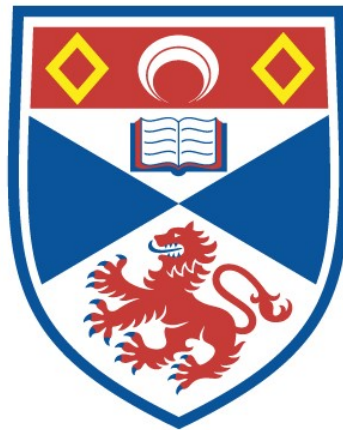


# FICTION AND ITS OBJECTS

Ashley Everett Watkins

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews



2020

Full metadata for this thesis is available in  
St Andrews Research Repository  
at:

<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this thesis:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10023/19537>

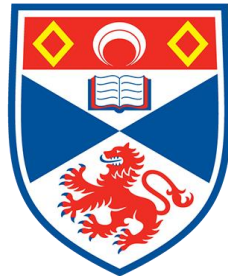
This item is protected by original copyright

This item is licensed under a  
Creative Commons License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

# Fiction and Its Objects

Ashley Everett Watkins



University of  
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

at the University of St Andrews

September 2019

## Abstract

This thesis develops a metaphysics of fictional objects that is embedded in a theory of fictional practice and maximally preserves the meanings of our fictional utterances. I begin by asking two questions: How can it be true of a fictional object such as *Dune's* Paul Atreides that he was born on the planet Caladan to the Lady Jessica (an intrafictional claim), that he was created on Earth by Frank Herbert (an extrafictional claim), and that he does not exist (a nonexistence claim)? If one or more of these is not true, then what is the nature of our assent to these three types of propositions about fictional objects? I argue that fiction's social nature and its basis in imaginative acts provides us with a dualist account of fictional objects: 'Paul Atreides' in the intrafictional and nonexistence claims refers to merely possible people while 'Paul Atreides' in extrafictional claims refers to an actual abstract artifact. I defend imagination's central role in fiction and argue that it's a norm of imagination that it models possibilities. I then define fiction as a social practice necessarily consisting in 1) acts of social imagining, 2) agreement maintained by implicit principles, 3) an aesthetic function or aim, and 4) the creation of abstract artifacts through which it achieves that aim. The result is that intrafictional claims are not assertions about the actual world, but expressions of imaginings that have as their intentional objects possible objects and states of affairs. Extrafictional claims are assertions about the actual abstract artifacts created by fictional practice that bear a picking out relation to the possibilia of fictive imaginings. Finally, nonexistence claims are assertions about the possibilia of our fictive imaginings - assertions that they are not actual. I defend the compatibility of these artifactualist and possibilist accounts and show how their union under the umbrella of a full theory of fiction both explains their intuitive appeal and solves the major issues they encounter individually.

## **Acknowledgements**

I'd like first of all to express my huge gratitude to the St Andrews and Stirling Graduate programme in Philosophy, and the faculty and fellow students who create such a cooperative and invigorating environment in which to study. I'm very grateful to the university for the funding I've received for my philosophical development and research, including the Philosophical Quarterly Bursary during my MLitt and the Sheana and Pierre Rollin Scholarship during my PhD.

Of course, I could not have completed this work without the unwavering support of my supervisors. Thanks to Berys Gaut for seeing my potential, making me a better writer and a better thinker, hammering at my bad habits until they finally broke, and for teaching me the meaning of scholarship. Thanks to Aaron Cotnoir for feedback that was both encouraging and incisive, guidance on all matters metaphysical, and particularly for all the long meetings and many words read in the final months of my writing-up.

Thanks to the community of philosophy PhD students, who are responsible for so much of the joy and excitement of the past four years. To the St Andrews MAP chapter for striving to make philosophy open to all. To the members of the Aesthetics Reading Group, Clo Torregrossa, James Ursell, and Eric Studt, for many hours of challenging conversation, support, and friendship. Special thanks to Clo, who not only helped run our reading group and MAP chapter, but is also my co-organizer for the Scottish Aesthetics Forum. She has been a voice of reason, a recommender of readings, and a reliable source of camaraderie and non-philosophical conversation since our days on the MLitt.

I could not have made it this far without the support of my family back in Nevada. Thanks to my mom Vicki Dolan for the weekly emails, for always taking an interest and believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself. Thanks to my dad John Watkins, who taught me how to argue before I knew what philosophy was, and for the many hours spent debating morality, religion, and science with a 12-year-old. I don't know how he had the patience. Thanks to my older brother Kyle, my uncles Steve and Jim, and my aunt Dorothy for always welcoming me back home when I visit. And special

thanks to my grandparents, John and Doris Watkins, who were so proud when I told them I was going to St Andrews. Though I lost them on the way, I know they would have loved to see me graduate.

I'm grateful to all those at California State University in Northridge who sparked my interest in and encouraged me to pursue philosophy. I owe so much to the incredible education I received from a faculty that poured time and energy into their undergraduates. Thanks to Abel Franco for always having time for coffee and ideas, and never lowering expectations. Thanks to Julie Yoo for enthusiasm and engagement, for reading recommendations and for having patience with me when I didn't know what I wanted. And thanks to Takashi Yagisawa for showing me the power of possible worlds and Star Trek thought experiments.

Finally, I give my warmest thanks to my partner Nick Bibby. Thanks for keeping me sane, fed, grounded, and safe. Thanks for listening to me talk endlessly about fictional objects. Thank you for seeing me through anxieties, panics, and low points, and for being there to celebrate all my victories. Thanks for becoming my home in Scotland.

## **Candidate's declaration**

I, Ashley Everett Watkins, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

I was admitted as a research student at the University of St Andrews in September 2015.

I received funding from an organisation or institution and have acknowledged the funder(s) in the full text of my thesis.

Date

Signature of candidate

## **Supervisor's declaration**

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date

Signature of supervisor

## **Permission for publication**

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews we understand that we are giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. We also understand, unless exempt by an award of an embargo as requested below, that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that this thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use and that the library has the right to migrate this thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis.

I, Ashley Everett Watkins, confirm that my thesis does not contain any third-party material that requires copyright clearance.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the publication of this thesis:

**Printed copy**

No embargo on print copy.

**Electronic copy**

No embargo on electronic copy.

Date

Signature of candidate

Date

Signature of supervisor

## **Underpinning Research Data or Digital Outputs**

### **Candidate's declaration**

I, Ashley Everett Watkins, hereby certify that no requirements to deposit original research data or digital outputs apply to this thesis and that, where appropriate, secondary data used have been referenced in the full text of my thesis.

Date

Signature of candidate



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Chapter 1 – The two branches of the philosophy of fiction</b> .....	7
<i>Introduction</i> .....	7
1. <i>Ontology-focused views</i> .....	9
1.1 <i>Irrealist ontology</i> .....	10
1.2 <i>Creationist ontology</i> .....	14
1.3 <i>Possibilist ontology</i> .....	18
2. <i>‘Action theories’</i> .....	20
2.1. <i>Pretended assertions</i> .....	20
2.2 <i>Fictive utterance</i> .....	26
2.3 <i>Games of make-believe</i> .....	45
2.4 <i>Fiction as a genre</i> .....	49
3. <i>The pragmatic constraint expanded</i> .....	52
4. <i>The central paradox</i> .....	56
<b>Chapter 2 – Imagination</b> .....	59
<i>Introduction</i> .....	59
1. <i>Types of imagination</i> .....	60
1.1 <i>Imagination and mental imagery</i> .....	61
1.2 <i>Imagination and pretense</i> .....	64
2. <i>Features of the imagination</i> .....	66
2.1 <i>Imagination and belief in inference</i> .....	66
2.2 <i>Imagination and emotion</i> .....	68
2.3 <i>Non-occurrent imaginings</i> .....	69
2.4 <i>Deliberate imaginings</i> .....	69
2.5 <i>Imagination’s quarantine from belief and ‘double knowledge’</i> .....	70
2.6 <i>Imaginary worlds</i> .....	70
3. <i>Cognitivist views</i> .....	72
3.1 <i>Meta-representation</i> .....	73
3.2 <i>Simulationism</i> .....	75
3.3 <i>‘Boxology’ and the single code</i> .....	80

4. Multiple models and representing possibilities .....	85
4.1 Mental models.....	85
4.3. The possibility norm.....	89
<b>Chapter 3 – Fiction’s social nature: agreement, aims, and works .....</b>	<b>96</b>
Introduction .....	96
1. What kind of thing is fiction? .....	99
1.1 Getting the kind wrong .....	101
1.2 Fiction as a social practice.....	106
2. Social practices.....	109
2.1 Activities and rules.....	110
2.2 Rules and agreement.....	113
2.3 Aims – internal and external, fixed and fluid.....	117
2.4 Social entities and abstract artifacts .....	122
3. Fiction as an institution .....	130
3.1 Fictional activities and agreement .....	131
3.2 Fiction’s fixed external aim .....	136
3.3 Fictional works .....	142
Conclusion .....	148
<b>Chapter 4 – A dualist theory of fictional objects .....</b>	<b>150</b>
Introduction .....	150
1. What is true in fiction? .....	153
2. An alternative conception of fictive utterance and fictional operators .....	157
3. Fictional reference and the foundations of dualism .....	167
4. Fictitious objects.....	172
4.1 Indeterminacy .....	173
4.2 Impossible fictions .....	178
5. Ficta.....	181
5.1 Bringing possibilism and creationism together .....	182
5.2 Thomasson’s ontology .....	185
5.3 Ficta .....	189
6. The central paradox test .....	190
6.1 Available solutions.....	191

6.2 Embracing dualism.....	200
Conclusion.....	205
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	207
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	213

## Introduction

Fictional objects have presented an enticing puzzle for philosophers from many backgrounds and with diverse interests. They've been a challenging test case for theories of reference, systems of ontological categories, speech act theories, and even systems of logic. We say things about fictional objects that seem meaningful and to which we readily assent, but that don't seem to make any sense on further inspection. We sometimes say that they are people, that they have wings, or that they live in London. We also say that they're based on real people, that they first appeared in certain novels, or that they were thought up by specific authors. But the kinds of things that can be people cannot first appear in novels and the kinds of things that are thought up by authors cannot live in London. Worst of all, we often say that they don't even exist. A sizeable portion of philosophical literature on fiction is devoted to making sense of these weird things that we say and how we might mean them when we say them.

However, things often go wrong in these attempts. Theories that explain one case very well may utterly fail to explain the other. It may turn out that we don't really mean what we say, even if we think we do. Or it turns out that we ought not to assent to some of the propositions we assent to, like that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, because they are false. Sometimes they offer a reason, or an 'error theory,' for why we continue to make these mistakes. It's difficult, though, to know whether we are wrong relative to the theory or whether the theory is wrong relative to us. When the problems of fiction float about untethered to anything but anomalous discourse and each theory explains only the kind of claim about fictions that the other can't, it's not clear what the standard is to decide between them. It comes down to a decision about which kind of claim about fiction we want to keep most: is it that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, that he was created by Arthur Conan Doyle, or that he doesn't exist at all?

In this dissertation, I will argue that the ontological views are wrong relative to us and that the mistake they make is in seeing fiction as a strange use of language, or a series of

inconsistent assertions. I will argue that ontological views should be embedded in an overarching theory of the nature of fiction. This nature lies in the whole practice of fiction, involving imaginative engagement, creation and categorization of works, as well as our discursive practices. I will build on other theories to develop a view according to which fiction is a social practice consisting in acts of imagining. I will show how a dualist ontology emerges from this theory of fiction and that it performs better than the alternatives relative to our intuitions and the meanings of our claims about fiction.

The first chapter will introduce the topic in detail and will include a review of existing theories, both the purely ontological and the so-called action theories of fiction. I will assess these views and offer a general diagnosis of where they go wrong. In the case of ontological theories, I will argue that they fail to conform to facts about the practice of fiction and therefore fail to be theories of fictional objects. For action theories, I will argue that the stubborn presence of counterexamples to their conditions for fiction is due to their fixation on fictionality as a property of propositions or utterances.

Having suggested that a focus on utterances, propositions, and semantic analyses is a mistake, I will opt to focus on the imagination for illumination in the practice of fiction. I will review and assess four major types of cognitive theory of the imagination relative to a set of desiderata. From this assessment I will find that the imagination is a faculty of representational mental modeling. Some features of this view will explain some of the ways we engage with fiction. I will then examine the connection between imagination and possibility and argue that the best explanation for this connection is normative: that it is a norm of imagination that it models possibilities.

In Chapter 3, I will lay out my theory of fiction as a social practice. I will first defend the idea that we ought to conceive of fiction as a practice rather than as a property of propositions, utterances, or narratives. I will develop a structure of a class of social practices that create abstract artifacts, which I will call ‘institutions.’ These consist in essential activities, agreement, aims, and artifacts through which they achieve their aims. Applying this structure to fiction, I will show that fiction is a practice consisting essentially

in acts of social imagining, that maintains agreement through implicit principles, that has an aesthetic aim, and creates artifacts, most notably works, through which it achieves its aim.

