MODALITY THROUGH FICTION'S EYE

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Philosophy.

Chapel Hill

2013

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ABSTRACT

JAMES N. BRANTNER: Modality Through Fiction's Eye
(Under the direction of Keith Simmons)

This paper explores the relationship between modality and fiction, particularly in regard to questions asked by both about identity of objects across worlds or fictions and about how the relationship between fictional or possible objects and their properties should be explained. On the latter question, it concludes that, while the exemplifying/encoding distinction as spelled out by Edward Zalta is problematic, the distinction captures an important intuition and should be re-imagined in such a way as to avoid those problems. Additionally, the analysis of both questions draw out strong parallels between fictions and possible worlds indicating that the distinction will apply in a similar way to both.

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i. Introduction

Among the most interesting questions of metaphysics are those regarding the ontologies of possibility and of fiction. And there seem to be many parallels between the two—after all, on the surface, fiction seems like a paradigmatic example of things that are possible but not actual. On the other hand, fairly convincing arguments have been made, famously by Saul Kripke and followed by many others, that fictions are actually not possible worlds, and that has been the end of it.

However, the parallels still exist that made that naïve view of fiction as a paradigmatic example of possibility so compelling. In this paper, we will consider the parallels between the two by starting with a particular theory of fiction and examining whether or not our choice of modal theories is significantly impacted. We will work with an artifactual theory of fiction, a take on an abstract object theory—in which fictional characters are taken to exist as abstract objects—that I find particularly compelling. This is certainly not the only theory with the potential to bring out parallels with modality, but it is one that is compelling to me, so in absence of an obvious theory of fiction that seems right to everyone, it makes a fine place to begin.

We will then examine what lessons the artifactual theory of fiction can teach us about modality. In particularly, we will consider how the artifactual theory handles questions of identity of fictional characters and how fictional characters relate to their properties. In the former case, we will see how familiar arguments about fiction elicit echoes about modality, and indeed suggest a conception of modality in which the actual

world has some priority over other possible worlds. In the latter case, we will consider the exemplifying/encoding distinction. This is rejected by Amie Thomasson in her development of the artifactual theory, but it is compatible with the artifactual approach more broadly and has been suggested by other abstract object theorists. We will reject the distinction as it stands but recast it in a way that solves some of the problems facing the distinction as currently understood. In doing so, we will be able to apply to the distinction not only in the case of fiction but in the case of modality as well. We will certainly maintain the Kripkean line that there are major differences between fictions and possible worlds, but our discussion of these two questions will allow us to develop a theory that accentuates the similarities and remains both intuitive and parsimonious.

ii. Scene-setting

If we're to determine how closely we can parallel the artifactual theory of fiction is to theories of possible worlds, it is first worthwhile to briefly survey the landscape. We will lay out exactly what the artifactual theory is, and we will present for reference other abstract object theories of fiction—they will be instructive, even when they are implausible. We will then consider two theories that present possibilia as abstract objects. If the artifactual theory is to find parallels to modality, these theories will be good places to look.

As stated, we will focus on the artifactual theory of fiction, but if we're to explore parallels between an abstract object theory of fiction (of any kind), it's certainly worth first giving some attention to someone who already has theories of both fiction and modality as non-concrete: Edward Zalta. Zalta famously drew the distinction between exemplifying and encoding properties. Concrete objects exemplify properties, and abstract objects exemplify certain properties and encode others. Concrete objects cannot encode properties, and, while abstract objects can exemplify properties (such as "being abstract"), the introduction of encoding allows us to solve significant intuitive challenges when applying an abstract object theory to fiction. Zalta sees fictional entities as abstract objects, encoding the properties ascribed to them in the stories. For instance, Sherlock Holmes exemplifies the property "is written about by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle" but encodes the properties "smokes a pipe," "solves crimes," and "lives on Baker Street." Zalta claims that essentially abstract objects are individuated by the properties they

encode and necessarily encode the same properties in every possible world—fictional entities encode their properties even in worlds in which their authors do not exist. Additionally, that set of properties by which they are individuated can be incomplete (we may never know whether or not Sherlock Holmes had a mole on his back) or even inconsistent.[1]

Amie Thomasson, on the other hand, while seeing fictional characters as abstract objects, sees them as man-made, created by and dependent on their authors. On this view, the artifactual view on which we will focus, fictional characters are not necessarily existent—they exist only in the worlds in which their creators create them—but are necessarily abstract. On this she agrees with Zalta: fictional characters do not exist as flesh and blood individuals in any possible world. But in addition to her disagreements about the dependence of fictional objects on their authors, she's not comfortable with Zalta's views about encoding properties, rather retreating back to the concept of pretense. We don't really ascribe properties to fictional objects (well, we ascribe the properties of "being fictional" or "being created by Conan Doyle," but not properties like "being a detective" or "smoking a pipe"), we rather pretend to ascribe properties in the context of the story.[2] When we say things like "Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe" are true, we do not mean they are genuinely true but that they are true according to the story—all such statements come with a unspoken "according to the story" operator that we only pretend is absent. While there are strong intuitions supporting the pretense view, it does seem to lack something, in that it fails to get at the truth in statements about fiction. Even though

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1 Linsky, Bernard and Zalta, Edward. "In Defense of the Simplest Quantified Modal Logic."

2 Thomasson, Amie. *Fiction and Metaphysics*. 105

abstract objects can't smoke pipes, it seems that “Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe” is true in some sense deeper than this view allows. It seems wrong to just leave it at “the stories say Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe.” Later we will consider a modification that will bring pretense closer in line with intuitions about fiction.

Now that we have glanced at a couple of abstract object theories of fiction, including the artifactual theory on which we will draw most heavily, let's consider a couple modal theories in which we might look for parallels. Again, a first place to look might be Zalta, who had a theory of the possible worlds that cast the merely possible as non-concrete. However, it diverges sharply from his theory of fiction. In order to simplify his quantified modal logic and preserve the Barcan formula, Zalta, along with Bernard Linsky, accepts a metaphysics in which everything that possibly exists actually exists. But they still want to preserve the driving force behind our intuitions that there are some things that could have been real that in fact are not. To do this, they reinterpret “possible, not actual” as “possibly concrete, actually non-concrete.” This gives us a thing that exists in the actual world to which to ascribe properties, but it also gives a meaningful sense in which our intuitions that said thing isn't real are accurate.[3]

However, while Linsky and Zalta admit the contingently non-concrete—things like merely possible people—into their ontology, they draw a sharp distinction between those objects and essentially abstract objects. Contingently non-concrete objects are concrete in other possible worlds. Essentially abstract objects, obviously, are not. Contingently non-concrete objects may be confused with essentially abstract objects because they're not concrete, but they don't have many other features of abstract objects.

