heavy justification for the doxastic account doesn't even apply to the problem of fictional emotions in general, because novels can give rise to fictional emotions just as much as movies can. Unless imagination leads to belief just as naturally as perception does, the doxastic theory is bound to fall short.

So if fictional emotions are real and don't stem from a belief that the fictional accounts are actually true, the only remaining answer to the puzzle is to deny the claim that we do not respond emotionally to objects and situations that we do not believe to be real. But do we have better reason to deny this claim than the previous two? Tamar Gendler and Karson Kovakovich argue that we do, drawing on research in neuroscience and cognitive development to claim that emotional responses to hypothetical situations are key to our practical reasoning ability.[77] They cite an experiment[78] in which subjects are given $200 in play money and are told to maximize their profit by drawing cards from four decks of cards. They can draw from any deck of cards (and switch whenever they please), and each time they draw, they receive more play money, in

[77] "Genuine Rational Fictional Emotions" (2006).

[78] Antoine Bachara et al, "Insensitivity to future consequences following damage to human prefrontal cortex" (1994).

an amount that varies from deck to deck. However, they are periodically fined, with fine amounts and schedules also varying from deck to deck. The subjects are not told the amounts or schedules of the payments or fines in advance. As it happens, two of the decks yield higher payouts but are also associated with higher fines—high enough that drawing from those decks will ultimately leave the subject in the red. The other two decks have lower payouts but also have lower fines, low enough that the subjects drawing from these decks would often come out ahead. When the experiment is run, subjects with damage to the ventromedial sector of the prefrontal cortex, gravitate towards the decks with the higher initial payouts but penalties that ultimately overwhelm these payouts. Normal subjects, on the other hand, as well as subjects with other sorts of brain damage, initially sample from all four decks but ultimately gravitate towards the two decks with the lower initial payouts but higher long-term profitability. Finally, repeating the experiment with the reward and penalty schedules reversed indicates that the issue was not an oversensitivity to reward or undersensitivity to punishment, but rather an inability to weigh long-term results over immediate ones.

Subjects with this sort of brain damage, Bechara et al say, display no other intellectual deficiencies and have no problem performing comparably to controls in problem-solving tasks in laboratory settings. However, subjects with this sort of brain damage do struggle to make decisions in non-laboratory settings and display a lack of autonomic reaction to "emotionally distressing images."[79] Gendler and Kovakovich conclude that the ability to engage emotionally is a key factor in the hypothetical reasoning to make good long-term decisions. But this emotional engagement is not with actual events but with hypothetical events, the future consequences of

[79] Damasio et al, "Somatic markers and the guidence of behavior: Theory and preliminary testing" (1991).

various proposed decisions. But hypothetical future dangers, benefits, etc., much like fictional dangers, benefits, etc., are not believed to be actual. So if we cannot engage emotionally with things we don't believe to be actual, our ability to engage in hypothetical reasoning would be seriously hampered. While not investigating the same abilities, this dovetails nicely with research showing that reading fiction led to increased ability to recognize cognitive and emotional states in others.[80]

So research suggests that engaging with fiction proves useful in recognizing emotions and that engaging emotionally in fiction helps with practical reasoning. And that it proves useful gives a good explanation for why our brains would be constituted such that we do emotionally engage with fiction. And, coupled with the apparent truths that we do engage emotionally with fiction and that we do not do so by believing the fiction is real, it gives us convincing reasons to drop the requirement that we emotionally engage only with things we believe to be real.

If we accept Gendler and Kovakovich's reasoning from this data, then we can answer the initial puzzle. It was the first statement that was incorrect—we do, as it turns out, have genuine emotions towards objects or events we do not believe to be real. But while the initial puzzle may be solved, two more questions arise in its stead. Even if we grant that we *do* have genuine emotions towards objects or events that we do not believe to be real, we still have not explained *why* we respond emotionally to objects or events that we do not believe to be real or whether that is consistent with our existing metaphysical account of fiction. There may be data indicating that such a response exists and is useful, but we can hardly claim that such emotional responses are intentionally chosen on the grounds of their usefulness. And related to the question of why we

[80] Kidd, David Comer and Castano, Emanuele. “Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind” (2013)

have such emotional responses is the question of whether such emotional responses are rational. Again, just because we have them and because they are useful does not show that they are rational.