Finally, Chapter 4 will mark a return to the semantics and ontology of fiction. I will propose a type of non-assertive speech act that I call an ‘imaginative utterance,’ and suggest that all claims of the type “Sherlock Holmes is a detective,” or “Paul Atreides was born on Caladan,” are utterances of this type. I will argue that imaginative utterances refer to possible objects and states of affairs in virtue of being expressions of the contents of imaginative models. I call the possible objects about which we imagine in accordance with fiction ‘fictitious objects.’ Additionally, fiction as a social practice is responsible for the creation of abstract artifacts, including both works and the kinds of fictional object that we often call ‘characters.’ These are what I shall call ‘ficta,’ singular ‘fictum.’ Ficta are the objects about which we believe and assert. I will show how the context of utterance is fixed and explain the intimate relation between a fictum and its associated fictitious object. I will then put this dualist view to the central paradox test and argue that it out-performs its rivals.

Each chapter of this dissertation plays an essential role in providing an overarching theory of fiction from which an ontological view emerges. It is both an argument for a particular theory and a demonstration of its central methodological claim: that the best ontological view of the entities of a practice is a consequence of a comprehensive theory of that practice.

## Chapter 1 – The two branches of the philosophy of fiction

### *Introduction*

In his 1985 paper “Pretense and Paraphrase,” Peter Van Inwagen makes note of a split in the philosophy of fiction between what he calls ‘action theory’ and ‘ontology.’ These two branches of the philosophy of fiction are different both in their aims and in their origins. Action theory has its roots in aesthetics, or the philosophy of literature according to Van Inwagen, and is primarily concerned with theorizing about acts associated with fiction such as “story-telling, composition, reading, criticizing, interpreting, summarizing, quoting, alluding to, and comparing.”<sup>1</sup> Those engaged in action theory typically come to the philosophy of fiction when their enquiries into literature appear to them to depend on the nature of fiction for answers. Those engaged primarily in the ontology of fiction are, predictably, metaphysicians and logicians whose theorizing over objects or propositions has been thwarted for the moment by counterexamples from the realm of fiction. Of course, this is not a sharp divide, as even in 1985 Van Inwagen named Nicholas Wolterstorff’s work as a prominent exception. Despite the frequent overlap, it’s still true that “[m]ost philosophers of fiction have stressed one of these two divisions of the philosophy of fiction, and have treated the other in a very perfunctory manner.”<sup>2</sup> Each side supposes that, having figured out the puzzles of their preference, the problems of the other half will more or less work themselves out.

Van Inwagen, acting as a confirmed representative of Team Ontology, extends a sort of olive branch to the action theorists, admitting that he once supposed that a metaphysician could solve the not-very-interesting problems of action theory “on a rainy Saturday.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, particularly after reading the work of Kendall Walton, he came to see action theories as “fascinating, intricate, sophisticated, and, *above all, illuminating.*”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, “Pretense and Paraphrase,” in *The Reasons of Art: Artworks and the Transformations of Philosophy*, ed. Peter McCormick (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), 415.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

Van Inwagen's frank admission – that he believed metaphysicians could easily solve the problems of action theory in a day, if only they were worth doing – is a refreshingly explicit expression of an attitude no doubt noticed by many other aestheticians and philosophers of art. Beyond that, Van Inwagen's journey into action theory reveals a genuine disagreement between the two camps as to where the nature of fiction is to be located. Those engaged primarily in the ontology of fiction take the true nature of fiction to lie in the metaphysics of its objects or in the analysis of propositions involved in fictional discourse. For action theorists, things like story-telling and interpretation are at the very heart of the nature of fiction, rather than simply actions done with or to those things that are truly fictional.

It ought to be no great surprise that metaphysicians don't see, without further inspection or reflection, the work of aestheticians or philosophers of art to be getting at the true nature of things. After all, that is traditionally the business of metaphysicians. Much of the history of analytic metaphysics proceeds in a more or less reductionist way – to break down complex things into their constituent parts, examine those parts, and come to an essential definition consisting of necessary and sufficient conditions. If we take fiction to be made up of propositions, for example, then putting fictional propositions under the microscope and fishing out the elusive property '*fictional*' is a method supported by decades of analytic thought. Given its pre-eminence in contemporary Western philosophy, this method of teasing out an essential definition has been embraced by many of those rightly described as engaging in action theory, usually by conceiving of and analyzing fiction as a unique speech act.<sup>5</sup> But action theorists who are engaged in an essential definition project at most make their theories of fiction compatible with a certain ontology of fictional objects, rather than achieving *illumination* in the realm of ontology.

There has recently been pushback against traditional lines of thought in the philosophy of fiction, including the reductionist project, notably by theorists such as Stacie Friend and Derek Matravers: Friend by conceiving of fiction as a genre delineated by standard and

---

<sup>5</sup> Of course, there is plenty of work in the philosophy of fiction that does not aim for an essential definition of fiction, for example the work of Eileen John on the moral value of fiction and recent work by Stacie Friend on how we learn from fiction and its cognitive value.



contra-standard features and Matravers by minimizing the fiction/non-fiction distinction in favor of a confrontation/representation distinction. Refreshing as these views are, I think they still miss the mark. While illuminating with regard to the categorization of and engagement with works, their accounts remain silent on ontological questions.

Furthermore, both primarily target the traditional linkage of fiction with imagination in their criticisms, but this element of standard accounts is a scapegoat. To really hit the traditional approach where it hurts, we should tackle not its use of imagination but its fixation on individual utterances or propositions.

The aim of this chapter is two-fold. It will serve to introduce and briefly examine the field of positions on fiction with which the remainder of the dissertation will be concerned. It will also argue for two claims about theories of fiction: 1) that the *nature* of fiction lies in what Van Inwagen calls ‘action theory’ and 2) that a fully-realized action theory ought to be illuminating with regard to ontological questions. That is, an action theory that succeeds in getting at the nature of fiction will necessitate some particular view of the ontology. The test for whether an action theory is ontologically illuminating will be to examine how it solves what I call the ‘central paradox.’

In section 1, I will examine views of fiction from metaphysics and the philosophy of language: views that broadly fall under the ‘ontology without action theory’ category. Section 2 will be concerned with views that stress action theory, both with and without some view of the ontology that is compatible with, but does not follow from, the main view. In section 3, I will argue for my criteria for a successful theory of fiction by arguing for a strong version of David Davies’ pragmatic constraint. Finally, section 4 will introduce and explain the central paradox as a test for successful theories.

### *1. Ontology-focused views*

The major division in fictional ontology is between realists and irrealists. Typically, both begin with semantic arguments. Realists tend to argue that our everyday talk about fictions commits us to the existence of fictional objects, at which point they provide a story about what kind of objects they might be. Irrealists argue that our everyday talk commits us to the view that fictional objects do not exist and subsequently try to work out paraphrases or

other explanations for common utterances that appear to take seriously and ascribe properties to fictional objects. Many theorists on both sides of the issue solve the problem of fictional objects by appealing to, or modifying, a pre-existing theory of language. This overview is brief, so it will not be possible to address every available argument for and against each view, but these ontological views will be addressed in more depth in Chapter 4.

### *1.1 Irrealist ontology*

An early and highly influential irrealist account can be found in Bertrand Russell's 1905 paper "On Denoting." Russell's primary aim is to show how propositions containing non-denoting terms can nevertheless be meaningful according to his theory of descriptions. Russell wants to avoid the conclusion that sentences such as "The round square does not exist" or "The current King of France wears a wig" commit us to the existence of things like the round square and the current King of France by virtue of being meaningful. It seems like we can meaningfully speak about these things, so mustn't they exist *in some sense*? Moreover, not only does a sentence like "The round square does not exist" seem meaningful, it also appears to be true. This is worrisome for Russell, as he explains in his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*:

It is argued, e.g. by Meinong, that we can speak about 'the golden mountain', 'the round square', and so on; we can make true propositions of which these are the subjects; hence they must have some kind of logical being, since otherwise the propositions in which they occur would be meaningless. In such theories, it seems to me, there is a failure of that feeling for reality which ought to be preserved even in the most abstract studies. Logic, I should maintain, must no more admit a unicorn than zoology can; for logic is concerned with the real world just as truly as zoology, though with its more abstract and general features.<sup>6</sup>

Along with such nonsensical imaginary objects as the round square Russell lumps fictional objects, noting that "it is of the very essence of fiction that only the thoughts, feelings, etc., in Shakespeare and his readers are real, and that there is not, in addition to them, an

---

<sup>6</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919), 169.

objective Hamlet.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, realist views violate common sense by including fictional objects such as Hamlet in what exists. This intuition – that surely fictional objects aren’t real – is the starting point of all irrealist positions.

Russell’s analysis of propositions that appear to commit us to an objective Hamlet can be explained in terms of definite descriptions. Briefly, a fictional name like ‘Hamlet’ is really an abbreviation for a sufficiently unique description such as “the melancholy Danish prince whose father was murdered by his uncle.” A sentence containing the name ‘Hamlet’, such as “Hamlet was a tortured young man” is properly analyzed as follows: “There is at least and only one melancholy Danish prince whose father was murdered by his uncle and he is a tortured young man.” This analysis not only preserves the meaningfulness of the original sentence, despite ‘Hamlet’s failure to denote, but also makes the proposition false because the first conjunct – that there is at least and only one melancholy Danish prince whose father was murdered by his uncle – is false. Thus, for Russell, all sentences about fictional objects are both meaningful and false, since their existential conjunct will always be false.

The problem with this view for fictional objects is that it cannot account for the difference between a sentence like “Hamlet is a tortured young man” and “Hamlet is a Roman foot soldier.” On Russell’s analysis, both enjoy an equal standing as meaningful but false. We all know, however, that the first is true and the second is false. Or, if not properly true or false, we at least *assent* to the first but not the second. Though there could plausibly be some story about this assent that does not reduce to one being true and the other false, Russell’s explanation on its own does not account for the difference between the two. Even more problematic are sentences like “Hamlet was created by Shakespeare” and “Hamlet was created by J.K. Rowling.” Surely the first is true and the second is false. Perhaps some may be willing to sacrifice the ‘truth’ of sentences like “Hamlet is tortured” or “Hamlet saw the ghost of his father,” but it’s hard to agree that “Hamlet was created by Shakespeare” is just as true (that is to say, false) as “Hamlet was created by J.K. Rowling.” If what we want is to respect both common sense and the very essence of fiction, we

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

should not be willing to give up the fact that particular fictional objects are created by certain people and not others.

Others committed to the irrealist thesis have offered similarly systematic ways of paraphrasing propositions about fictional objects since Russell, in a way that maximally preserves meaning. The primary way this is done is by invoking covert intensional operators, a method of paraphrasing used by irrealists and realists alike. One who wishes to rescue Russell's analysis from the first kind of objection, the one that insists there's a difference between "Hamlet is a tortured young man" and "Hamlet is a Roman foot soldier," could say that both sentences occur under an "In the fiction" operator. Thus, "In the fiction, Hamlet is a tortured young man" comes out true, since it is true in the fiction that there is at least and only one Danish prince whose father was murdered by his uncle, and he is a tortured young man. Happily, "In the fiction, Hamlet is a Roman foot soldier" comes out false. Gareth Evans called these types of utterances *conniving* uses of empty terms, and appealed to pretense, or games of make-believe, to explain why we talk this way without making the operator explicit.<sup>8</sup>

The second type of objection is not so easily dealt with, as neither "Hamlet was created by Shakespeare" nor "Hamlet was created by J.K. Rowling" will come out true under the "In the fiction" operator. An initial thought would be to reduce facts that seem to be true of fictional objects outside of the fictional operator to facts about real things like fictional works, novels, or creative acts. However, Van Inwagen points out that while paraphrases of this sort can be developed and are semantically equivalent to their original propositions, they fail to preserve logical consequence.<sup>9</sup> To show this, he uses an example proposition about fictional objects: "There are characters in some 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18<sup>th</sup>-century novel." He supposes that a philosopher who is willing to admit that both 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels and 18<sup>th</sup>-century novels exist "might simply invent an open sentence, e.g., 'x dwelphs y,' which is satisfied only by pairs of classes of novels, and which (however its

---

<sup>8</sup> Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 353.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (Oct. 1977): 303-4.

semantics is to be spelled out in general) is satisfied by the pair < the class of 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels, the class of 18<sup>th</sup>-century novels > if and only if what is expressed by [the sentence] is *true*.”<sup>10</sup>

While this paraphrase is semantically equivalent to the original proposition by stipulation, it does not preserve logical consequence. The sentence “Every female character in any 18<sup>th</sup>-century novel is such that there is some character in some 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel that is presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than she is” expresses a proposition that is a logical consequence of the original proposition. But the open-sentence paraphrase of this new proposition, using the same method, would be something like “*x* praphs *y*.” The two paraphrases can’t be shown to have *any* relation to one another, much less one of logical consequence.