[3] Linksy and Zalta. “In Defense of the Simplest Quantified Modal Logic.”

For instance, they don't encode properties.[4] It seems that they're primarily in the ontology to simplify the logic and allow us an actual object to reference when making modal claims. Beyond that, they don't do a lot of theoretical heavy lifting. Merely possible and fictional objects share existence in all possible worlds and non-concreteness, but the fictional and not the merely possible are essentially abstract, and the fictional, unlike the merely possible, have their properties necessarily. While this does make it clear what the contingently non-concrete are not, it remains obscure just what they are—it seems that they are a subset of abstract objects that have almost nothing in common with any other abstract objects. We will seek to draw a closer, and hopefully less obscure, parallel between the fictional and the possible.

Alvin Plantinga also has a theory that eschews the merely possible in favor of something actual and abstract. Instead of theorizing about people and windows and doorknobs and sculleries, he theorizes about essences of people and windows and doorknobs and sculleries. The essence of Socrates is a set of properties, perhaps just "being identical with Socrates." This essence exists in all possible worlds whether or not anything in that world exemplifies that essence. What exists only in the worlds with Socrates is something exemplifying that essence.[5] Possible worlds, on Plantinga's view, are maximally consistent states of affairs. He does remain agnostic on what exactly states of affairs are—whether chunks of the world or propositions[6]--and we will try to be similarly general.

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[4] Linsky, Bernard and Zalta, Edward. "In Defense of the Contingently Non-Concrete."

[5] Plantinga, Alvin. "Actualism and Possible Worlds."

[6] IBID.

We will focus on the artifactual theory of fiction and determine whether it influences our choice of modal theory. We will see that the parallels between fiction and possible worlds are stronger than those proposed by Zalta's theory but do not require proposing actual abstract objects to stand in for the merely possible, as on Plantinga's. Rather, we will consider how objects relate to their properties in fiction and in possible worlds and draw strong parallels there. Additionally, we will see that strategies for identifying characters across fiction may be helpful for identifying objects across possible worlds.

iii. Questions of Identity

One problem facing both theories of fiction and theories of possibility is identity. There is strong intuitive pull to say that the same character can be contained in multiple works of fiction and that the same person can be contained in multiple possible worlds. After all, Hercule Poirot appears in a great many Agatha Christie stories. Do we really want to say that characters are bound to a single work of fiction, thus admitting a great multitude of Poirots, all sharing the same basic characteristics and filling the same roles in the same writer's work? And even if we're inclined to take the multitude of Christie's novels as one larger work containing one Poirot,[7] we're still faced with the same problem, as there are other unauthorized works—that cannot reasonably be considered part of the larger work—that borrow characters. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* wouldn't make much sense if it weren't about the actual characters from *Hamlet*.

The pull to identify people across possible worlds is similarly strong. If modal claims are to be explained by possible worlds, then the fact that I could have dropped out of college to pursue a career as a professional soccer player (full disclosure: this would not have worked very well) needs to be explained by there being another possible world in which *I* drop out of college to pursue a career as a professional soccer player. If it's just a world in which someone like me in certain respects drops out of college to pursue a career as a professional soccer player, it just doesn't seem to get the job done. Of course, I already admit that someone like me could have done so. But I wanted to say that *I* could have done so. And it seems like that requires another possible world that has me in it. It

[7] Which leads to a whole host of other problems, discussion of which we'll leave for another time.

has been argued famously by David Lewis that this is nonsense and that a sufficiently similar possible person is all we could ever need (or get), but there is at least a strong initial pull towards the conclusion that the same people should exist in multiple possible worlds.

Not only do the two theories face similar challenges, they encounter similar problems with purported answers. For instance, one may try to identify characters across fictions and people across possible worlds by a set of properties they have in common. But this is doomed to fail, for familiar reasons. Aristotle may not have done any of the things we ascribe to him (being a philosopher, teaching Alexander the Great). And I could write a book (an admittedly boring one) about the amazing adventures of a Sherlock Holmes who decided to forgo detective work in favor of becoming a dentist. On the other side of the coin, it's possible that someone else could've done the things Aristotle is best known for (been a Greek philosopher who taught Aristotle), and fictions could be written about different pipe-smoking British detectives. It's hard to see how a list of identifying properties could be minimal enough to escape the first problem and maximal enough to escape the second.

So, if the two areas have similar challenges and similar problems with meeting those challenges, can they avail themselves of similar solutions? In particular, does the abstract object theorist about fiction have any resources that lend themselves to similar use in theories of modality? Amie Thomasson offers that instead of trying to distinguish fictional characters solely by their properties, “we may get farther by treating fictional characters as historical entities individuated at least in part by the circumstances of their

creation."[8]

The idea here is to say that a necessary condition of one fictional character being identical to another is that the author of the latter intended to refer to the former when creating the work of fiction. So Poirot from *Murder on the Orient Express* and Poirot in *Death on the Nile* are the same not because they have similar properties but because Christie was referring to the character from the former when writing the latter. This also explains the case of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, as well as the entire phenomenon of Fan Fiction, in which people write their own stories about characters from more famous works. It also explains why we don't identify characters who happen to share similar properties. Stories about pipe-smoking British detectives are not all about Sherlock Holmes because the authors weren't all writing about the character contained in the work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Does any of this help solve problems in the metaphysics of modality? Not as much as one might hope. The suggestion that we identify people not by properties but "at least in part by the circumstances of their creation" has some application: the necessity of origins thesis has significant traction in discussions of modality, so we see some parallel. Both fictional objects and regular objects can be picked out by certain facts about their origins. But beyond that, there aren't significant parallels allowing one to bring the fiction solution to bear on the modal problem. For starters, possible worlds aren't created one-by-one. So, unlike in the case of sequels being written to an individual novel, we can't look at one possible world created first and then check to see if the next world created references it.

[8] Thomasson. *Fiction and Metaphysics.* 62

Still, one may think a parallel between the author of a fictional character and the parents of a person may be strong enough to allow for similar responses. We may take the element of succession out of the fictional case by supposing an author works concurrently on several novels, all about the same character who had not previously been introduced. Is this not similar to a person being born of the same parents in many possible worlds, although there is not one world being referenced by the others? While there are similarities, there is one vital difference that prevents the solution. There is no question about the identity of the author concurrently writing the fictions.[9] There is, however, a question about the identities of the parents of the person we're trying to identify across possible worlds. If we don't already know how to tell whether multiple fictions contain the same fictional character, we still may know how to tell whether multiple fictions have one and the same author. But if we don't know how to tell whether multiple possible worlds contain the same person, we won't be able to tell whether multiple possible worlds contain the same people who are the parents of that person. In the fiction case, we can reach a point of solidity—the author—on which to ground identity statements. In the possibility case, appeal to the parents just pushes the same problem back a generation. There's just no parallel to the fiction solution.