The Problem of Personality

With those two questions in mind, our consideration of fictional emotions will now turn to a lesser-known puzzle, one called by Gregory Currie "the problem of personality." Currie observes that the problem of belief is a significant one, but he argues that even were we to solve it, as we have, there would still remain the question: why are our emotional responses to fictional characters and events so different than they are (or would be) to sufficiently similar actual people and events? Currie cites an example from *The Masters*[81] in which an ambitious but underqualified academic, Paul Jago, seeks election to the Mastership of Cambridge College. In the story, Jago is rejected, and Currie notes in himself feelings of disappointment in Jago's failure, despite the fact that the man appointed was a clearly better candidate.[82]

Currie's case is far from the only example of this phenomenon. Most people who regularly enjoy works of fiction will be able to think of a similar case in their own experience, whether a case where the fictional reaction is different in kind, such as wanting the fictional bank robbers to get away with it and wanting the real ones caught, or merely in degree, such as mourning the untimely death of a beloved fictional character while feeling little or nothing when hearing of the actual death of some friend of a friend of a friend.

[81] By C.P. Snow

[82] "The Paradox of Caring" (1997)

If we can explain why our emotional responses to fiction are different than to real life situations, it should go a long way toward explaining why we respond emotionally to fiction and whether or not this is rational. And Currie offers us an explanation. He argues that reading fiction encourages us to put ourselves in the mindset of the intended audience of the story, imagining ourselves as people who may have very different values and priorities than we actually do. When we heed the story's prompting and put ourselves in the intended mindset, it should be no surprise that our emotional responses are much different than they would be to similar people and events in the real world.

This account prompts several questions, perhaps the most obvious surrounding the explication of “intended audience.” But it is instructive to start by setting aside the details of the account and evaluating the spirit of the proposal. Currie's solution does provide us with some clear insight into the problem—reading fiction does encourage us to take on other values, whether of the narrator, or of the characters, or of the author, or something else. But, once we have this insight, there are two further questions we must ask. First, is the phenomenon of being encouraged to take on novel values unique to fiction, or does it occur in other contexts? Second, is it sufficient to explain the disparity in our responses to fictional cases and to real life cases?

Currie also provides us some insight in response to these questions. He observes that we have a natural tendency to “adjust [our] own mental set[s] to the mental set[s] of another with whom [we] are in close communication,” and notes that David Hume has made a similar observation.[83] This is something we see in everyday life—when listening to a friend recount her day, we feel a pull to see things from her perspective and, to some degree, adopt her values. So

[83] In *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1888).

this phenomenon is not unique to fiction. But then we must ask whether it is this or something else that is responsible for the difference in our reactions to the fictional case and to the real case. And Currie seems to overlook this question as he explains his own solution to the problem of personality. Currie claims that, were he to read Jago's story as non-fiction, he would be entirely indifferent, even though he cares about Jago when reading the story as fiction. While it is dangerous to dispute other people's claims about their own mental states, there is reason to suspect that Currie's claim is false. His discussion of his hypothetical response to an actual Jago and his discussion of his response to fictional Jago have dissimilarities beyond his reactions and the fictional or non-fictional status of the cases. First, he explicitly considers the reaction he would have, as a professor, if Jago were running for Mastership of Currie's own school. This gives him a personal stake in the matter that is totally absent in the fictional case and would explain the difference in his reaction without any reference to having a different value set.