So, while that method may have been systematic in the sense that it can be applied to all propositions purportedly about fictional objects, it fails to retain the relations between the original propositions. Perhaps there are other paraphrases that can be constructed that do not commit us to the existence of fictional objects and preserve logical consequence. Van Inwagen suggests that paraphrases that quantify over the *names* of fictional objects and the sentences in which those names appear, rather than the fictional objects themselves, could do the job. But he notes some problems with such an approach. The paraphrases wouldn’t be systematic; they would have to be developed on an *ad hoc* basis. As such, there is no guarantee that every sentence about fictional objects can be successfully paraphrased in this way.

More recently, Stuart Brock proposed an analogue to the fictional operator for such non-fictional propositions about fictional objects – one that essentially fictionalizes realist theories. Sentences like “Hamlet was created by Shakespeare” and Van Inwagen’s example “There are characters in some 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18<sup>th</sup>-century novel” can be placed under the

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

operator “According to the realist’s hypothesis.”<sup>11</sup> This solution is systematic, guaranteed to apply to all non-fictional sentences about fictional characters, gives us the right result, and preserves logical consequence in the way Van Inwagen argued good paraphrases should.

The problem with this solution is that it’s trivial. The target of this investigation is talk that refers to fictional objects. The problem for the irrealist, having assumed at the outset that fictional objects do not exist, is to explain the apparent truth, falsity, and meaningfulness of these sentences. If the best way to explain this is by putting them under an “According to the realist’s hypothesis” operator, that’s tantamount to admitting that it’s the realist who can explain it. If I ask why we talk a certain way, saying “According to the way we talk, we talk this way” is not a very illuminating answer. While it may be a clever piece of internal puzzle-solving, the result leaves one cold. It fails to explain why everyone goes around talking like a realist if realism is false and is utterly uninformative regarding the nature of fiction.

### *1.2 Creationist ontology*

Just as irrealists take it to be common sense that fictional objects don’t exist, creationists think it’s common sense that they do, especially if we take the work of literary criticism seriously.<sup>12</sup> An early expression of a creationist view of fictional objects comes from Saul Kripke’s 1973 *Reference and Existence*. In his lectures, Kripke makes several suggestions that subsequently became orthodox in creationist circles. One of these is that fictional names are ambiguous regarding their reference. The creator’s original use of a fictional name is denotationless and refers to nothing at all. However, subsequent uses by others, even when uttering the same propositions as appear in the fictional work, genuinely refer to the fictional object.<sup>13</sup> This now-existent fictional object is an abstract entity and was, as intuitions suggest, literally created by whoever created the fictional work. This distinction between the creative use and the referring use of fictional names has been picked up and

---

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Brock, “Fictionalism about Fictional Characters,” *Noûs* 36, no. 1 (Mar. 2002): 9.

<sup>12</sup> Van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction,” 302.

<sup>13</sup> Saul Kripke, *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 72-3.

developed by subsequent creationists, including Van Inwagen, John Searle, and Amie Thomasson.

Van Inwagen argues for a creationist view on the basis of taking seriously literary criticism, conceiving of fictional objects – including characters but also plots, borrowings, episodes, and so forth – as *theoretical objects* of literary criticism. If we are to take literary criticism seriously, then we should take its theoretical objects seriously, just as we do the theoretical objects of other areas of investigation.<sup>14</sup> He stops short of providing a more in-depth account of what kind of objects they are or how they are created, but he does provide a formalized argument for why we ought to accept their existence.

Recall his example, “There are characters in some 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18<sup>th</sup>-century novel.” He provides a formulation of this proposition as follows:

$$(Ex)(x \text{ is a character in a 19}^{\text{th}}\text{-century novel} \ \& \ (Ay) [y \text{ is a character in an 18}^{\text{th}}\text{-century novel} \ \rightarrow \ x \text{ is presented with greater wealth of physical detail than is } y]).^{15}$$

That is, there is some  $x$  such that  $x$  is a character in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel and, for every  $y$ , if  $y$  is a character in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century novel, then  $x$  is presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than  $y$  is. Since this formalization is a conjunction of the existential claim about  $x$  and the conditional involving  $y$ , if we take the entire conjunction to be true then each of the conjuncts must be true. This gives us the first conjunct, that there is some  $x$  such that  $x$  is a character in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century novel. Moving back to natural language, the first conjunct means that there are such things as characters in 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels and it follows from this that there are such things as fictional characters. Of course, this argument only works if we accept that the original proposition is true.

John Searle provides an interesting case of a theorist who commits to a creationist ontology *and* to an action theory, but whose action theory results not from an interest in

---

<sup>14</sup> Van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction,” 303.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

aesthetics or the philosophy of literature but from philosophy of language. Put briefly, fictional uses of language pose problems for his theory of speech acts. I will return to his full action theory in the next section, but for the moment it suffices to say that Searle takes fictional uses of language to be *pretended assertions*. In terms of the ontology, he follows Kripke in considering the first, creative uses of fictional names to be non-referring; by pretending to refer to, say, Paul Atreides, Frank Herbert does not truly refer but rather creates Paul Atreides via this act of pretended reference.<sup>16</sup> Thereafter, when someone utters a sentence like “Paul Atreides was born on Caladan,” they genuinely refer to Paul Atreides. Taking the whole proposition, what is its truth value? If we treat it as straightforward serious discourse, it’s false: whatever Frank Herbert created, it is not the kind of thing that could have been born. What, then, explains our intuition that in some sense it’s true and that we can genuinely and properly assert it as such?

Searle says we must distinguish between serious discourse, fictional discourse, and serious discourse about fiction.<sup>17</sup> When I make the above statement about Paul Atreides and it’s taken as serious discourse *about fiction*, it counts as a true statement because I’m saying something true about the fictional character Paul Atreides and can point to Frank Herbert’s work as verification.<sup>18</sup> It is not fictional when I utter it, because I am not the author of the work. Frank Herbert does not have to provide evidence for its truth when he utters it in the work of fiction, because he only *pretends* to assert it. When I utter the same proposition, according to Searle, I am actually referring to the fictional character Paul Atreides and making a true statement about him. He puts his position succinctly thus: “Holmes and Watson never existed at all, which is of course not to deny that they exist in fiction and can be talked about as such.”<sup>19</sup>

This has caused some consternation. As Gregory Currie and Takashi Yagisawa argue, if Searle holds existence in fiction to be some type of existence, then the above sentence is a

---

<sup>16</sup> John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*



contradiction.<sup>20</sup> It becomes clear that Searle means to say that fictional characters do not exist *as people* in the actual world, but that they come to have existence *as characters* via this creative act of pretended reference. What we end up with is a picture according to which an author like Frank Herbert creates things such as Paul Atreides and Caladan by pretending to refer to them and assert things about them, thereby allowing a reader such as myself to then assert the same thing seriously and end up with a true genuine assertion. But what relation am I truthfully predicating of them when I say that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan? For Searle, all I need for this true assertion is that ‘Paul Atreides’ and ‘Caladan’ refer and that I can point to Frank Herbert’s *Dune* as verification. As noted earlier, however, if we’re talking about fictional characters and not a real person and a real planet, it’s difficult to make sense of how a ‘born on’ relation can hold of them. What are these created characters and how can we make sense of predicating properties and relations of them that only seem to work for concrete objects like people and planets?<sup>21</sup>

While Searle does not offer an explicit answer to this, Van Inwagen does. Though he does not go into great detail about what kind of objects fictional entities are, he takes them to be some kind of abstract artifact and thus agrees that to literally attribute properties like ‘being a person’ to them would be to make a category mistake.<sup>22</sup> Rather than straightforward predication, the sort of properties that fictional entities are said to have in their respective stories are *ascribed* to them. Van Inwagen uses ‘ascription’ in a stipulated technical sense, denoting a three-place relation between the fictional object, the property, and a ‘place,’ such as a particular fictional work or part of a work. Thus, when we say that “Mrs. Gamp is fat,” we are saying that fatness is ascribed to Mrs. Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. There’s no principled reason why such a fix would not be available to Searle. However, Yagisawa argues that this reveals an inconsistency within the creationist project: “that it is very

---

<sup>20</sup> Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17; Takashi Yagisawa, “Against Creationism in Fiction,” *Noûs* 35, Supplement: Philosophical Perspectives 15, *Metaphysics* (2001): 156.

<sup>21</sup> Yagisawa, “Against Creationism in Fiction,” 158-60. Yagisawa makes this point particularly regarding Van Inwagen’s position, but I believe the same criticism holds for Searle.

<sup>22</sup> Van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction,” 305.

difficult to fathom how Dickens could create an individual by writing a story which, when finished, would be a massively false story about that individual.”<sup>23</sup>

We will see in Chapter 4 how a newer creationist account by Amie Thomasson confronts the problem of creation and attempts to avoid the category mistakes that populate fictional discourse if we consider fictional objects to be abstract artifacts. According to Thomasson, fictional objects are ‘purely intentional objects,’ a species of abstract artifact with a particular structure of ontological dependencies.<sup>24</sup> She invokes pretense to explain the apparent truth of propositions that ascribe properties to characters that abstract artifacts cannot have. I will go into more depth about this view later, but it’s enough for now to say that these problems remain major challenges to creationist views in fictional ontology.

### *1.3 Possibilist ontology*

Possibilism, another form of realism, was proposed by David Lewis in his 1978 “Truth in Fiction.” His view on fiction is an application of his possible-worlds semantics to a selection of fictional statements. His focus is on the kind of statements that creationists struggle most with: those that treat fictional entities as the kinds of things they are described as being in the fiction.<sup>25</sup> His method is to adopt the covert operator “In the fiction” for these types of claims and offer a possible-worlds analysis of that operator. Effectively, fictional worlds are possible worlds. Since possible worlds are populated by possible objects, fictional objects are possible objects. Given his robust modal realism, this means that there is no problem with category mistakes for these claims. If Paul Atreides is a possible person, then he is just as much a flesh-and-blood person as you or I.

After considering some options for a possible-worlds analysis of the operator, Lewis settles on the following:

*Analysis 2: A sentence of the form “In the fiction  $f$ ,  $\phi$ ” is non-vacuously true iff, whenever  $w$  is one of the collective belief worlds of the community of origin of  $f$ , then some world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\phi$  is true differs less from the world  $w$ , on*

---

<sup>23</sup> Yagisawa, “Against Creationism in Fiction,” 158.

<sup>24</sup> Amie L. Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 89.

<sup>25</sup> David Lewis, “Truth in Fiction,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no.1 (Jan. 1978): 38.

*balance, than does any world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\varphi$  is not true. It is vacuously true iff there are no possible worlds where  $f$  is told as known fact.*<sup>26</sup>

This rather complicated analysis overcomes some difficulties with simpler versions. However, it is enough for our purposes to understand Lewis' view as one in which a sentence such as "Paul Atreides was born on Caladan" carries the covert operator "In *Dune*," and that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan in possible worlds in which *Dune* is told as known fact. Consequently, a possible person will be an Atreides-candidate if he resides in one of those worlds and said, did, and was everything Paul Atreides was described as saying, doing, and being in *Dune*.

There are some problems internal to possibilism that will be dealt with more fully in Chapter 4, such as indeterminacy and the problem of impossible fictions. Briefly, Saul Kripke argued that a fictional character such as Paul Atreides could not be a possible person because there's no principled way to determine to which possible person 'Paul Atreides' would refer.<sup>27</sup> For Kripke, names are rigid designators that refer directly to a single individual. But fictions, unlike possible worlds, are indeterminate. A single fiction could count as a description of many, perhaps infinitely many, possible worlds. Therefore, there is no one possible person that can be said to be Paul Atreides. Furthermore, some fictions are deeply inconsistent in a way that cannot be explained away by a mistake. This means that a possible-worlds explanation of what's 'true' in a story is inadequate or disqualifies many uncontroversially fictional works from genuinely telling fictional stories. If possibilism about fictional characters requires possibilism about fictional 'truth,' then this also spells big trouble for the idea that Paul Atreides is a possible person.

Perhaps the most glaring problem for this form of realism is its lack of anything to say about sentences like "Paul Atreides was created by Frank Herbert." It isn't immediately clear how a possibilist analysis could be adapted to such sentences. Additionally, it's in violation of an apparent fact about fictional objects: that they are created by those who create the fictional works in which they appear. On a possibilist account, creators of

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>27</sup> Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 148.

works can at most be said to discover these fictional objects and how one can discover an entity in a causally isolated possible world is rather mysterious. It is for this failure to conform to the facts about fictional practice that sometimes gets this view dismissed out of hand.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. 'Action theories'

This section is devoted to theories that primarily aim at giving an account of fiction itself, rather than just of its objects. As with the ontological views, it is not possible to give every available theory a full treatment. Since our purpose here is to examine the potential and success of fully-realized accounts of fiction, I have chosen those that I consider the most influential, novel, or complete representatives of their type.