However, there's another problem of identity in fiction in which there may be a sharper parallel with the modal case. There are many cases of historical figures appearing in works of fiction, and we need some way to explain how the same person can be flesh and blood in the real world and be an abstract object in a work of fiction. Similarly, if we

[9] Or at least, there is no problem of identity specific to these sorts of cases. The only problem of identity is the problem of identity over time in general.

have an abstract object theory of possible worlds, we have to ask how a person can be flesh and blood in this world but merely abstract in other possible worlds.

First, what do abstract object theories about fiction have to say in regards to fictions containing historical characters? Peter van Inwagen claims that when Tolstoy ascribes vanity to Napoleon in *War and Peace*, he is not doing the same sort of thing that Dickens is doing when he ascribes fatness to Mrs. Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.[10] Van Inwagen does suggest that it "*may*" (italics his) be the case that sometimes when critics talk about Napoleon in *War and Peace*, they talk about a fictional creature called "Napoleon" that is numerically distinct from the actual Napoleon, but this proposal, even if true in limited cases, seems far-fetched as an overarching proposal of how to handle historical fiction. The point of writing about historical figures is to write *about historical figures*, not about purely fictional entities that bear some resemblance to historical figures.

Thomasson makes a similar point when arguing for her analysis over Zalta's encoding model. She supposes a story in which Richard Nixon marries a queen and becomes a prince. She claims that because "Nixon is a prince" and "Hamlet is a prince" both occur in the same contexts (fiction) and have the same form ("X is a prince"), they should be analyzed in the same way. But Zalta cannot analyze them the same way, because people are concrete and thus cannot encode properties. She also considers a proposal that real people have fictional surrogates that appear in their places in historical fiction, but rejects it for the same reasons we rejected van Inwagen's consideration: historical fiction needs to be about historical figures themselves—it loses its force if it

[10] Van Inwagen, Peter. "Creatures of Fiction." *American Philosophical Quarterly.* 306.

isn't actually about historical people or places or events. According to Thomasson, the historical figures appearing in fiction should be the genuine article, the real, concrete historical figures. She also insists that ascription of properties in a work of fiction should work the same whether historical figures or creatures of fiction are involved, which separates her from both Zalta and van Iwagen. Using this principle, she develops a pretense view on which an "according to the fiction" operator is added to statements both about historical figures and about fictional characters.[11]

Of course, for the identity comparison, the important part of how sentences about historical figures in fiction get analyzed is how we manage to find the same people in both history and in fiction. If historical fiction is to be about historical figures in any meaningful way, there must be a way that historical figures appear. Either there is an abstract object that is identical to the historical figure but (similar to the surrogate proposal, except with an identity relation) it would do the job, but would also require an identity relation between an abstract object and a concrete one that van Inwagen and Thomasson seem to see as so implausible as to not even be worth considering. And indeed, it's hard to see how an object could be both actually abstract and actually concrete, perhaps even at the same time. The other option, which both van Inwagen and Thomasson take, is that historical fiction is a case where real, concrete historical figures appear alongside abstract objects in works of fiction.

When handled in this way, there is no real problem of identity of a character across fictions (or from a fiction to the real world). Unlike in the case of regular fiction, the temptation to identify historical figures by their properties is either greatly lessened or

[11] Thomasson. *Fiction and Metaphysics.* 104-105.

entirely gone. The way to tell whether it's really Napoleon in *War and Peace* is to ask Tolstoy if he was talking about Napoleon. The solution here is actually quite similar to the solution for regular fiction. Fictional characters (and people) are individuated by facts about their origins, and to answer questions about whether we're talking about the same fictional character (person) across two stories (across a story and the real world), we need to ask the author of the second story (story) whether or not they were talking about the same character (person) from the first story (real world).

So if the solution is similar, will the parallel to transworld identity be any different? Previously, we were considering transworld identity across two arbitrary possible worlds. But that's not how it's done in the typical case. Typically, we ask identity questions about people in the actual world and people in another possible world. And that comparison can be handled in a way that's quite similar to the case of historical fiction. In the case of historical fiction, say Napoleon in *War and Peace*, we don't have an abstract Napoleon and a question of whether he's identical to the concrete Napoleon. We just have a concrete Napoleon that appears both in the real, concrete world and in an abstract work of fiction. And, depending on our metaphysics of modality, we could see just the same thing happening in the case of possible worlds. On a Lewisian interpretation, we have infinite concrete worlds and concrete people in all of them. He sees talking about identity between two concrete objects in different worlds to involve claims equally implausible as the ones that led van Inwagen and Thomasson to not consider a theory of historical fiction where there's an abstract object that's identical to a concrete one. But on a different interpretation, we have concrete objects in the actual world that also appear in other

possible worlds. It's not that they're duplicated in other possible worlds, it's just that the other possible worlds are *about* them in some sense. Napoleon is contained in another possible world in the same way that he is contained in a work of fiction—as himself.

Of course, Napoleon doesn't get in another possible world in the same way he gets into a fiction (that is, there's no writer looking at the actual world and writing up another possible world based in part on it). But the ontology is the same, even if the origins are not. Concrete objects appear in abstract states of affairs. In one case, it's an artifactual state of affairs and in another sense, it's a complete and eternal state of affairs, but in both cases, it's a concrete object appearing in an abstract state of affairs. There is no problem of identity, because there's no appearance of there being two things. Just like Tolstoy didn't create a second Napoleon, other possible worlds don't have a second Napoleon. They just have the regular Napoleon appearing in different circumstances.

This response seems the most plausible, and I suspect a metaphysical picture along these lines are what drives the Kripkean view that transworld identity is a pseudo-problem. Because a second (or apparently second) object never comes into play, we don't have to ask whether the objects are identical. Just as we look in *War and Peace* and see that it's about Napoleon, we talk about the possible worlds that contain Napoleon. Not another merely possible object that's identical with Napoleon. Not a Tolstoy-created fictional artifact that's identical with Napoleon. Just plain old Napoleon. In both cases, the key is that we already have Napoleon—the actual Napoleon in the actual world. Of course, it is a further question how we get Napoleon in the first place. When talking of fiction, it's simple enough—the actual world is clearly there before historical fiction can

be written. But the parallel solution here may suggest that the actual world also has priority over merely possible worlds.