Second, when evaluating his own response, Currie holds the facts of the case fixed, but he does not discuss the presentation. But if we adjust our mental states when reading fiction, and if we also adjust our mental states when in close communion with others in real life, we have reason to believe that the presentation is of significant importance. The facts, or the pretended facts, aren't all there is to the matter. When Currie reads *The Masters*, he is being told the facts of the fictional matter, but he is being told them from a perspective that is extremely sympathetic to Jago. It would be easy to imagine being indifferent to an actual Jago (or Jago-like character) in an actual situation with the same set of facts. But it would be easy to imagine being indifferent to the fictional Jago if one were reading the same fictional facts, but presented by one of Jago's opponents or a neutral observer. The presentation matters, sometimes more than the facts matter.

If one only holds the facts constant, it is easy to assume one's actual reaction would be different than one's fictional reaction. But if the facts and presentation are both held constant, the emotional response is much more likely to be consistent. If Currie were to read Jago's story presented as fact by someone as sympathetic to Jago as the author of *The Masters*, and in a way that did not materially affect Currie's own life, it is much more likely that his emotional response would be the same as it was when he read Jago's story as fiction. The invitation to consider the world from another point of view is not doing the work—this is not what accounts for our disparate responses to fictional and real life cases.

What usually accounts for the difference in response between fictional and actual cases? A difference in imaginative engagement. The reason that the presentation matters is because it facilitates our imaginative engagement, which in turn shapes our response. Part of this will have to do with perspective, as Currie theorized. After all, an author that sympathized with Jago and an author that despised him could present the exact same facts in ways that prompt very different imaginative experiences on the part of the audience, the former likely prompting something like Currie's response and the latter prompting just the opposite. But part of the difference in emotional response stems not from the perspective from which we imagine but from the depth to which we imagine. A dusty presentation of propositional truths prompts a very different imaginative experience than a well-crafted story featuring the exact same set of propositions. Very few will care about the former, even if many care about the latter.

This point has not escaped everyone's notice. Noel Carroll, in a review of Walton's book, asks why fictions sometimes fail to move us. Presumably, they are intended to. And in most cases, we intend to let them. On Walton's theory, when we dive in to a work of fiction, we intend

to engage in the game of make-believe. But sometimes, they just don't move us.[84] This is because the medium is important. If someone is dead-set enough on playing a game of make-believe, they may be able to make do with poor props. A game of “the floor is lava” doesn't require a floor that bears any resemblance to lava. Similarly, it is possible to fill in the imaginative gaps even when presented with a dry, bare bones sketch of facts. But generally, the quality of the presentation is going to affect the level of imaginative engagement. A poorly-staged play will generally see audiences engage less than a well-staged play would. And the level of imaginative engagement is going to affect emotional engagement. *Plan 9 from Outer Space* and *Manos: The Hands of Fate* do not fail to scare viewers because their plot is not scary—there have been successful horror stories with similar enough plots—but because their storytelling is of such low quality. They cannot garner the level of imaginative engagement they seek, and so they fail to garner the emotional engagement they seek.

This is not unique to fiction. All else being equal, a true story told badly is not going to garner the level of imaginative engagement or emotional response of a true story told well. In fact, true stories told without any dramatic flair often garner less imaginative and emotional engagement than expertly presented works of fiction. The bombing of 2016 Easter services in Pakistan was an objectively horrible event that really happened, but for many with no personal connection to Pakistan, it didn't generate an emotional impact anywhere near that of a wordless four-minute scene from the beginning of the Pixar film *Up*. Why? *Up* was designed to engage the imagination and was created by people who are very good at engaging the imagination. News

[84] Carroll, Noel. “On Kendall Walton's Mimesis as Make-Believe” (1991).

stories about bombings are generally designed to present facts and are not written by experts at prompting imaginative engagement.