### 2.1. *Pretended assertions*

The connection between fiction and pretense can be found throughout the literature, in all types of ontological views and action theories. It's a very common view that the makers of fictions, the audiences, or both are engaging in some sort of pretense, but what form this pretense takes can vary widely. So far, we've covered quite a bit of philosophy of fiction that originates from concerns in the philosophy of language – problems of reference, meaning, and truth value when it comes to sentences about fictional things. Often, the challenge is to make a theory of language conform to examples from fiction, coupled with the assumption that fictional objects don't exist. Some theories are considered better than others based on how well they deal with these fictional sentences.

However, Kripke can be credited with re-framing much of the post-Russell vs. Meinong debate by his use of pretense, taking the focus off non-existent objects and influencing the direction of later work on fiction. Kripke suggested that fictional cases do not arbitrate between theories of reference at all, but rather that a 'Pretense Principle' applies equally well to all of them.<sup>29</sup> He says that, whatever the criteria for naming really are, that creating

---

<sup>28</sup> For example, see Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Kripke, *Reference and Existence*, 24. Kripke acknowledges Frege as an early proponent of a similar view involving pretense. Accordingly, I don't wish to name Kripke as the originator of these ideas, only to point out that he played a large part in bringing them into the center of the philosophy of fiction.

a fictional work is partly an exercise in pretending that such criteria hold in the use of fictional names. Fictional reference is not a challenge to theories of naming or reference because fictional reference piggy-backs on genuine reference by masquerading as reference. The maker of a fiction merely pretends to conform to the usual practices of naming and using names, however that usual practice is to be understood. Thus, Kripke argues that Russell's view does not require that apparently true statements about fiction, such as "Paul Atreides was born on Caladan," are false. They would only be false if they were genuine propositions asserted about the real world, *but they aren't*. The mistake according to Kripke is not in any one theory, but in treating fictional statements just like any other assertion.

We saw in the previous section that Kripke had a creationist view of the ontology of fictional characters, according to which "[a] fictional character [...] is an abstract entity [that] exists in virtue of more concrete activities of telling stories, writing plays, writing novels, and so on."<sup>30</sup> Building on this, he says that "'Hamlet thinks' *merely purports to express a proposition*, rather than really expressing one."<sup>31</sup> 'Purports' is not so different from 'pretends,' and we start to see here a move from pretended *reference* to something more like pretended assertion. But while he alludes to the making of fictional works and their appreciation in his discussion of fictional ontology and reference, he does not commit to any view of fiction *simpliciter* beyond, it seems, the 'concrete activities' that have a similar relationship to fictional entities as a nation has to concrete relations between people. Essentially, 'fiction' refers to the concrete activities in virtue of which fictional objects exist.<sup>32</sup>

The analysis of those activities, together with Kripke's creationist ontology and the central role of pretense, is taken up by Searle. He develops a theory of fictional discourse in the pursuit of completeness for his speech act theory rather than out of an interest in aesthetics or literature. Since his theory is one of speech *acts* rather than merely of reference, I

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-9. Emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

consider his theory of fiction an *action* theory. He argues that fictional discourse, and therefore fiction itself, is a specific speech act: pretended assertion.

Searle's motivation to tackle the problem of fiction arises from its incompatibility with two of the tenets of his version of speech act theory: that to speak or write in a language is (always) to perform a type of speech act called an illocutionary act and that the *type* of illocutionary act performed is determined by the words and sentences used in its performance.<sup>33</sup> Whether a speaker is asserting, requesting, or promising will depend on the meanings of the words used in the utterance. However, in fiction there are many sentences that are word-for-word identical with sentences that, according to the semantic rules postulated by his speech act theory, are *bona fide* assertions. Assertions are governed by rules particular to their type of illocutionary act – rules that dictate that they are uttered with a commitment to their truth, that the utterer believes in the truth of the utterance and is prepared to provide evidence for it, and that the assertion is non-obvious. If any of these rules are broken, the assertion is defective in some way.<sup>34</sup>

The assertion-like sentences that appear in fiction do not seem to be governed by these rules, though nevertheless the words therein retain their usual meaning. If the meaning of the words indeed fixes the illocutionary act performed, must we say that utterers of fiction are liars running around making assertions which they know are false? This would be strange, since we don't judge authors or filmmakers as liars. Unlike utterers of genuine assertions, we don't expect the utterers of fiction to be committed to the truth of their fictional utterances, nor do we require that they believe in or can provide evidence for their truth. To avoid the obviously false conclusion that fiction-makers are liars and the undesirable one that fictional uses of language are not instances of illocutionary acts at all, Searle develops a special account for fictional discourse.

The important distinction for Searle is between fictional discourse and serious discourse. To illuminate this distinction, he invokes pretense, much as Kripke and Evans do. Utterers

---

<sup>33</sup> John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 59 and 64.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

of fictional discourse are not genuinely asserting but *pretending* to assert. This pretended assertion is not to be confused with an all new type of illocutionary act – the type of act is still fixed by the words used and is therefore still that of assertion. It is the *performance* of the act that is different from genuine assertion and it's different in virtue of the utterer's intentions.<sup>35</sup> It is the fiction maker's intent to pretend that allows for the unproblematic breaking of the usual rules of assertion. Additionally, "the existence of a set of conventions which suspend the normal operation of the rules relating illocutionary acts to the world" makes fiction possible.<sup>36</sup> That is, the intent to pretend plus an established set of conventions results in pretended assertion rather than merely defective assertion and this pretended assertion is fiction. The intent to pretend serves to 'invoke' the conventions of fiction.

Though it's a view that emerged from philosophy of language, it's a paradigmatic action theory because it involves rules, make-believe, and intentions to pretend – all of which will appear in different forms and with different degrees of elucidation and emphasis in later, more developed theories of fiction. Nevertheless, the aim is to patch a fiction-sized hole in a theory of language and much of what is central to fiction is mentioned but not elaborated upon. Searle achieves his aim for his speech act theory and leaves it at that but does not go into more detail about fiction as a practice or its conventions. This is curious because, for Searle, a practice is constituted by its conventions, or its constitutive rules.

For a reader primarily interested in a theory of fiction rather than a theory of speech acts, the most notable omission is of fictions that are not linguistic or language-based, such as films or pictorial fictions like comic strips (not all of which include dialogue or written or spoken description). It's not immediately clear if there's space in a pretended assertion theory for fictions that cannot be regarded as instances of speech.

Language, specifically sentences that look a lot like assertions, is one way that fiction is made. But it is only one way. Perhaps it's not fiction itself that poses a problem for Searle's theory; rather, it is that some works of fiction make use of language in a way that

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

violates his theory's predictions. If Searle's answer only works for linguistic fictions and there must be some other account for all other fictions, his solution could be accused of an untidy disunity as a view of fiction. One might respond that of course not all fictions are made with language, but neither do all 'speech acts' make explicit use of language. Perhaps Searle or a proponent would be willing to concede that not all instances of fiction-making are utterances of words as such, but they are certainly all pretended acts, done with the intention to invoke the conventions of fiction.

There are two ways I can see this working. One way is to hold that all instances of fiction, whether linguistic or otherwise, count as pretended acts of assertion. This would mean that all non-linguistic fictions have a linguistic paraphrase, or that their content can be translated into assertible propositions.<sup>37</sup> For Searle, this seems true given his 'expressibility principle,' which says that everything that can be meant can be said. Most would agree that all fictions mean something. On this account, creating a pictorial fiction by drawing a unicorn, for instance, is an act of pretending to assert something like "There is a unicorn with these features." However, we don't say that the artist is lying; rather, she drew the unicorn with the intent to invoke the conventions of fiction.

The problem with this is in finding a non-fictional analogue: What act of assertion is the unicorn-drawing artist pretending to do? If drawing a unicorn is an act of pretended assertion, then presumably drawing a horse is an act of assertion. Imagine that I draw an actual horse that is standing in a field in front of me. My intent is to create a picture of this very horse. But I'm a little *avant garde* and decide to imitate the Cubist style in my portrait of this horse. As a result, both his eyes are forwardly-facing and visible, yet his head is turned to the side. If this act is an assertion, it seems that I've lied about the features of this horse – I've misrepresented his features, by lines on paper rather than by language. Not only that, but all Cubist portraits are or contain lies about their subjects. This doesn't seem right. There was no intent to create a fictional horse when I made my Cubist portrait; the intent was to represent an actual object. Conceiving of this act of non-fictional representation as asserting the content of the representation doesn't seem to work.

---

<sup>37</sup> This also assumes that a fiction just is its content.



Perhaps not all fictions are pretended *assertions*, but they are pretended acts of some sort with the intent to invoke the conventions of fiction. Under this interpretation, there is a class of acts that: 1) have in common a salient similarity to acts governed by certain rules; 2) are performed with the intention to invoke the conventions of fiction; and 3) which are exempt, in virtue of the intention to invoke the horizontal conventions, from the rules governing the acts to which they bear the salient similarity.<sup>38</sup> This class of acts is responsible for the creation of fictions. On this view, the act of drawing a unicorn bears a salient similarity to the act of drawing a horse. Yet, we do not say that the artist made a mistake in her rendition of the horse; she drew the unicorn with the intent to invoke the conventions of fiction.

This version has the challenge of identifying some act of which the fiction-making act is a pretended instance. Perhaps every act of linguistic fiction-making is a pretended act of assertion and every act of fictional painting is a pretended act of portrait-making. But it's not clear what this might be for something like a fictional film. Could an instance of fictional filmmaking be considered one of pretended documentary filmmaking?

Considering other forms of fiction gives rise to several significant questions for Searle's account. There's a cognitive question about whether a fiction-maker need be aware that they are pretending to do something else in the course of making fiction. After all, it seems that intention is built into the notion of pretense. Can someone be rightly described as pretending to sleep, for example, if she's simply lying down with eyes closed, but without any intention to pretend?

---

<sup>38</sup> The condition requiring a salient similarity between the pretended act and its non-pretended counterpart is based both on intuitive considerations about what it means to pretend to do something but also on Searle's own discussion of the "mechanisms by which the author invokes the horizontal conventions." He notes that pretended actions of other sorts are often done by actually performing some of the acts which constitute the act to be pretended; a pretend slap is done by actually moving one's arm in a slapping motion, for instance. Similarly for pretended assertion, the fiction-maker actually performs the *utterance act* – the physical and/or vocal act of forming the words and sentences either by speaking or writing them. This utterance act is indistinguishable from the illocutionary act from the outside other than its lack of the intention to assert. Clearly, some degree of similarity is required for an act to be a pretense of some other act. Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 67.

There's also a threshold question regarding the salient similarities between fiction-making actions and their non-pretended counterparts. For pretended assertion, the pretender performs the utterance act exactly as it would be performed in a genuine assertion. In an act of fiction-making as complex as filmmaking, how many of the smaller, constitutive actions need to be relevantly similar to those that constitute documentary filmmaking and how similar is similar enough? There's also a question about the resulting nature of fictional works. Linguistic fictions result from acts of pretended assertion but are also themselves pretended assertions in Searle's account. Must a fictional film then be considered a pretended documentary film? It may seem intuitive enough in the case of linguistic narrative fiction to consider an utterance such as "Paul Atreides was born on Caladan" to be a pretended assertion. But we don't readily agree that fictional films are pretended documentaries. Consider fictional films that *are* pretended documentaries, or 'mockumentaries,' such as *What We Do in the Shadows*. Why is it that we can recognize these types of films as pretended documentaries, but not all fictional films?

Additionally, Currie points out that pretended assertion includes much that isn't typically considered fiction. For example, it doesn't differentiate fictions from instances of parody or imitation.<sup>39</sup> It certainly seems that someone can pretend to assert something in the course of merely making fun of a person without thereby bringing about a fiction. If I, for example, pretend to assert something like "I pay the best taxes. A tremendous amount of taxes. So many taxes you wouldn't believe it," in the course of making fun of Donald Trump, it would be very strange to say that I've just created a fiction, or that my imitation was fictional.

## 2.2 Fictive utterance

Though not many hold a pretended assertion view of fiction, identifying fiction with a kind of speech act is a very popular position with several available iterations.<sup>40</sup> Common to

---

<sup>39</sup> Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-49; Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 29-52; David Davies, *Aesthetics and Literature*, (London: Continuum, 2007), 32-43; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 219-34.

them is the conception of fiction as a one-sided communicative act, with creators acting as utterers and appreciators as an audience. The distinction between ‘real’ and pretended acts in views like Kripke’s, Evans’s, and Searle’s is reimagined as a distinction between belief and make-belief (or imagination). This shift is not so surprising, since the paradigm case of pretense is children’s play and children’s play involves acting on imaginings rather than beliefs. So perhaps, rather than pretending to tell and hear (or write and read, or record and view, etc.) true stories, we are engaged in really communicating make-believe or imaginary content in fiction. The speech act itself is not *pretend*; rather, what’s communicated by way of the speech act is *imaginary*.