Of course, there is still a question of identifying merely possible individuals. But if we're inclined towards a view in which the actual world has some priority, we may then be able to make a comparison between merely possible individuals and possible fictions. We can, I think, make claims about whether a fictional character in another possible world would have been Sherlock Holmes. We make such a determination based on whether that world contains Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and about whether Conan Doyle created that fictional character, and perhaps other facts about the manner of that creation (I don't expect to be able to pin down the exact conditions in which we'd have identity, and I suspect there are cases that are easily disputable, but the main point is that there are cases in which we could look at a possible fictional character and confidently identify him with our actual Holmes). If the actual world has priority, we can do something similar with the merely possible. One way—perhaps not the only way, but a Kripkean one—of cashing out that priority is with a claim that possible worlds contain only actual material. Possible people are combinations of actual sperms and eggs. In this case, we can identify two mere possibilia based on their relationship to something actual, just as we can identify possible Holmes based on their relationship to Conan Doyle. Solving the identity problem in this way will have farther reaching consequences as well, which we shall see in sections V and VI. But first, we should move to the second of our initial problems.

iv. How Do You Hold Your Properties?

A second tricky problem in realist theories of fiction in general, and the artifactual theory in particular, is that of exactly what relation the fictional entities have to the properties ascribed to them in the fiction. If Sherlock Holmes is an abstract object, then Sherlock Holmes cannot smoke a pipe. Pipe-smoking is something that simply cannot be done by any abstract object, Holmes or otherwise. But Sherlock Holmes is described by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as a pipe-smoker. If "Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe" appeared in the true/false section of a middle school English test, the answer would be "true."

As we've seen, Zalta proposes an exemplifying/encoding distinction. Concrete objects exemplify properties, abstract objects encode properties. So we can still truly say that Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe because Holmes encodes the property of pipe-smoking, even though he doesn't exemplify it.

It's still not totally clear exactly what this distinction consists in, but van Inwagen makes a similar distinction between a character exemplifying a property and having a property ascribed to it.[12] If his distinction is taken as a different fleshing out of the exemplifying/encoding distinction, it adds a third place to the encoding relation, making it a three-place relation, taking a property, an object, and a place. The place, he says "is either a work of fiction (such as a novel, short story, or narrative poem) or a part or

[12] Van Inwagen himself admits that this terminology is bad ("Creatures of Fiction," 306), because one can ascribe properties to objects in non-fiction, and that's quite different than ascribing properties in fiction. If Conan Doyle ascribes a property to Holmes in one of his novels, Holmes has that property ascribed to him, in van Inwagen's technical sense. But if I ascribe a property to Holmes in my essay about fiction, Holmes does not necessarily have that property ascribed to him, in van Inwagen's technical sense. So the term is, at the very least, misleading and divergent from ordinary use. But van Inwagen doesn't see any other terms that aren't misleading. That said, following R.M. Sainsbury in his exposition of the distinction in *Fiction and Fictionalism*, I'll stick with "encoding" language.

section thereof, even a part or section that is so short as to be conterminous with a single (occurrence of a) sentence or clause."[13]

Already, we can see that this is importantly different than Zalta's encoding distinction. For Zalta, an abstract object encodes what it encodes necessarily, and at all times. For van Inwagen, an abstract object encodes something contingently and at a place —it can easily not encode the same property at some other place. Sherlock Holmes does not encode the property of pipe-smoking in *Fourth Mansions* (which doesn't include Holmes at all), but he does in Conan Doyle novels. The place of the encoding can be made even more specific, as van Inwagen allows the place to be about as short as can make meaningful property attributions. This is done so that we can say things like "Sherlock Holmes is smoking a pipe at one point in the novel but is not smoking a pipe at another point." Were the places less fine-grained, this would amount to saying that Holmes encodes pipe-smoking and not pipe-smoking at the same place, which seems contradictory. But with fine-grained places, we can say that Holmes encodes pipe-smoking and not pipe-smoking in the same novel, but not at the same place in the novel.

Encoding as a three-place relation already should begin to look familiar. After all, encoding a property in a particular fiction (or particular part of a fiction) is not terribly different than exemplifying a property at a particular time, or exemplifying a property in a particular world. We have a choice of whether to see each as a three-place relation or as an indexed property, but the underlying structure is the same in all cases.

So what does this familiarity tell us? That perhaps this encoding/exemplifying distinction isn't so spooky and obscure after all. If we want to take seriously the idea that

[13] Van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction," 305.

the same person can have different properties in different possible worlds, we already need some sort of three-place relation that takes an object, a property, and a world.[14] So the encoding relation, while giving us new machinery to analyze objects and properties, demands no heavy ontological burden—it is a small modification on something we already have.

We do need some modification, because if a world is a maximal state of affairs, then a fiction is certainly not a world, as a fiction is not maximal. But we could easily enough say that the three-place relation takes an object, a property, and a state of affairs. This would give us one relation that covers ascribing properties to objects in fiction, ascribing properties to objects in other possible worlds, and even ascribing properties to objects in the actual world. Of course, there would be some details to work out. In shifting from a place to a state of affairs, we've lost the fine-grainedness that allowed us to say that Holmes smoked a pipe at one point in the story but refrained at another point. But we have the same problem with properties in possible worlds. In the actual world, I was in Tennessee on November 20, 2012, but I was not in Tennessee on November 26, 2012. This sort of case occurs all over the place in the actual world, and occurs all over the place in possible worlds, so there's no reason its occurrence in fiction should pose any particular problems.

But this sort of generalized relation still has at least one major problem: the object in the first-place is abstract in the case of fiction and concrete in the case of the actual world. And, as we said earlier, an abstract object cannot, by virtue of being abstract,

[14] Alternatively, we could have world-indexed properties, but as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the underlying structure is the same—such have an obvious parallel in the case of fiction.

exemplify many of the properties that concrete objects exemplify. So it seems like we must draw a further distinction that cordons off the fictional cases from the rest of the cases. And again, it poses a problem with historical fiction. After all, van Inwagen does not want to say that Napoleon encodes the property of being vain in *War and Peace,* Despite the fact that Tolstoy attributes vanity to Napoleon in *War and Peace*. Napoleon, not being a fictional character, is just not the sort of thing that can stand in this particular relation.[15]

And now we're subject to the familiar objection from Thomasson, that the encoding/exemplifying distinction treats sentences differently that should be treated the same. When we say "Napoleon is vain," talking of *War and Peace,* and "Hercule Poirot is vain," talking of any number of Agatha Christie novels, we should be saying the same sort of thing. But if real people cannot standing in this sort of relation, we not only must analyze them differently, but the exemplifying/encoding distinction gives us no help in dealing with historical fiction.