What is the upshot, for the problem of personality and for our wider consideration of fictional emotions? It is that we should be very careful not to underestimate imagination. Philosophers have a tendency to focus heavily on beliefs when discussing our mental lives. And beliefs are indeed extremely important in shaping how we see and respond to the world. But an over-reliance on the propositional can get us into trouble, as it has in the problem of belief and the problem of personality. If we see belief as the primary driver of emotion, it makes no sense to engage emotionally with stories that we believe to be false. And if we are focused entirely on propositions, it is difficult to explain the difference in our reactions to fictional accounts and to true accounts in a way that doesn't undercut our answer to the problem of belief. Shifting the focus to imagination solves both these problems.

Experiencing something affects us differently from hearing a sentence that expresses the corresponding proposition. Seeing a beautiful mountain view is not like hearing "the mountain view is beautiful." These are, of course related. After all, seeing a beautiful mountain view is very likely to cause us to believe the proposition "the mountain view is beautiful." But even if hearing an assertion and seeing for oneself result in the same propositional belief, they affect the mind—and importantly, the emotions—differently. Experiencing, in general, generates a stronger emotional response than believing a proposition. This is clear enough from experience.

How does this tie into imagination? This is not the time to give an account of all forms of imagination, but at least some of our imaginative life consists in what Currie, with Ian Ravenscroft, calls "perception-like" imagination, or what Neil van Leeuwen calls "imagistic

imagining."[85] [86] This sort of imagination mimics our experiences[87]. We may experience seeing a beautiful view or smelling a delicious smell, and we can likewise imagine seeing something beautiful or smelling something delicious, even if we do not actually see or smell either thing. And just as experience can drive strong emotional responses, so can this experience-mimicking sort of imagination. The mistake that leads to the two puzzles was underestimating the role of this type of imagination in driving emotional responses, putting belief in the driver's seat. Belief certainly affects our emotions, but beliefs are not the only—or even the primary—driver of emotions. Experiences drive emotions more strongly than beliefs do, and so can perceptual imagination. This is why well-crafted works of fiction can affect us more deeply than drily-presented facts. The former may not convince us of any new truths about the world, but it nevertheless engages with the part of us that drives our emotional response.

And this is true in general, not just in cases of fiction. Imaginatively engaging with a friend's story of poor service at a restaurant may generate a stronger emotional response than seeing (and believing) a headline about a bombing overseas. The latter would generate a stronger response if both were engaged equally, but if the former is engaged in the imagination to a significantly greater depth, we can (and often do) see a response disproportionate to the relative seriousness of the two cases. This sort of phenomenon is responsible for our emotional responses to fictional accounts, but it is not unique to fictional accounts.

[85] *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology* (2002).

[86] "The Meanings of 'Imagine' Part I: Constructive Imagination" (2013).

[87] Rather than mimicking belief, as the propositional attitude "imagines,"--what van Leeuwen calls "attitude imagining"--does.

This doesn't meant that belief has no role to play. Our beliefs shape our experiences and our imagination, and so play a major role in what ultimately gives rise to emotions. And experience clearly shows us that beliefs can do significant work to regulate emotions. We may be imaginatively engaged with a story to such a degree that we are distraught when a favorite character dies. But when we remind ourselves that this didn't actually happen, we can often mitigate the emotional response. Now mitigation does not mean dismissal. As anyone who has ever woken up terrified of something or someone evil at their bedroom door can tell you, you can mitigate the fear by reminding yourself that there almost certainly is not an evil lurking at the door, but dismissing it entirely is much more difficult. Belief makes a difference, but ascribing too central a role to belief takes us away from how emotions actually work. When we realize the role of imagination, the problem of belief becomes less puzzling, and the problem of personality can be explained by the differences in presentation and subsequent imaginative engagement between the fictional and actual situations in question.

The Metaphysics of Fictional Emotions

This understanding of the role of imagination as more directly tied to emotional response than may have been suspected, dubbed "imaginative contagion" by Tamar Gendler, follows a growing trend in the literature, starting with Peter Lamarque in 1981 and including Noel Carroll, Richard Moran, Susan Feagin, and others, and it allows us to respond both to the problem of belief and the problem of personality within the context of the metaphysical framework that we introduced in the first three chapters. Yes, we do care about worlds of fiction more than merely possible worlds, even though worlds of fiction are no more real. And the reason is because we imaginatively engage more deeply in worlds of fiction, and our imagination is unconcerned over

whether its subject is something that's actually happening or something that occurs only in the realm of the possible or the fictional.