Speech act views can be broadly classed as intentionalist views of fiction, since whether something counts as fiction or not will turn on the intention of a single person – the creator of the fiction. They are also atomistic in the sense that ‘fictional’ is primarily a property of individual propositions and only derivatively a property of works. That is, a work counts as fictional just in case it contains some threshold number of propositions that are uttered fictively. How intentionalist or atomistic a speech act view is can vary by degrees. Take, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff’s view. For Wolterstorff, art is active – it is the act of projecting worlds by performing various other actions. One way of projecting a world is by committing a certain illocutionary act that he calls taking the *fictive stance*.<sup>41</sup> To make a claim, true or false, is to take an assertive stance, while to *present for consideration* is to take the fictive stance. To take this ‘mood stance’ in the act of making an utterance is always to create a fiction; thus, this view is both intentionalist and atomistic to a high degree. One can take the fictive stance regardless of the truth of the proposition expressed or the context of the utterance.<sup>42</sup> Thus, any time we present something for consideration, whether it be in a novel, a philosophical thought experiment, or even in casual conversation, we create a fiction.

In his book *The Nature of Fiction*, Gregory Currie develops one of the most widely discussed views of fiction as a speech act. For Currie, it’s a *fictive intent* that is required for

---

<sup>41</sup> Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, 231.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

a fictive utterance and the proposition expressed by a fictive utterance is fictional. He defines the fictive intent with the following Gricean analysis: an utterance is fictive only if it's uttered with the intention that it be make-believed *and* with the intention that it be make-believed partly because the audience recognizes that intention.<sup>43</sup> The use of 'only if' rather than 'if and only if' is not accidental; the fictive intent is necessary but not sufficient for fiction on Currie's account. Unlike Wolterstorff, Currie considers some instances of true utterances made with fictive intent clear counterexamples, so he argues that an additional 'background condition' is needed. Properly fictional utterances are those made with fictive intent and that are at most accidentally true.<sup>44</sup>

In Currie's View, the intentional structure appears to presuppose some pre-existing shared knowledge or conventions that underpin the recognition of the intention. This element comes into play with the application of Gricean conversation implicatures to the fiction case. Currie notes that, for cases in which what is meant is not the same as what is said, such as in non-literal speech, successful communication is guided by a tacit agreement that what we say will be both true and relevant.<sup>45</sup> Relevance is more or less directly transferable to the fictional case, but what we believe is true cannot guide what we take a fiction to mean. If it did, we would never be able to grasp what is meant by fictions because we would disqualify much of their content due to its falsity. Hence, Currie says that what we take to be true *in the fiction* will play the role that actual truth plays in conversation. But what is true in the fiction depends on the rules of fictional games of make-believe.<sup>46</sup> These shared principles underpin our tacit agreement about what is meant by fictions. Thus, the intention that an audience make-believe *and* that they make-believe specific content presupposes the existence of a practice of make-believe games. This means that, unlike Wolterstorff's fictive stance, Currie's fictive intent requires a community of practitioners.

---

<sup>43</sup> Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-3.

Currie's view is equally as atomistic as Wolterstorff's, however, since being fictional is like truth in that it is a property of propositions.<sup>47</sup>

It may seem that any fictive speech act theory must be atomistic, since our utterances typically express propositions and we can always utter a single proposition with a fictive intent or using the fictive stance. However, fictive utterance theorists are often ambiguous about how atomistic their theories are. For example, Wolterstorff says that “[i]t’s as if every work of fiction were prefaced with the words ‘I hereby present that...’” possibly indicating that we are to conceive of an entire work of fiction as a single utterance made under the fictive stance.<sup>48</sup> Yet he’s also clear that the fictive stance is a mood taken up by an utterer to the *individual propositions* she expresses with her utterances.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Currie at different points in *The Nature of Fiction* defends the idea that fictional works are “a patchwork of [...] fiction-making and assertion,” that one can both assert and perform a fictive speech act with the same utterance act and the same content (thereby indicating that even the supposed assertions within fictional works are also properly fictive utterances) and that only a work *as a whole* expresses a (very complex) proposition.<sup>50</sup> The view seems to be that fictive utterances can have flexible boundaries, perhaps being as short as one sentence or as long as a novel. But these utterances are *fictive*, not fictional – only propositions are truly fictional and are fictional in virtue of being expressed by fictive utterances. This is why, as a view of fiction, they are atomistic.

One might wonder what exactly is wrong with this type of atomism, as there’s nothing immediately unintuitive about the suggestion that fictionality is a property of propositions. The problem is in developing a satisfactory account of the relationship between fictive utterances, fictional propositions, and fictional works in a way that does no violence to our usual practices of categorization or our intuitions about what is fictional. David Davies notes the importance of differentiating between a fictional narrative and a fictional work.

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>48</sup> Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, 233.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>50</sup> Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 49, 33, 155.

“Fictive-utterance theories,” he says, “cannot tell us what makes a *work* fictional.”<sup>51</sup> This is because fictive utterance views are plagued by counterexamples of both types: works that contain fictive utterances (or fictional narratives) but that are not fictional and fictional works that contain a large amount of assertive content.

The first type is frequently cited by Stacie Friend in her critiques of imagination-based views of fiction. In particular, she argues that ancient histories such as those by Tacitus contain imaginative narrations of battles that were not intended to be believed and that they contained these ‘fictional’ elements conventionally.<sup>52</sup> That is, it was a standard part of the practice of history at the time to include such imaginary embellishments. These histories could plausibly contain a proportionally similar amount of ‘fictional’ narrative as an uncontroversially fictional work that contains a large amount of assertive content. However, it’s implausible, says Friend, to consider such ancient histories to be fictional. Equally implausible would be to consider a fictional work with large amounts of assertive content, such as *Moby Dick*, to be non-fictional, or even somehow less fictional than a work with little or no assertive content such as *Dune*.

Some fictive utterance accounts are less prone to these pitfalls. In *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen lay out a view of fiction that, while it is a speech act view focused on an analysis of fictive utterances, puts special emphasis on fiction as a social practice. They summarize the view as follows: “that the fictive dimension of stories (or narratives) is explicable only in terms of a rule-governed practice, central to which are a certain mode of utterance (fictive utterance) and a certain complex of attitudes (the fictive stance).”<sup>53</sup> The notion of a social practice, which I argued was implicit in Currie’s conception of the intentional structure of a fictive act, is made explicit in this view. Utterances gain their fictional status in virtue of a social practice of storytelling and the practice must be in place for fiction to come about. However, fictive utterances are still

---

<sup>51</sup> David Davies, “Fiction,” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, eds. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 332.

<sup>52</sup> Stacie Friend, “Fiction as a Genre,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society New Series*, vol. 112 (2012): 185.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 32.

the unit of explanation, as the practice of storytelling is a practice of making these kinds of utterances.

Broadly, what makes them fictional is that they are uttered in the context of the right social practice: the practice of storytelling. The practice makes a fictive utterance what it is and the conventions of the practice also bear on the content and reference of the utterances. The proper analysis of fiction is not a semantic analysis of sentences, but an analysis of an act of fiction making together with the proper attitudes for reception.

Lamarque and Olsen arrive at three essential features of fictional utterances:

1. A Gricean intention that an audience make-believe (or imagine or pretend) that it is being told (or questioned or advised or warned) about particular people, objects, incidents, or events, regardless of whether there are (or are believed to be) such people, objects, incidents, or events;
2. The reliance, at least in part, of the successful fulfilment of the intention in (1) on mutual knowledge of the practice of story-telling;
3. A disengagement from certain standard speech act commitments, blocking inferences from a fictive utterance back to the speaker or writer, in particular inferences about beliefs.<sup>54</sup>

The first condition is familiar from our discussion of Currie's view and is a common element of fictive utterance views. The second is also familiar, resembling the invocation of conventions that we saw in Searle's work. The third condition describes the *fictive stance*, not to be confused with Wolterstorff's fictive stance. It describes the uniquely fictive approach to utterances – an approach that does not allow us to infer from the utterance back to the beliefs of the utterer – that creates the apparent gap between fiction and reality.

Does this more explicitly practice-based view escape the earlier objection regarding the explanation for works? Lamarque and Olsen make explicit that their analysis of fictionality pertains to fictional narratives or stories, which can be as short as a single sentence.<sup>55</sup> Like other fictive utterance views, it conceives fictionality as a property of individual

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

propositions, which is conveyed to them by a fictive utterance. Thus, works are only fictional because they have fictional constituents; that is, they contain a fictional narrative. As noted by others such as Stacie Friend, there are fictional narratives within non-fictional works. For Lamarque and Olsen, these narratives just are fictional ‘works,’ which leads us to conclude that Tacitus’ histories contain little fictional works.<sup>56</sup> It also brings back the threshold question. If it’s the case that both fictional and non-fictional works contain properly fictional constituents, is there some proportion of fictional propositions or narrative that makes works fictional?

### 2.2.1 Fictive utterance and ontological consequences

Fictive utterance views can vary regarding the ontology of fictional objects, but they tend to approach the problem in the same general way: with a semantic analysis of fictional names. This analysis can proceed in different ways, but typically has three notable features: 1) that some sentences containing fictional names are under the intensional operator “In the fiction,” 2) that fictional names do not function like ordinary proper names, and 3) that there is some ambiguity with regard to the meaning or reference of fictional names depending upon the context of their usage. How each of these features plays out, and the consequences for fictional objects, can vary more than one might expect. In what follows, I summarize and evaluate two ontologies that are achieved by this method of semantic analysis, each of which has had considerable influence over the view I develop in Chapter 4. I will start with Gregory Currie’s view.

At the outset, there are some assumptions that Currie makes in order to develop his own account. The first is that fictional objects do not exist. This is evident not only from his claim that if fictional names were proper names then they would be empty proper names, but also from the way he structures his subsequent discussion on available alternatives to his view. He considers views that distinguish existence from being (Meinongian views), ones that distinguish existence from actuality (possibilism) and those that aim to make

---

<sup>56</sup> Simple narratives count as *fictional* works on their view, but not *literary* works, which have more robust requirements. Ibid.



empty names contributors of meaning to the sentences in which they appear.<sup>57</sup> That fictional objects may exist in actuality is not an option that he considers before developing his own view. A second assumption is that names are directly referring expressions. This, combined with the assumption that fictional objects do not exist, motivates his view that fictional names are not proper names and so warrant a novel semantic analysis. It also features as a premise in his criticism of other views, such as straightforward possibilism.<sup>58</sup>

Because the nonexistence assumption is made early on, this view appears to fall into the trap of deciding whether or not fictional objects exist before really knowing what kind of objects they would be, a move that Thomasson says is misguided and motivated by the conviction that fictional objects must be freakish or strange things that challenge common sense or developed theories of reference and ontological categorization.<sup>59</sup> Ideally, an action theory would look to *what we do* when we do fiction and conclude from that what objects we must be doing it with. From there, acceptance or rejection of fictional objects in our ontology becomes appropriate. Instead, the strategy here is to construct a semantic analysis that is at least compatible with the view of fiction on offer *and* with an assumed irrealist ontology. Despite claims to accommodate non-linguistic fiction, the view still looks to sentences, expressions, and referents for insight into fiction's objects. This makes sense if what we're essentially doing with fiction is uttering and receiving sentences. But if what we're doing when we do fiction is *imagining*, we ought to look to imagination's objects, rather than focusing solely on a semantic analysis. Even Currie appears to agree with this, as he writes that "[w]hen we know the content of this reader's make-believe, we know all that is relevant to determining the semantics of 'Holmes.'"<sup>60</sup> If that's the case, why do we not turn our attention to imagination?

Putting my qualms with the strategy aside, Currie offers analyses of three separate uses of fictional names – fictive, metafictional, and transfictional.<sup>61</sup> A fictive use of a fictional name

---

<sup>57</sup> Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 127-46.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>59</sup> Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 3-5.

<sup>60</sup> Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 147.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

occurs when the creator of the fiction uses the name within the fiction; this is the kind of creative use familiar from work by Kripke and Searle. When audiences discuss fictional characters as though they are what they are described as being, they use fictional names in a metafictional sense. Breaking with Kripke and Searle, Currie acknowledges a third and often problematic use. When audiences discuss fictional characters in comparison to characters in other works or to actual-world individuals, that is a transfictional use of the name. Something like “Paul Atreides is braver than Boromir” is an example of a transfictional utterance. These uses are complicated because of the strain they put on the standard “In the fiction” operator.