Following Thomasson, I find it more plausible to draw a distinction based on the place involved than based on the object involved. But unlike Thomasson, I don't want to crush the encoding/exemplifying distinction entirely and wholly retreat to pretense, out of the concern that pretense leaves truth out of the picture. Instead, I'd like modify the distinction to capture that crucial intuition that the place—not the object—is the key. Rather than saying that abstract objects are the sorts of things that encode properties and concrete objects are the sorts of things that exemplify properties, why not rather say that objects encode properties in certain settings and exemplify them in other settings.

[15] IBID, 306.

Napoleon can encode properties in *War and Peace* while exemplifying them in the real world. Sherlock Holmes can encode the property of pipe-smoking in Conan Doyle's novels, while he would exemplify it in the real world if Sherlock Holmes smoked a pipe in the real world.[16]

Here we have a broader three-place relation that encompasses both encoding and exemplifying. If the third place in the relation is the actual world, it is an exemplification relation. If the third place in the relation is a fiction, it is an encoding relation. And this maps on to our intuitions about fiction in a way that we could not before, when we tried to make the encoding/exemplifying distinction based on the sort of object involved. "Napoleon is vain," when speaking of *War and Peac*e, should be treated the same as "Poirot is vain," when speaking of Christie's novels. But "Napoleon is vain," when speaking of *War and Peace*, seems interestingly different than "Napoleon is vain" when speaking of history. The way in which Napoleon relates to vanity in real life seems more robust than the way in which he relates to vanity in *War and Peace*. The additional robustness doesn't stem from it being Napoleon. Napoleon is the same person in both cases. It's about the setting.

So we have one general three-place relation, and have claimed that encoding and exemplification are special cases of it—it can be an encoding relation or an exemplification relation depending on what takes the third place of the relation. We have argued that this maps onto our intuitions much more closely than the initially proposed distinctions. And it seems clear that if the third place is a fiction, we have encoding, and

[16] That it is impossible for Holmes to smoke a pipe makes no difference to the fact that, were he actually smoking a pipe, he would exemplify the property of pipe-smoking.

if the third place is the actual world, we have exemplification. But what if the third place is another possible world? We'll pick up this question in Section V, but first, we should say more about what the third place is.

We started with the idea that the third place was a world (or perhaps something slightly more specific, like a world at a time) but quickly moved into state of affairs talk. This seems natural, as one familiar way of defining a possible world is as a maximally consistent state of affairs. But this is not meant to be a decision about what a possible world truly is. There should still be room for a theory that doesn't define a possible world in such terms. However, use of states of affairs allows us to apply the relation more generally to fictions in addition to worlds, so it is worth preserving the use of states of affairs even if we do not define a possible world in those terms.

It should not be too difficult to maintain states of affairs as the objects taking the third place in the relation without committing to states of affairs as a definition of possible worlds. If a possible world indeed is just a maximally consistent state of affairs, all the better. But what if a possible world is a concrete universe spatiotemporally disconnected from ours? In that case, we can in principle give a complete description of that world. And that description, in addition to describing a world, will describe a state of affairs. Call this the state of affairs associated with the world. This should allow us to be more general. No matter what a possible world is, as long as we have states of affairs in our ontology, we should be able to find the state of affairs associated with the possible world. So, for the sake of generality, rather than being a world, let the object taking the third place in the relation be the state of affairs associated with a world.

Why go through the (albeit minimal) trouble of going from worlds to states of affairs? While worlds were general enough for analyzing modal property-attribution, they do not suffice for extending to fiction, as fictions do not clearly involve worlds. There are those who think they do, but there are strong arguments against this view (for starters, fictions are not complete descriptions of a state of affairs, and whatever else we can say about worlds, they're big—a description of a world should be complete).

So is a fiction a state of affairs? Not quite. The identity conditions for states of affairs are too stringent to apply to fictions. If we have a state of affairs in which Sherlock Holmes plays the violin, then any state of affairs in which Sherlock Holmes does not play the violin but rather the viola is not the same state of affairs. But surely Conan Doyle could have written Sherlock Holmes stories in which Holmes plays the viola instead of the violin (of course, they would not have been as good. But, as I'll argue below, he could have done it).

So a fiction cannot be a state of affairs. But a fiction, like a possible world, can have an associated state of affairs. The difference is that this association is not necessary. It makes no sense to talk about how a possible world could've been different. To say that a possible world could've been different is to misunderstand what it is to be a possible world. If someone does say that a world could've been different, they almost certainly mean that there is another possible world that is different. The identity conditions are strict. Any change in the content of a possible world does not alter the possible world but rather describes a different possible world.

Fiction is not like this. The Sherlock Holmes stories could have had Holmes

playing the viola. They wouldn't have been different stories, they would've been the same stories with a few modifications—different versions of the same stories. The identity conditions for a story have to do at least in part with its origins. They almost certainly also include *something* about the content of the story, but certainly not every single detail has to be the same for the story to be the same. So when we take the state of affairs associated with the Sherlock Holmes stories, we are talking about the state of affairs associated with the actual Sherlock Holmes stories. There are merely possible versions of the Sherlock Holmes stories associated with other states of affairs, and there's an epistemic possibility that we could find a lost Sherlock Holmes story that describes a different state of affairs than the ones we know. If we wanted to talk about the possible world in which Conan Doyle writes Holmes as playing the viola, we have another state of affairs associated with this possible version of the story. But while versions of stories, like possible worlds, have stricter identity conditions than stories themselves. So when we actually attribute violin-playing to Holmes, the third place in the relation is filled by the state of affairs associated with the actual Sherlock Holmes stories.

This allows us to get the needed generality. Because a place isn't defined as a world or a story, it allows this relation to be used for both worlds and stories. And in the latter case, it also makes things more precise. If what took the third place in the relation attributing the property of violin-playing to Holmes was the Holmes stories, we would need an "actually" operator. The Holmes stories could have been different, so we would need to make sure we were attributing the property in the actual Holmes stories rather than in a possible modification of them. But using states of affairs does this work for us,

because states of affairs cannot be different. When we attribute violin-playing to Holmes, we go to the state of affairs associated with the actual story.

It may seem that our analysis of the three-place relation is open to the following objection: if we grant that Sherlock Holmes exemplifies being an abstract object in the actual world and that the Sherlock Holmes in the stories is the same Holmes created by Conan Doyle in the actual world, should we not grant that Holmes exemplifies being an abstract object in the fiction? After all, the fiction appears in the actual world, and it contains an actual object Sherlock Holmes. And since that object exemplifies being abstract in the actual world, it should in the stories as well. This would be a problem. If Holmes exemplifies being an abstract object in the stories, then the whole basis for drawing the distinction comes apart. We wanted it to be the case that whether an object exemplifies or encodes a property depends on the place in which the relation occurs. In fictional contexts, we have encoding. In the actual world, we have exemplification. But if Holmes exemplifies being abstract in the stories, this distinction has failed. However, if we were to claim that Holmes encodes being abstract in the stories, we would also run into trouble. We've already granted that Holmes encodes being a concrete object in the stories, so if he were also to encode being abstract, he would encode contradictory properties.