But not only is our metaphysical framework consistent with this account of emotional response, it allows us to go a step further. Even those who recognize the effects that the imagination can have on our emotions rarely go on to say more about the object of said emotions. Sure, we may be afraid, or relieved, or angered, but of what? And Lamarque argued that the objects of our fictional emotions are thoughts—we may accurately say that we are afraid of a fictional object insofar as the fictional object is contained in said thoughts.[88] But this rings false. Yes, our imagination may bring about an emotional response, but that does not mean our emotions are directed at our imagination. It should be that are emotions are directed at the objects of our thoughts, not the thoughts themselves. And our metaphysical framework, which posits the existence of fictional objects, sanctions reference to them, and explains how they have the properties ascribed to them in the stories, allows us to get just this result. When our imaginative engagement brings about an intense emotional response to a true story, the object of those emotions are the people and events in the story. And in the same way, when our imaginative engagement brings about an intense emotional response to a work of fiction, the object of those emotions should be the fictional characters and events. In chapter two, we discussed how our account handles Smith admiring Sherlock Holmes. It works just the same with other emotions. On our account, if Charles is afraid of the slime, he's afraid of the slime, not his thought of the slime.

[88] "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?" (1981)

Of course, the slime is not really attacking him in the actual world, but our perceptual imagination is unperturbed by this detail. In that way, it is unlike belief or even other sorts of imagination, in which we may merely suppose or consider that a proposition is actually true. When we believe something is actual, it is a different experience than believing it exists in another possible world. But perceptual imagination lacks this difference. Our imagistic imagining is the same whether we imagine something actual, possible, or impossible,[89] and thus it yields an emotional response whether or not the object of our imagining is an actual object or event.

Differences Between Real and Fictional Emotions

This accounts for the similarities in our emotional responses to actual situations versus fictional ones. But surely there are still some differences that don't come down to imaginative engagement—differences that stem from the differences between fiction and reality. They may not be as stark as Currie imagined, but they are there. Can we account for those differences as well? Indeed, we can. Some are easy to deal with. As we discussed earlier, our beliefs play some role in mitigating our emotional responses. This is one reason that it is easier to emotionally recover from the death of a beloved character than it is to recover from the death of a beloved friend or family member. A second, even more obvious reason is that we generally invest more time and energy into our friendships than we do into our engagement with fictional characters.

But there is a third reason that our emotional responses to fiction often differ from our emotional responses to similar real life cases, and this is that we often engage with works of

[89] Of course, it may be more difficult to imagine things that are foreign to our experience of the world, but this is a different phenomenon.

fiction on two levels. The first level is engagement with fictional people and events as people and events. But we also engage with stories as works of art, and we generally desire for them to be good works of art. Not all of our emotions towards works of fiction are directed towards the characters—some are directed towards the stories as works of art.

This explains certain moments of conflicting emotions that would be otherwise inexplicable. In *Breaking Bad*, anyone who cares about Walter White as a person likely wants him to take his friend's job offer, allowing him to provide for his family after his death without resorting to cooking meth. But if he had taken the job offer, it would have ended the story before it really got rolling. Others watching the same show developed such a dislike for White that they wished for him to be quickly found out and killed. But this has the same problem: when White dies, the show ends. Both groups of people experienced conflicting emotions, a first-level desire for White to make better life choices or get his comeuppance, and a second-level desire for the events necessary to keep the show going. The same internal conflict is also evidenced in the horror movie audience silently screaming "don't go in there" while at the same time knowing that if the characters avoided the danger, there would be no movie.[90]