The analysis of fictive uses builds on that of creative uses familiar from other views. In an individual fictive use within a work, the author refers (directly) to nothing at all by her use of the name. Since fictional names are not proper names, they’re not rigid designators of individuals (either in the actual world or across possible worlds).<sup>62</sup> Fictional names do not contribute to the meaning or truth conditions of the propositions within a fiction in the same way that proper names do regarding everyday propositions. In fact, no one proposition within a fiction is meaningful on its own. Rather, the content of the story as a whole ought to be taken as a single proposition, the meaning of which can be understood without ever assigning a referent to fictional names. This is because fictional names operate much like quantifiers.<sup>63</sup> To say that Paul Atreides did this-and-that is semantically similar to saying that *someone* did this-and-that. A listener could understand a story about an unspecified someone without ever needing a particular referent picked out by ‘someone.’

The story, once completed, picks out what Currie calls qualitative worlds: possible worlds in which there are people and things of which the propositions of the story are true.<sup>64</sup> Our understanding of a story is demonstrated by our ability to distinguish the qualitative worlds of the story from others. These people and things need not be identical across the qualitative worlds because they are not rigidly designated. To put it in terms of Lewisian possible worlds and counterpart theory, one qualitative world of the Sherlock Holmes stories may have Currie’s counterpart as its ‘Holmes,’ while another may have my

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-9.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

counterpart as its ‘Holmes.’ We both fit the role of Holmes in the respective worlds, but Currie and I are not the same person. Our counterparts do not represent each other’s possibilities; rather, Currie and I share the possibility of having been Holmes. It’s interesting to note how similar this is to Lewis’ possibilism. Yet for Currie, fictional objects are not possible objects, either individual or complexes, but are nonexistent. This is despite fictional names operating like functions that pick out clusters of possible objects. Presumably, given his commitment to direct reference, Currie is swayed by Kripke’s earlier objection that a name either refers to one thing or nothing at all.

This picture of the meaning of a story bears on Currie’s semantic analysis of the metafictional use of fictional names. Recall that the author’s individual uses of the names have no meaning on their own; they do not refer to anything. So how are we to understand uses that occur outside the fiction? In order to be meaningful while being outside the single proposition of the fiction, they must mean something. Currie explains it this way:

A fictional name like ‘Holmes’ or ‘Anna Karenina’ abbreviates a description that includes all the information given by the story. The content of Tolstoy’s story is that there is a unique  $n + 1$ -tuple, the first member of which is called ‘Anna’ and does such and such and..., and the  $n$ th member of which is called ‘Levin’ and does such and such, and the  $n + 1$ th member of which is responsible for this story, in which he sets out his knowledge of the activities of the other  $n$ . ‘Anna’ is then defined as the first member of that  $n + 1$ -tuple. ‘Anna’ denotes, in each world, the person, if there is one, who is the first member of the  $n + 1$ -tuple of things that satisfy the conditions of the story in that world.<sup>65</sup>

Fictional names used metafictionally are abbreviated descriptions of this sort. In Doyle’s stories, understood together as a massive single proposition about some particular  $n+1$ -tuple of things, ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is just that member of the  $n+1$ -tuple that did the things ‘Sherlock’ is said to have done in the stories. The name ‘Sherlock’ is shorthand for that member, which is understood only in view of the entire work. Formally, this means that all these metafictional uses of fictional names are only meaningful when under what Currie calls

---

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

the operator **F**, which is the make-believe operator we discussed above. That is,  $\mathbf{F}(P)$  = “It is fictional that *P*.”<sup>66</sup> This operator also marks this kind of utterance as an assertion about some fictional content, rather than a fiction-making fictive utterance. This means that ‘metafictive’ doesn’t mean what it first appears to mean; that is, metafictive uses are not those that take place outside the fictional world, so to speak. They are not in sentences like “Paul Atreides was created by Frank Herbert.” This kind of sentence is false when placed under the **F** operator. So, a fictive sentence and a metafictive sentence can look identical; the difference is determined by the circumstances of the utterance.

Here is where complications arise and Currie must further distinguish fictive and metafictive uses from *transfictive* uses. This is because the operator is specific to a *particular fiction*, not to fictionality in general. If one were to make a comparison between two fictional characters from different stories, their operators would be completely different, and, as Currie notes, trying to combine the operators into one single fiction would cause seemingly unsolvable complications for determining what is true in the stories.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, if one were to utter a sentence comparing a fictional character to an actual individual, it would be very strange to put it under the operator, since the actual individual (in most cases) does not exist in the fiction.

Transfictive uses of fictional names refer to theoretical entities that Currie calls ‘roles.’<sup>68</sup> In his account, roles are a type of ‘office,’ defined by a possible worlds framework. An office is something like ‘The President of the United States,’ which designates different individuals in different possible worlds and in some worlds designates no one at all. As Currie says, “[r]oles are just those offices defined in terms of what is true in a story.”<sup>69</sup> Roles, therefore, have no value in the actual world. But this does not mean that transfictive uses of fictional names do not refer to *anything* in the actual world; they refer to the role itself as a function, not to the value of (or the individual picked out by) the role. This means that sentences like “Paul Atreides was created by Frank Herbert” are transfictive uses; in

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

our example, the name refers to the role of Paul Atreides that was specified by Frank Herbert. With this analysis, the proposition expressed by the sentence comes out true just as we'd expect. However, our earlier example "Paul Atreides is braver than Boromir" is also transfictive, which means the names used here refer to roles rather than to the people the roles pick out. This is strange. How is it that a role is *brave*, much less braver than some other role? Unless we do some paraphrasing, this seems like a category mistake.

One can see how these three analyses of fictional names are tied to the idea of fiction as a game of make-believe. The author plays her part in her original fictive utterance of the story, at which time her uses of fictional names function as bound variables and refer to nothing. Upon the completion of her utterance, the characters become discernible as abbreviated descriptions including the contents of the entire work conceived as an  $n+1$ -tuple of things that did such-and-such. The reader picks up on these descriptions and refers to them in his metafictional talk about the entities that appear to be discussed within the fiction. In the case of transfictive uses, the propositions containing the names are lifted out of the operator and the 'being true in the story' is now a function from a possible world to an individual, and no longer a propositional operator in the sense that it was for metafictional uses.

So, depending on the circumstances of utterances about fictional objects, we may be referring to nothing at all, to abbreviated descriptions, or to roles. One thing that immediately jumps out is that, once we get to transfictive uses, it no longer looks like a strictly irrealist position. If fictional names sometimes refer to roles and roles are theoretical entities, then fictional names sometimes refer to some kind of entity. Notably, Van Inwagen, a creationist, conceived of fictional objects as theoretical entities. On his view, these entities bear an 'ascription' relation to the properties they are described as having, though they don't literally have them. On Currie's view, these theoretical entities are roles that are in a sense defined by these properties. Roles are functions from worlds to individuals, according to which the individuals in a given world that fit the descriptions of the fictional objects are the value of the function. Since these roles are 'entities' and are

specified by creators of fiction, they could be conceived as abstract artifacts.<sup>70</sup> In this way, Currie's view looks very similar to a creationist view. The original, creative uses of fictional names refer to nothing at all. Metafictive uses do not refer to anything either, but merely abbreviate descriptions of fictional content; those descriptions, if they are descriptions of people and things, do not themselves describe any existing thing. However, transfictive uses and their reference to roles resemble the creationist view, though with some possible worlds machinery thrown in.

So, while Currie appeared to make an outright irrealist assumption at the start, he clarifies this in his concluding remarks on fictional characters. Like Van Inwagen and others, Currie holds that fictional objects do not exist as concrete people and things – they don't exist as the things they are described as being. However, there are such things as roles. The roles, if they were occupied, would be occupied by the fictional objects as they are described. Part of what makes them merely fictional objects is that those roles are not occupied in the actual world. They are, however, occupied in some possible worlds. Nevertheless, these possible-world values of the roles are not the subjects of fictions on Currie's view. I will elaborate further on this possible-worlds aspect of Currie's ontological view in Chapter 4.

There's much that's appealing about Currie's ontological view. It certainly seems true that there's something distinct going on when an author uses fictional names and when a reader does so. After all, in some sense an author (at least when initially creating the fiction) cannot be wrong about what she says of a fictional object in her work, but a reader's utterances about that same object are either true or false. Furthermore, his use of roles and possible worlds captures the intuitions that make Lewis's view on truth and objects in fiction so attractive. It would be strange if the fact that most fictions are possible, and that their possibility seems to have something to do with our understanding and engagement with them, were merely a coincidence.

Like all others, the view has its problems. One issue is with its consistency with his overall theory of fiction. That fictive utterances have a uniquely fictive use of names works quite

---

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

well. But in order to explain how we grasp a story containing many empty names and technically no individually meaningful propositions, he suggests that the content of the fictional story is a big, single proposition that can be expressed in the form of a Ramsey sentence. Earlier, though, he argues that fictional works consist of both fictional propositions and genuine assertions and that “[w]e can say that a work as a whole is fiction if it contains statements that satisfy the conditions of fictionality I have presented.”<sup>71</sup> Currie aims to locate fictionality in individual utterances by way of a new type of illocutionary act, yet when accounting for fictional names and their objects, the boundaries of a single utterance and a single proposition change.

The ontology itself also has some unintuitive consequences for fictional practice. One problem is that on this view of abbreviated descriptions and roles, fictional objects and characters are bound to the individual works in which they appear. Though we talk about fictional objects as if they appear in many works, Currie says this kind of talk is a mistake.<sup>72</sup> Roles are defined by descriptions, the descriptions are abbreviations of the content of a work, and the content of a work is only meaningful when taken as a whole. This means that the role that we call ‘Paul Atreides’ in Frank Herbert’s *Dune* is not only a different role from the role that we call ‘Paul Atreides’ in David Lynch’s film version of *Dune*, but it is even different from the ‘Paul Atreides’ role defined by Frank Herbert’s sequel *Dune Messiah*. This is a hard pill to swallow.

Another, arguably more unified analysis was done by Lamarque and Olsen. Their view makes use of the distinction between sense and reference and follows neatly from the features of their practice-based account. One such feature is that the practice sets the *mode* of utterance, which in turn determines the *content* of the utterance.<sup>73</sup> Currie dealt with problems of content in apparent counterexamples to his Gricean analysis of fiction. One of his examples, also mentioned by Lamarque and Olsen, is an author who writes an autobiography not only using the stylistic conventions of fiction but also with the intention

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>73</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, 51-2.

that her readers make-believe the content.<sup>74</sup> Intuitively, we would still class this as a non-fictional autobiography rather than a fictional work, despite its resulting from a genuinely fictive utterance. What seems to underlie this is that the content is true rather than made-up, which is why Currie is compelled to invoke his further condition that if a fiction is true, it is at most accidentally true. The autobiography is not accidentally true; therefore, it does not count as fiction. As Lamarque and Olsen say, this seems at once *ad hoc* and intuitively appealing.

Their answer is that the mode of utterance determines the content of the utterance as part of the practice of fictional story-telling. Autobiographical content is determined by what happened in the author's life, not by the mode of the author's utterance. Thus, the autobiography is not fictional. Another way to say this is that the autobiography was not written according to the conventions of fictional practice – an essential part of which is that content is secondary to the mode of utterance – and therefore is not fiction even if it was uttered with the sort of intentions usually associated with fictional utterances.

Making explicit this part of fictional story-telling also provides us with a clearer understanding of exactly what we are making believe. In the next section, we'll encounter some confusion that arises with Kendall Walton's semantics and ontology portion of his theory of fiction. Essentially, despite his view that 'fictional' is a property of propositions that are prescribed to be imagined, it later turns out that this is not so straightforward. Walton is an irrealist about fictional objects, so there are gaps in fictional content left by empty terms like 'Gulliver' and 'Lilliputians.' Closing these gaps requires another layer of make-believe; that is, we imagine that non-propositions are real propositions as well as imagining their content. However, this doesn't appear to answer the question about what content we're imagining, or how these non-propositions have meaning or content for us to imagine in the first place.

---

<sup>74</sup> Depending on the specific example, she may or may not even be aware that what she writes are memories from her own life. Currie constructs an example according to which the memories are suppressed and unavailable to the consciousness of the author to avoid the complications that deceit brings into the picture. See Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 45.



For Lamarque and Olsen, the content is determined by the acts of fiction-making and appreciating, including our way of imaginatively engaging with fictions. They characterize the appropriate kind of imaginative engagement with fiction as entertaining sense and making-believe truth and reference.<sup>75</sup> In fictional contexts, propositions and their elements, including apparently proper names, have a sense. We grasp this sense in the usual way that we understand what sentences mean. We imagine that the sentences are true and that the names and terms refer to actual things. However, the reference is make-believe – there are no actual objects to which fictional names refer in fictional contexts. That the sentences expressed by fictive utterances always have a sense (even when ‘ordinary’ proper names may not have a sense outside of fictional contexts) is part of what it means for fictive utterances to determine their content. Their sense is their content, and so unlike Walton’s view, fictive utterances genuinely express propositions.