This objection is primarily motivated by and aimed at the account of fiction that sees Holmes as an abstract artifact created by Conan Doyle. The stories are, on this view, a part of the actual world, and the Holmes contained in the stories is the same abstract artifact created by Conan Doyle. If Holmes is an abstract artifact in the actual world, he

doesn't suddenly become non-abstract in some part of the actual world (that is, in the fiction). So in the fiction, he must be abstract in some sense. And whether he encodes or exemplifies, it causes problems for this method of handling fiction.

The best way to handle this objection is to reject the push to claim that Holmes is in any sense abstract in the stories. This rejection may seem natural to some and hand-wavy to others, but a parallel example should clarify the intuitive pull behind the rejection and make it seem the natural choice. Consider, rather than "being abstract" and "being concrete," the properties "being created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle" and "being born of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes."[17] These are exclusive in much the same way that abstractness and concreteness are exclusive. On our interpretation, it seems clear that Holmes exemplifies being created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the actual world and encodes being born of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes in the stories. If this objection is to be moving, there must be some intuitive pull towards saying that *in the stories* Holmes is created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But in the stories (which are absent any meta-fictional elements that might give us pause), there is no pull at all to say that Holmes is created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Surely Holmes and the stories as a whole are created by Conan Doyle, but *in the stories* they are not created by Conan Doyle.

Abstractness and concreteness are properties that are harder on the intuitions than being born of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes and being created by Conan Doyle, but the situation is parallel, and the parallel shows that the objection should be rejected. Holmes is not in any sense abstract in the stories. Certainly Holmes is an abstract object that the stories are

[17] We choose this comparison because we've talked about origins, but we could just as easily contrast properties like "being popular with readers" and "being sought-after for crime-solving."

about, but he is not abstract in the stories, just as he is not created by Conan Doyle in the stories.

The reasoning behind the objection is similar to that behind the idea that the same person cannot appear with different properties in multiple worlds, so counterpart theorists may still be attracted to it. But if the same object can have different properties in different worlds, Holmes being abstract in the actual world shouldn't force him to be abstract in the stories. This may be obscured in the particular example, but we can see from the parallel that it holds.

v. How Parallel is Parallel?

Of course, even if we accept both this understanding of the three-place relation and this artifactual theory of fiction, there are still questions, closely related to those set aside in the previous section, about how far to take the parallel between fictions and possible worlds. The most extreme response would be to say that the fictions are just identical to possible worlds, albeit perhaps underspecified when written about. This seems clearly ruled out by appeal to the artifactual theory of fiction, unless one is inclined to say that merely possible objects are artifacts. The necessity of origins thesis seems intuitively gripping, and as we've seen, it can be applied easily enough to fiction. Just as I may have had the parents I had essentially, Sherlock Holmes was essentially created by Conan Doyle—a Holmes-like character created by Agatha Christie just wouldn't have been Holmes. But if Holmes is just a possible person who is a flesh and blood individual in other worlds, he wouldn't have been created by Conan Doyle in those other worlds. So if the necessity of origins thesis is correct regarding fictional characters, fictions cannot just be examples of possible worlds.

However, this is not the only reason to rule out this extreme conclusion. Another point weighing against it is the familiar problem of reference. If Sherlock Holmes were a merely possible person, how would Conan Doyle be able to refer to him? There's no one Conan Doyle could point to and say “I'm talking about that guy,” and there could be many possible people that have all of the properties ascribed to Holmes, so Conan Doyle can't just be picking out Holmes as “the possible person that has such and such

properties." It seems as though Conan Doyle has no way to refer to a particular merely possible individual, and if he cannot refer to such an individual, it seems unlikely he would be able to write about them.

So if we are to generally accept an artifactual theory of fiction and an encoding/exemplifying distinction but are to reject the idea that fictions just are possible worlds, what are the remaining options. Three general strategies emerge, and one's preference among the three should vary based on how tightly one sees the connection between fictions and possible worlds. Recall that, in introducing the three-place relation and how it ties into the exemplifying/encoding distinction, we said that when the third place of the relation is the actual world, it is an exemplification relation, and when the third place is a fiction, it is an encoding relation. But what should we do if the third place is a merely possible world? We could, if we see possible worlds as just the same sorts of things as the actual world and quite different from worlds of fiction, see this as an example of exemplification. On the other hand, if we see tighter parallels between possible worlds and worlds of fiction, we could see this as a relation of encoding. The third option would be to see it as neither. Each option has its strengths and weaknesses, which we shall consider in turn.

The first strategy, saying that we have exemplification when the third place of the relation is a merely possible world, can be supported by observing the differences between possible worlds and worlds of fiction and by appeal to a uniformity in the nature of possible worlds. On the former point, we should note that possible worlds are not artifacts. They are not created by us and they do not come into existence at some point in

time. Furthermore, states of affairs that comprise works of fiction are rarely, if ever, maximal and can be self-contradictory. Possible worlds are maximal and must be consistent. Finally, the actual world and merely possible worlds are both subsumed under the category of possible worlds. To the degree that that indicates uniformity, if we see that the relation in the actual world is exemplification, we should expect the same from possible worlds.

However, one thing this first option doesn't do is capture what's special about the actual world. For those inclined toward Lewis in thinking that actuality is merely an indexical, this won't be terribly moving. But for those not Lewis-inclined in this matter, it seems clear that the actual world is special. Possible worlds are full of things that could have happened. Merely possible worlds are full of things that could have *and didn't* happen. But the actual world is full of what has actually happened. Even if, before it was made actual, the actual world was the same sort of thing as other possible worlds, actuality seems to introduce a pretty big difference. Before we roll two dice, all 36 possible outcomes are equal. But once we roll them and see a pair of sixes, that outcome becomes relevantly different than the others—it's the one that happened. And it can be hard to cash out exactly in what the difference consists. The actual world seems more real in some sense. But if we admit possible worlds into our ontology, then unless we're prepared to grade out varying levels of reality, merely saying the actual world is more real isn't the way to cash out the intuition.