This phenomenon might push an audience to wish for a beloved character's death—because the story is set up to be a powerful tragedy and would be ruined by a happy ending—while simultaneously wishing the character could find some way to escape fate. But it relies on seeing stories as art. We would be horrified by the suggestion that we should wish for the tragic but beautiful death of a beloved real life friend. Because in real life, our engagement is on the first level, on the people and events. We may care about the beauty of our lives, but this caring

[90] A concrete example of this might be viewers of *The Cabin in the Woods* during the scene in which the cellar door is flung open.

should be subservient to caring about the people involved. Wishing for the tragic but beautiful death of a real person would be an appalling instance of mistaken priorities, putting the art over the person. But when engaging with fiction, we properly engage on both levels, and we are not required to prioritize the former. As we have argued, this does not mean that our first-level emotional responses are not real. But it does bring about emotional conflict in some fictional instances where there would be none in non-fictional contexts.

This discussion barely scratches the surface of all there is to our engagement with fiction, but it should help to clarify some facets that may have previously seemed puzzling. We have argued that perceptual imagination is closely tied to emotional response, and that our perceptual imagination is unconcerned with whether or not the situation being imagined truly mirrors something found in the actual world. And this focus on imagination has allowed us to answer the problem of belief, by giving us reason to believe that are emotions are not only directed at what we believe to be real, and also to answer the problem of personality, by showing that a significant portion of the difference in response to real and fictional scenarios comes from the level of imaginative engagement. There are still unique features of our emotional engagement with fiction, but with those two puzzles solved, our fictional emotions begin to look a lot more like our regular emotions and a lot less like vestiges from childhood that must be declared irrational or hidden away. Emotional responses to fiction are perfectly real and perfectly explicable within the metaphysical account of fiction that we have advanced in the last three chapters. They may not be rational if one's definition of rationality requires a high level of belief-sensitivity, but such a definition would throw out a great bulk of our imaginative and emotional

lives. If our account can sanction any emotions at all as rational, it can sanction fictional emotions.

CONCLUSION

This concludes our examination of three general questions about the enterprise of fiction: what are fictional objects, in what sense do they have the properties we commonly ascribe to them, and why is it that we care about them? We have provided a single account that yields satisfying answers to all three. First, fictional characters should be understood as abstract objects, created by their authors. That explains the dependance that fictional characters have on their authors and the difference between fictional people and actual people, while still making room for us to accommodate our prephilosophical talk about fiction.

But viewing fictional objects as abstracta led us to a second question: how is it that fictional objects have the properties we ascribe to them, so many of which are ordinarily reserved for concrete objects? To answer this, we examined predication in more detail, ultimately arguing that predication should be understood as a three-place relation, taking an object, a property, and a world-time. Exemplification is just a special case of this relation: predication in the actual world. With this analysis of predication, we were able to argue that much of what we ascribe to fictional characters are properties that the characters truly have in the worlds of the fictions—generally impossible worlds—but that the characters nonetheless do not exemplify. Furthermore, we argued that possible predication should be understood in the same way as fictional predication.

However, once we realized that most fictional worlds were impossible worlds, it raised another question about a specific sort of fictional predication: predication of modal properties. So we developed an account of fictional modalities, arguing that what is fictionally possible for a

certain character does depend only on the characters' essences but rather on the accessibility relations between various worlds of fiction—a modal structure within fictional worlds that are just as much a part of a work of fiction as the rest of the world.

Finally, we considered our response to fiction: why is it that we care? And we found that, while our beliefs are extremely sensitive to modal location—we naturally track whether we believe something to be actually true, possibly true, or completely impossible—our imagistic imagination is much less so. The vividness of our imagination is largely independent of whether we are imagining something actual, possible, or fictional. And it is our imagination, we argued, that gives rise to our strongest of emotional responses.

This gives us a cohesive account that answers some of the most basic questions about the nature and our experience of fiction and that does so without leading us to the implausible conclusions that have doomed so many other accounts.

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