Like Currie, Lamarque and Olsen take original acts of storytelling or re-telling to be genuine fictive utterances. Subsequent utterances of the same sentence type, such as when I say that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan, are conceived as reports of the content of the story and placed under the usual “In the fiction” intensional operator. These are assertions and can be true or false, unlike fictive utterances which are neither true nor false. However, the work done by the operator is conceived a bit differently. Remember that for Currie, the “In the fiction” operator signals that what follows is abbreviated content of the whole work. For Lamarque and Olsen, “[t]he intensional operator ‘In the fiction...’ turns a person (internally speaking) into a character (externally speaking).”<sup>76</sup> Under the operator, truth and reference is make-believe and we can talk about fictional objects as if they are what they are described as being. Internally, the name is a name like any other and refers to people and things. Lamarque calls this use of names an ‘author’s use,’ and these uses occur within fictive utterances.<sup>77</sup> But in external contexts, the name has no reference, but only a sense. Lamarque calls this an ‘informed reader’s use’ and it takes place in assertive reports of the content of stories. The use of the operator, as well as the context of a fictive utterance,

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>77</sup> Peter Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 29.

transforms the make-believe reference of the name into an actual indirect reference, or a sense.

The senses of fictional names are understood in terms of descriptions. That is, “fictional objects are intensional objects; what they are, and what is true of them, is determined by the way they are described in certain kinds of utterances.”<sup>78</sup> From an internal perspective, these descriptions or sets of properties identify the direct reference of the name. Externally, however, they define the character; the description is what we refer to in an informed reader’s use of a fictional name.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the theory itself has something specific to say about fictional objects in virtue of having something concrete to say about the content of our make-believe. Rather than first assuming an ontological view and aiming to make the theory compatible, a view of fictional objects as intensional objects secondary to fictional descriptions emerges from the view.

### *2.2.2 Fictive utterance as a theory of fiction*

Conceiving of the fictive act as an act in its own right means that there need be no act of which it is a pretended version; it’s simply an act undertaken with the intention that others make-believe certain propositions. The fictional film need not be a pretended documentary, nor the unicorn painting a pretended portrait of a horse. It’s more obviously applicable to non-linguistic fictions than the pretended assertion model, and this is surely an advantage.

My criticism of fictive utterance accounts of fiction in general is along the same lines as those made by Friend and Gibson and acknowledged by Davies – they do not tell us what makes works fictional. But I differ from Davies on a major point. He takes fictional narratives to be properly fictional and supposes that containing a fictional narrative may be necessary for a work’s being fictional, and furthermore that fictional narratives are the ‘central case’ of fiction from which other things said to be fictional are derivative.<sup>80</sup> I have just the opposite view: that a narrative is only fictional in virtue of appearing in a fictional

---

<sup>78</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, 51.

<sup>79</sup> Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View*, 34.

<sup>80</sup> Davies, “Fiction,” 333.

work. This is a view for which I argue more robustly in Chapter 3, however for now I will argue for it by way of an analogy.

Fictive utterance views take ‘fictional’ to be a property of propositions or narratives which get this property by being expressed by a fictive utterance. A fictive utterance is understood in contrast with assertion and analyzed in terms of intentions and attitudes.

While an assertion is uttered with the intent that the audience believes the content of what’s expressed, a fictive act is uttered with the intent that the audience make-believes the content of what’s expressed. This, usually in combination with some other conditions or constraints, explains what it is for a proposition or a narrative to be fictional.

But this view is rather odd in a way that is seldom noticed, at least explicitly. Why should we expect that an analysis of a particular type of speech act would be all there is to a definition of *fiction*? We can make use of the comparison with assertion to illuminate this point. To assert is to commit a certain type of act, but we readily acknowledge that we can assert in order to do a great many other things. Lawyers make assertions in order to make their closing arguments, journalists make assertions in their creation of a news segment, and writers make assertions to craft an autobiography. We all make assertions every day in the simple act of conversation, consoling our friends, or giving out compliments. However, all the propositions expressed in these various acts only have *being expressed by an assertion* as a common property. Such assertions are, when they’re not defective in some way, expressions of some beliefs of the utterer which they in turn intend their audience to come to believe. What are termed ‘fictive utterances’ are, I suggest, expressions of some imaginings of the utterer which they in turn intend their audience to imagine. Fiction may make use of these imaginary utterances, but there’s no reason for every imaginary utterance to create a fictional proposition or narrative. This is why fictive utterance views are plagued by counterexamples. We use expressions of imaginings in casual conversation, in histories, in autobiographies, in scientific theories, in mathematics, and so on. We express our imaginings with the intent that others imagine them all the time without ever making *fiction*.

Consider an analogy with autobiography. Suppose that, having observed that autobiographies are made with assertions and assumed that ‘autobiography’ just is a certain use of language, we concluded that assertions express autobiographical propositions. It’s brought to our attention that there are a lot of assertions that don’t seem to be autobiographical, such as “The earth is round.” Admitting this, we suggest an additional condition: that the content of the assertion must be about the utterer. We’re satisfied that, given that autobiographies are both composed of assertions *and* about the utterer, that being an assertion and having content about the utterer are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a proposition’s being autobiographical.

However, we’re quickly faced with some objections. It’s pointed out to us that there are a great many assertions in autobiographies that are not about the utterer; in fact, it could be that most of the assertions in an autobiography are about other people and places.

Furthermore, many assertions are made about the utterer both in everyday life and in other types of works without resulting in an autobiography. Our response is to double down on our assertion view. We could, like Currie, insist that asking how many autobiographical propositions are required for an autobiographical work is a silly question. We could say that the propositions expressed by these assertions really are properly autobiographical and that other things like works are autobiographical in some derivative way that we leave mysterious. Better than this, we could argue that these assertions will create autobiographies if they’re embedded in the right kind of social practice. But if we admit that autobiography results from one practice’s use of this type of assertion, then why is the focus not on that practice? Isn’t it *that*, and not the assertion used in many other practices, that’s the essence of *autobiography*?

The longer we cling to the idea that individual propositions that are expressed by assertions about the utterer are *truly* autobiographical, the further away we get from the object of our original interest. We set out to analyze the concept of autobiography but are left with an analysis of a speech act. Our best option is a view according to which autobiography is an assertion about oneself embedded in a practice. However, this equally describes some other practice, like political campaigning, for instance. Like autobiography, it includes a lot of

assertions about the utterer, but it also includes assertions about other things. Political campaigning is certainly a social practice of asserting things about oneself, but to bite the bullet and say that it's autobiographical is to change the subject and to give up on explaining the *autobiography* that we set out to explain. Surely there's a way to analyze the practice of autobiography that differentiates it from other self-assertion practices.

The same can be said of fiction. To conceive of fictionality as a property of propositions expressed by some particular speech act is to change the subject. It both hugely extends the scope of what's fictional to every imaginative utterance and paradoxically leaves mysterious the things that ought to be obviously and primarily fictional – works like *Moby Dick*. If we admit that there are many practices that make use of so-called fictive utterances, then the way to differentiate the truly fictional from the merely imaginary is to turn the focus of our analysis toward what is necessary *and* sufficient for that practice.

### 2.3 Games of make-believe

We've already been discussing games of make-believe quite a bit, but this element of many theories of fiction was developed in detail by Kendall Walton in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Walton's theory is an example of an anti-intentionalist view, or a functionalist view in Davies' terms, in that it defines fiction according to how it functions rather than according to the intentions of any particular person or group of people.<sup>81</sup>

Though Walton intends his theory to be a theory of representation generally, it's safe to limit the discussion to fictions. Something is a fiction according to Walton if it serves as a prop in games of make-believe. This simple-sounding idea will take some careful explication to fully grasp and, as my view is what you might call Walton-adjacent, it is important to provide a full and charitable understanding of the theory.

As previously mentioned, for Walton representations just are things whose function is to be props in games of make-believe.<sup>82</sup> Objects such as dolls, tree stumps, novels, paintings, and toy trucks all fall into this category. The rules of games of make-believe are called

---

<sup>81</sup> Davies, *Aesthetics and Literature*, 36.

<sup>82</sup> Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 51.

principles of generation. These principles prescribe, or mandate, what is to be imagined by the players of the game. Walton illuminates this idea with an example of a children's game of make-believe. Suppose two boys are playing in the woods and one says, "Let tree stumps count as bears." This amounts to a principle of generation by direct explication; one of the boys has stipulated, explicitly, the rule of the game. Now each stump in the woods, together with the rule, prescribes the boys to imagine that there is a bear there. Thus, the stump becomes a prop in the game; it is a representation of a bear. The stump itself, together with the principle of generation ("let stumps count as bears"), creates a fictional truth, namely, that there is a bear there. This can be thought of as the function of the prop; it combines with a principle of generation to prescribe certain imaginings, thereby making certain propositions fictional. These are the key terms which form the basic skeleton of Walton's theory.

Central to his theory of representation are the concepts of imagining, being fictional, and make-believe. Walton is clearer on what imagining is not than on what it is.<sup>83</sup> Imagining can be spontaneous or deliberate, occurrent or nonoccurrent, solitary or shared. Imagining cannot be equivalent to entertaining or considering a proposition, as this does not allow for nonoccurrent imaginings, and including 'having something in the back of one's mind,' or nonoccurrent mere awareness, includes far too much in our understanding of imagining. The important part is to understand imagining's relation to make-believe and being fictional. If imagining is a propositional attitude, being fictional is a propositional operator. When one imagines a proposition within a game of make-believe, that proposition is fictional (or fictionally true) in that game. Principles of generation, props, imaginings, and fictional propositions are the component parts of games of make-believe.

In the case of representational works of art serving as props in games of make-believe, the origin of the principles of generation for these art-games and the distinction between authorized and unauthorized games become very important. Because what is fictional in a game of make-believe depends upon the principles of generation for that game, pinpointing the principles is necessary for deciding what is true in the fiction of, say, the novel *Dune*.

---

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-21.

Does a reader have the power to play a game of make-believe with *Dune* as a prop wherein Paul Atreides is actually Dale Cooper of *Twin Peaks* who has time-travelled into the future to become the Kwisatz Haderach, thereby making it true in *Dune* that this is the case? This would be a very undesirable consequence of Walton's theory, but he is clear that regardless of what games are actually played with representational works of art, what is fictionally true in the works depends on what is prescribed to be imagined in authorized games for that work.<sup>84</sup> Which principles of generation are in force for a particular work is left open in Walton's theory; they are indexed to particular cultures and can be based on factors such as artist's intentions, cognitive facts, nearest possible worlds (in the case of the Reality Principle), facts about the community (in the case of the Mutual Belief Principle), and so forth. It is less important to Walton that these principles can always be explicitly stated and more important that we recognize that they exist by virtue of the way the institution of fiction operates within a culture.

Importantly for our purposes, Walton thinks we can and ought to do without admitting fictional objects (or 'merely fictitious entities') into our ontology.<sup>85</sup> He offers an analysis of the fictional 'truths' that representations generate and a few paraphrases that aim to eliminate anything to which fictional names might refer. According to Walton, we are partially inclined to call a fictional truth a 'truth' because when we utter such a statement in our game of make-believe, it is true that we are speaking truthfully in that game. We want to call it a truth because we are still, in some sense, playing our game and make-believe, according to Walton, 'infects' our theorizing.

However, the absence of fictional objects equally infects theorizing about fiction. In Walton's case, the problem is clearest in his treatment of uttered sentences containing fictional names such as 'Tom Sawyer.' Tom Sawyer does not exist under Walton's theory and the name 'Tom Sawyer' fails to refer. A result of this is that something like "Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral" does not actually express a proposition. If there is no proposition that Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral, and indeed no propositions about

---

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-419.

Tom Sawyer at all, then what is it that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* makes fictional? Is anything fictional in the game of the work and the games played by readers of the work? Walton says that when someone utters “Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral,” she is verbally participating in her game of make-believe by pretending to assert something about the real world. He contrasts this with making a genuine assertion about a fictional world. This can be a bit troubling for a reader of Walton, as for the entirety of the book, prescribed imaginings are said to be identical to fictional propositions. Suddenly these propositions are no more and there are pretended assertions in their stead. More will be said on this and other problems in future chapters.

Semantic and metaphysical concerns aside, Walton’s theory also allows too much to be considered fictional. Remember that, according to Walton’s theory, the tree stumps count as *fictions* and make propositions like “There are bears in these woods” *fictionally* true, because the rule “tree stumps count as bears” counts as a principle of generation. I think he’s correct that there is something similar going on between fiction and children’s play - but the similarity is merely in the practice of make-believe. It’s strange to both say that fiction is a cultural institution *and* that this children’s game counts as fiction. They certainly both involve games of make-believe, but not all games of make-believe are fictional games of make-believe. Philosophical thought experiments, personal fantasies, and children’s games are games of make-believe that operate according to certain rules but that do not result in fictions.