But the same intuition holds about the way objects hold their actual properties compared to how fictional objects hold the properties ascribed to them in fiction. So if the

exemplification/encoding distinction works for that intuition, why can't it work here? In the actual world, we have exemplification, and in merely possible worlds, like in fiction, we have encoding. This, our second option, makes use of the similarities between the fictional and the merely possible to capture something special about the actual world. However, in doing so, it ignores the differences between the fictional and the merely possible. We've discussed several differences, and they may indicate that the parallel is not strong enough to lump the merely possible in with the fictional in the encoding relation while exemplification occurs in the actual world alone.

The third option is to claim that the exemplification/encoding distinction is missing a middle option for the merely possible. After all, while it did seem that a distinction needed to be made, there was no knockdown argument saying the distinction should be made between only two things. Why not three? This approach emphasizes the difference between the fictional, the merely possible, and the actual. If the merely possible is different enough from the actual world to cast doubt on exemplification occurring there and different enough from the fictional to cast similar doubt on encoding, why not just make the distinction tripartite? The downside of this approach, of course, is parsimony. The reasons for drawing an exemplification/encoding distinction were extremely compelling, and to make a tripartite distinction, we should have similarly compelling evidence that the exemplification/encoding distinction, as it stands, is not fine-grained enough to do the job.

We will require further analysis of exactly how the exemplification and encoding relations are restricted in various places. This should yield insight into exactly how deep

the parallel runs. A difference between the fictional and the possible that we have only briefly touched on is that the possible is, in fact, possible. Given that Sherlock Holmes is created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, it may be impossible that he is born of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes. But that doesn't stop him from being born of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes in the stories, and it doesn't stop him from encoding the property of being born of Mr. and Mrs. Holmes. So the encoding relation is not fully bound by the chains of possibility. However, it is somewhat constrained by possibility. Perhaps time travel is impossible, and thus Napoleon taking part in a history presentation in California in 1988 is impossible. But he does successfully encode that property in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*. However, it is much less clear that Napoleon could encode the property of being born in 1988 in California to 5th-generation American parents. It seems as though, if someone were to write a fiction in which Napoleon did that, it wouldn't be about Napoleon anymore. So the properties that Napoleon actually exemplifies does provide some constraint, although not complete constraint, on what Napoleon can encode. And, if the relation in the case of merely possible worlds is encoding, then the constraint on encoding in possible worlds is different from the constraint on encoding in fiction. This should not be surprising, given the differences between the two, but if seen as a difference in kind and not merely in degree, it may be ammunition for one inclined towards a tripartite distinction.

Now that we've seen how the constraint works in possible worlds, how does it work in fiction? The encoding relation in possible worlds is obviously constrained by metaphysical possibility. But there are perfectly good fictions that are not

metaphysically possible. Of course, we have the preceding arguments about how fictions generally do not describe possible worlds and thus that the events of fiction, even fairly straightforward, realistic fiction, are not within the bounds of possibility. But fiction can break the bounds of possibility even more clearly than that. Nothing requires the physics of fiction to be bound by metaphysical possibility. Nothing requires fiction to even be consistent! It is fairly common to find continuity errors in works of fiction, yielding internal contradictions. No one rejects them as fictions on the grounds that they contain contradictions.

Perhaps one might claim that contradictions in fiction are not reasons to reject the fiction as a whole but the reason to reject a particular property ascription. For example, an author may introduce a character as six feet tall and later list him at 5'10". But should we say that the story itself has a contradiction or that the author misdescribed a consistent story? One may think any theory including an author misdescribing a consistent story need require a pre-existent third realm of stories that the author only discovers, which seems inconsistent with the robust sort of creation we'd like to see in authorship. But misdescribing a consistent story need not require such a view—rather it needs only that the act of creating the world does not mesh perfectly with the act of putting pen to paper. The author could have created a consistent story in imagination but neglected small details and misreported them. This is, of course, speculative, but it would allow us not to worry about these small contradictions, perhaps giving us the ability to say that encoding in fiction is at least constrained by logical possibility.

But even if we were to grant that such continuity errors are not inconsistencies in

fiction, we run into larger problems when we see more important contradictions. These come out best in time travel stories. Time travel stories are often have vital elements of the plot that are entirely incoherent. And yet they remain fictions. In fact, time travel plots are often incoherent in such a way that the incoherencies not only fail to decrease the audience's appreciation of the fiction but actually facilitate the audience's appreciation.[18] And these certainly cannot be explained away in any easy fashion. The author isn't misreporting a coherent story. The stories themselves are incoherent.

So we must allow inconsistencies in fiction, which means encoding in fiction cannot be constrained by even logical possibility. Clearly then they are not constrained by physical or metaphysical possibility. Even the consistent time travel stories at best elicit controversy as to their metaphysical possibility.

So if encoding is not constrained in fiction by physical, metaphysical, or logical possibility, what is it constrained by? One initially plausible answer might be essence. This would be a surprising answer, as it would mean fictions are constrained by something more restrictive than logical possibility (essence, which pertains to metaphysical possibility) while at the same time being constrained by something less restrictive, in that it allows contradictions. However, there are intuitions in favor of the proposal. Napoleon may be able to travel in time in fiction, even in ways that might not be metaphysically or even logically possible, but Napoleon must still be Corsican, right? Of course, determining individual essence is an enormously difficult task in and of itself, but a difficult to pin down constraint on encoding is better than an entirely unknown one.

Unfortunately, we can easily show that individual essence will in fact not do the

[18] Two prime examples here would be *Back to the Future* and *Looper.* There are many others.

job. It seems to work in the case of Napoleon. His essential properties, whatever they may be—perhaps being Corsican, being male, being human, having such and such parents, etc.—seem to constrain how he appears in fiction. But for fictional characters themselves, this is not so. We have argued that it is essential to Sherlock Holmes that he was created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But we have also argued that in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes is not created by Conan Doyle but is rather born of two human parents. So one of Holmes' central, essential properties, does not hold of him in all stories in which he appears. In fact, it fails to hold of Holmes in most of the stories in which he actually appears—the property would only hold of him in a story with some meta-fictional elements.

But it does seem that Holmes must still be British. And perhaps he must be male, although the recasting of male characters as women, which is not unusual in the recent past, certainly introduces questions on that score. And perhaps he must have the same parents in all stories, although we may think it possible to write a Sherlock Holmes story in which he discovers he's adopted. The only constraints on what properties Holmes can encode are those that, if violated, would cause us to look at a purported Holmes story and say "No, that's not about him. That's about some other character being passed off as Holmes." And it's hard to say exactly what properties those are. Facts about his creation and the reference of future writers to Conan Doyle's Holmes character certainly do not come into play, as they exist outside the world of the stories. Whatever facts constrain what properties Holmes can encode in fiction, they are notably difficult to pin down—which is why there is room for argument about whether or not two characters are the

same—and are not just the set facts about Holmes' essence, at least in the ordinary sense of “essence,” where it is taken to include facts about what is metaphysically possible for Holmes. We will consider potential, so to speak, fictional essences which could constraint Holmes in fiction. It will turn out that this will not be directly parallel to the case of actual people (for instance, requiring that parentage remain constant but allowing intellectual prowess to vary) but will require a contextual concept.

Now it may seem strange to allow an object to encode properties that go against the essence of that object, as the essence of something seems like it ought to go beyond even the restrictions put in place by metaphysical and logical possibility. And indeed, it is strange, and a strangeness that may be unique to fictional artifacts. What Napoleon can encode seems to be constrained by his essence, even though what Holmes can encode is not. But, strange as it may be, this is just another step on a continuum of constraints on encoding. We already allow objects to encode in metaphysically possible worlds something that would have been banned in physically possible worlds. We allow objects to encode in logically possible worlds something that would have been banned in metaphysically possible worlds. And we allow objects to encode in fiction things that would've been banned in logically possible worlds. That we lose essence, and that it's hard to pin down what to replace it with, is a strange quirk, but it's just another along a continuum of allowances which are strange with respect to the next most restrictive class of worlds. And it seems the existence of such a continuum takes back any ammunition we had previously given to the supporter of a tripartite distinction, and our discussion is again turns to two options: that merely possible worlds are more parallel to the actual

world than to fiction and vice versa.

While not a complete answer, context of introduction may provide a potential insight into how this continuum of constraints on the encoding relation behaves. Sherlock Holmes is introduced in a particular context that is controlled largely by his creator. What features can encoded by Holmes in any possible or fictional worlds depends on that context, on what Conan Doyle chose to make Holmes' key properties. While it seems obvious that Holmes could give up smoking or playing the violin, it also seems any character without a brilliant mind and unsocial personality would not be Holmes. In fact, it seems much more obvious that these traits must be encoded by Holmes in all possible stories about him than that Holmes must have the parents he actually did—a property much less central to the stories.

These key properties are tied into a character's creation so inextricably that any character without those properties would not be the same character. But this is a phenomenon unique to fiction. Ordinary people are not introduced by particular authors in particular contexts, which is why Napoleon in fiction is constrained in much the same way that Napoleon in possible worlds are constrained. In some ways, he is more constrained than Holmes—after all, he definitely must have the same parents in all worlds and in all stories—but in other ways, he is less. Napoleon could have not been a brilliant leader, but to take from Holmes his brilliance would be to create another character entirely. Where he's less constrained, it's because he, like all ordinary people, already exist for anyone to write about. There is no author that gets any kind of first dibs, that gets to set a context for Napoleon's introduction into the world that would restrict the

properties he can encode. And where he's more constrained, it's for the same reason. He had no author to de-emphasize certain properties, like who his parents were, in his context of introduction, and so he encodes them in all possible worlds and in all fictions. A person comes into the world laden with their DNA and their causal history. A fictional character, on the other hand, may not have any specific DNA but may have other properties without which they simply would not be the same character. And while this may not always give a good answer for exactly how encoding is restricted, it does explain in part why fictional characters and actual people occupy different places on the continuum of how the encoding relation is constrained. Additionally, the constraint on both possibility and fiction by how an object is introduced in the actual world reinforces the parallel seen at the end of Section III between a possible world containing an actual person and a fiction containing an actual person.

vi. A Word About Pretense

So we have seen a number of parallels between fiction and possibility, but we have not yet come to a conclusion on exactly how far to take the parallel. Should we take fictions to be incomplete, sometimes inconsistent instances of the same sorts of things—albeit not the exact same things—as possible worlds, only dim reflections of the actual world? Or should we take possible worlds and the actual world to be very much the same and fictions to be quite different? There are certainly parallels between fictions and possible worlds, but there are also disanalogies. For those who don't see actuality as an indexical, the same holds between possible worlds and the actual world. There are many similarities, but the actual world is special in some way that merely possible worlds are not. It is the world that obtains, and our discussion in section III indicated that it claims some sort of priority over merely possible worlds, in much the same way as it has priority over fiction. But because there still are parallels to both, accepting the parallels we've discussed between possible worlds and fiction, even where they are suggestive, do not force a choice about whether these parallels are the stronger.

But there is another component—also strongly suggestive about which parallels are stronger—that is absolutely vital to many theories of fiction but that we have thus far left to the side: pretense. Under many popular theories of fiction, including Thomasson's, when we make claims about what happens in a fiction, we don't really assert propositions as true, we merely pretend they are true. Sherlock Holmes doesn't really smoke a pipe, but we pretend that he does in order to enjoy the story, or it order to talk about it

afterwards.

While the driving intuition behind the use of pretense seems solid—abstract objects don't smoke pipes—I've always felt the theories lacking something. I know that abstract objects don't smoke pipes, and I find it plausible that Sherlock Holmes is an abstract object, but it seems obviously true that Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe. That's the part that pretense theories miss. They miss the truth.

However, recasting pretense in terms of encoding seems to capture both the pretense intuition and the truth intuition. When we assert propositions ascribing properties to objects, we don't usually specify whether we're talking about an encoding relation or an exemplification relation. In normal statements about the world, we're talking about exemplification. But when we assert that Sherlock Holmes smokes a pipe, it's not that we aren't asserting a proposition, it's that we are only asserting a proposition about encoding. Abstract objects don't exemplify pipe-smoking, but they can encode it. And that's exactly what we mean when we say that Holmes does. We don't actually expect to find a flesh and blood Holmes smoking a pipe in London. But we're also still asserting a proposition.

When we pretend for the sake of a story, we're not pretending to assert a proposition; we're pretending that the proposition is about exemplification rather than encoding. Put differently, we're pretending that Holmes' actions are really happening and not happening in the creation of a long-dead writer. This explanation captures the pretense intuition without sacrificing truth in fiction.

But does it give us insight into possible worlds? I would say it does. When we

consider other possible worlds—really consider other possible worlds, not just consider modal properties of actual objects—we are considering what things would be like were those worlds actual. But they aren't actual. We are only pretending. And if encoding is the best way to recast pretense in fiction, it seems the right way to recast pretense here. Sherlock Holmes really smokes a pipe in fiction just like I really drop out of college in another possible world. These are both true, in virtue of properties encoded by Holmes and me. But when we consider the world as if those things were real, we are pretending. We are treating an encoding relation as an exemplification relation. In this, possible worlds stand closer to fictions than the actual world, and those parallels should be spelled out in terms of how objects encode their properties in fictions and in possible worlds while they exemplify properties in the actual world.

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