To help bring out this problem, consider Walton’s distinction between authorized and unauthorized games. This distinction is needed to preserve the intuition that just because someone does play a certain make-believe game with a work as a prop does not mean that their imaginings regarding that game are true of that work. These unauthorized games break the rules - they do not abide by the principles of generation that are in force culturally. However, I would argue that they do abide by some rules; it appears that Walton must say that the appreciator playing an unauthorized game is making propositions fictional in some sense, but those fictional propositions are not indexed to that work in the way those generated in authorized games are. After all, it would be inconsistent for Walton



to say that children can create fictional propositions by explicitly stipulating new principles of generation for their games but that appreciators of fictional works engaged in their own unauthorized games cannot. The idea, I take it, is that principles of generation that are shared culturally are those that authorize games and index fictional propositions to certain works; principles of generation that are not shared culturally have some other version of fictionality which is not robustly connected to works in the same way.

I find this clunky. Rather, it's better that *fictionality*, rather than authorization, exists in virtue of those shared principles. What Walton calls 'authorized games' are fictional games, and all others – children's games, thought experiments, and Walton's 'unauthorized games' played with works – are merely make-believe, or make-believe games of other types. There is no reason to suppose that every game of make-believe played according to rules is fictional, especially if fiction, as Walton seems to agree, is a cultural institution. There are games of make-believe that are just play, games that are played for the purpose of illuminating ideas in non-fictional works, entirely private games of world-building and fantasy, and I'm sure many others. There is something special about the principles of generation which are culturally in force in the institution of fiction, in virtue of which certain games of make-believe and their imaginings are fictional rather than merely make-believe. Differentiating between fictional games of make-believe and other games of make-believe, and thereby dissolving the identity between fictions and representations, serves to save the theory from the bizarre conclusion that there are no non-fictional representations and conserves our intuitions that children's make-believe toys just aren't fictions.

#### 2.4 *Fiction as a genre*

A recent view that rejects the reduction of fictional works to individually fictional components is Stacie Friend's view of fiction as a genre. This view is Waltonian in a sense, but not in the way one would expect. Friend uses the concepts of standard, contra-standard, and variable features of works proposed by Walton in "Categories of Art" to develop a view according to which works can be properly categorized as fiction or non-fiction without relying on any particular speech acts, utterances, or any notion of make-believe.

For Friend, a genre is “is a way of classifying representations that guides appreciation, so that knowledge of the classification plays a role in a work's correct interpretation and evaluation.”<sup>86</sup> Our practices of appreciating are critical to this view – another departure from views that prioritize fiction-making over other acts. Appreciative practices rely on categorization in part because, as argued originally by Walton, what aesthetic properties we attribute to a particular work will vary depending on what category (or genre) we place it in prior to evaluation.

Belonging in a genre is determined not by the fulfilment of certain necessary and sufficient conditions, but by a cluster of non-essential criteria. These criteria are varied, including both intrinsic and extrinsic properties of the work in question. The properties of works are standard, contra-standard, or variable with respect to a given category. Friend uses these terms in just the way Walton used them: standard features are those the possession of which typically results in automatic belonging to the category; contra-standard features are those the possession of which typically disqualifies a work from belonging to the category; and variable features are those the possession of which does not affect a work's belonging to the category. Being 2-dimensional, for instance, is standard for paintings, contra-standard for sculptures, and variable for Walton's imaginary *Guernica* category.<sup>87</sup>

According to Friend, the theories that we have discussed that aim for what is essential to fiction actually engage in an analysis of certain standard features of fiction. Standard features contribute to their classification as fiction, but they are not the necessary and sufficient conditions that other theorists take them to be. Among the standard features of fiction are “to engage us imaginatively through narrative; to deploy certain literary devices; to include invented elements, such as descriptions of what has never happened and names that fail to refer; to make claims that are not assertions by the author; and so on.”<sup>88</sup> Thus, other theorists are not wrong about what fiction is like; rather they are mistaken in their methodology. Fiction is simply not the kind of concept that is amenable to analysis by necessary and sufficient conditions. This is why such views are plagued by

---

<sup>86</sup> Friend, “Fiction as a Genre,” 181.

<sup>87</sup> Kendall Walton, “Categories of Art,” *The Philosophical Review* 79, no. 3 (July 1970): 347.

<sup>88</sup> Friend, “Fiction as a Genre,” 189.

counterexamples, despite seeming true in some way about fiction. We can still value other theories, such as fictive utterance theories, as insightful analyses of fictive utterances without thereby accepting that fictive utterances are essentially what fiction *is*.

Friend's view allows for the fluidity and change that we can observe in the development of fiction. Sometimes works emerge that challenge our categorization in new and aesthetically interesting ways by incorporating contra-standard features, such as the lack of narrative structure in modernist works like Joyce's *Ulysses* or the lack of made-up content in works of New Journalism like Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Such successful revolutionary works come to be truly fictional, even if they were borderline or controversial cases on their release.

It seems right that fictionality is non-reductively a property of whole works in virtue of a practice or cluster of practices. However, the view is still incomplete. For one, it has nothing to say about fictional objects beyond a basic assumption that creators of fiction tend to talk about things that don't exist. It also suffers from an implausible minimization of the role of imagination and make-believe. To point out that there are sometimes parts of fictional works that are meant to be believed is no refutation of imagination's role, as surely you can both believe something is true of the real world because you read it in *Moby Dick* while also imagining (or making believe) it in the fictional world of *Moby Dick*. Every fictional work establishes a fictional world to be imagined; if a work does not, it is simply not fiction. This cannot be merely a standard non-essential feature, as any work failing to involve the building of such an imaginative world would not count as a work of fiction.

The problem with this view is that, while it respects the complexity of the practice, the emphasis is in the wrong place. I may be able to categorize a command as a law by recognizing its features as standard for laws without thereby supposing that 'law' is just a category of commands. A deep understanding of law would involve an analysis of what constitutes the practice of law and its objects, not simply the process of recognizing something as a law. It is similar in the case of fiction. In one sense, of course 'fiction' is a category of works, in the same way 'Christian' is a category of religions or 'oak' is a category of trees. Everything can be categorized, but not every concept just *is* a category:

there is something more fundamental to be examined and that examination ought to reveal much more about the nature of a thing than merely how to recognize its examples.

### 3. *The pragmatic constraint expanded*

It seems to me that fictional ontology ought not to proceed without first securing an understanding of fiction itself. Clearly, this methodological intuition is not shared by the many metaphysicians and logicians who have taken up the task of explaining fictional objects and reference without alluding to any view of fiction as a whole. Luckily, in his book *Art as Performance*, David Davies explicitly formulates a methodological principle for the ontology of art that he dubs the ‘pragmatic constraint,’ or PC. He notes that this constraint on ontological theorizing has long been in use, though often implicitly, and bolsters his explicit formulation with some defenses against its possible vulnerabilities. He also offers some guidance on the right kind of application of the principle. He formulates PC particularly for art ontology and therefore focuses on the relationship between art practice and art *works*. However, a version of the constraint applies to fictional practice and fictional objects.

Davies’s PC is as follows:

Artworks must be entities that can bear the sorts of properties rightly ascribed to what are termed “works” in our reflective critical and appreciative practice; that are individuated in the way such “works” are or would be individuated, and that have the modal properties that are reasonably ascribed to “works,” in that practice.<sup>89</sup>

It’s on the basis of a principle like this that we might reject a theory of art ontology by pointing out a major discrepancy between the theory’s predictions and the judgements of the community at large. Davies uses the example of the ‘commonsense’ view, which excludes from the realm of art much of late modern art, including Abstract Expressionism and conceptual art.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004): 18.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Before I go further, I should make it clear that I am not committed to the view that fictional ontology is a species of art ontology. I take it that art is a very complex practice that may well consist of many subsidiary practices – one of these may or may not be fictional practice. However, that’s not what’s at issue just now. I think rather that Davies’ pragmatic constraint is apt for adaptation to the fictional case because fiction, like art, is a practice whose objects are the topic of much ontological theorizing by philosophers and our ontological interest in these objects arises from their use in that practice. As Davies says about art, “[i]t is because certain features of that practice puzzle us, or because the entities that enter into that practice fascinate us, that we are driven to philosophical reflection about art in the first place. To offer an ‘ontology of art’ not subject to the pragmatic constraint would be to change the subject, rather than answer the questions that motivate philosophical aesthetics.”<sup>91</sup> The same argument applies to fiction. Indeed, we saw in our discussion of Brock’s irrealism that, in his attempt to explain away fictional objects without any allusion to the practice, he didn’t manage to say anything interesting or informative about fictional objects. He merely changed the subject. Further, if we reformulate PC by directly substituting words pertaining to fictional practice rather than to art, we get a principle that looks plausible even without further argument:

Fictional objects must be entities that can bear the sorts of properties rightly ascribed to what are termed “characters” in our fictional practice; that are individuated in the way such “characters” are or would be individuated, and that have the modal properties that are reasonably ascribed to “characters,” in that practice.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, accepting this methodological principle does not mean that any disagreement between a theory and a critical consensus (or as near as critics get to a consensus on a judgement) rules out the theory, nor that philosophers can never make surprising or initially unintuitive ontological conclusions. Indeed, Davies arguably draws a rather

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>92</sup> This is an imperfect substitution, as not all fictional objects are what we call ‘characters.’ However, they are the most recognizable of fictional objects (that aren’t the works themselves) and the topic of most fictional discourse and philosophical discourse about fiction. Thus, this substitution retains the flavor of PC for fiction and its objects.

revisionary ontological conclusion by his use of the constraint, namely that artworks are performances. The key to applying the principle in a way that does not merely affirm a naïve institutional view is in our *rational reflection* on the practice.

Here is where I offer a strong interpretation of the correct implementation of PC, perhaps even stronger than Davies himself intended. However, I have good reason for holding a strong version of the principle, and an example of where Davies took it to be poorly implemented will be instructive. In “The Primacy of Practice in the Ontology of Art,” Davies further clarifies PC and its methodological implications by way of criticizing Julian Dodd’s strategy in *Works of Music*.<sup>93</sup> Dodd offers a view of musical works according to which they’re norm-types, not so different from Wolterstorff’s norm-kinds. We need not go into detail here, but the important thing to note is that Dodd gives up on the idea that musical works are created in order to secure two other features that his theory explains very well: repeatability and audibility. That is, musical works are repeatable since they can be played today on stage or tomorrow on a record, and they are audible since we have access to the work itself via patterns of sound. Given how well the theory does on these two fronts, giving up that they are created and instead holding that they’re eternally existing norm-types is an acceptable tradeoff. This, according to Dodd, is a form of appropriate rational reflection on the practice and conforms to PC.

Not so, says Davies. In weighing repeatability and audibility against creatability, Dodd has built his theory on the wrong foundations: that is, on ontological foundations. Dodd homes in on one aspect of PC: that the properties that are ascribed to works in the practice must be ascribed *rightly*. According to a type-token theorist like Dodd, some properties are ascribed to works *wrongly* by the practice, because the practice ascribes properties to works that can only be ascribed to composers or their actions. His ontological theory gives him good reason to deny that works have certain properties that are ascribed to them by the practice. Davies points out that this argument “suggests that Dodd reads PC, with its normative dimension, as asserting that appreciative practice and ontology *constrain one*

---

<sup>93</sup> David Davies, “The Primacy of Practice in the Ontology of Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 159-171.

*another.*”<sup>94</sup> This gets things the wrong way around. Dodd’s entire dialectical strategy is essentially backwards, since he begins with the ontology, relying on its strength as the supposed default view, and then endeavors to make the practice – or an epistemology of art, in Davies’ words – fit it. Not to mention that giving up on the idea that works are created radically transforms the nature of appreciation, and “no acceptable ontology can require that we revise the basic conception of artistic appreciation to be found in that practice, for it is only by reference to this conception that we can get any firm grip on the very subject of the ontology of art.”<sup>95</sup>

If we look back to *Art as Performance*, we can see the kernels of this later criticism of Dodd’s way of implementing PC. Davies offers a blueprint for the type of ontological argument that properly implements PC, somewhat confusingly calling it an ‘epistemological argument.’<sup>96</sup> This kind of argument begins with an ‘epistemological premiss,’ which is the rational reflection on the practice, continues with a methodological premiss – PC – and ends in an ontological conclusion.<sup>97</sup> However, the ‘epistemological premiss’ is rational reflection in the minimal sense of making some considered observations about what happens in the practice. It is rational reflection in a much more robust sense of a “theoretical representation of the norms” of a practice.<sup>98</sup> He cites Gregory Currie as a proponent of the kind of constraint that he’s aiming for, as he wrote in his book *An Ontology of Art* that prior to an ontology must be “an overall aesthetic theory which describes and analyses the sorts of relations that hold between us as critics and observers, and the works themselves.”<sup>99</sup> This indicates that it’s not mere observation about some purported facts about a practice that needs to come before ontology, but a theory that contextualizes and explains these facts about the practice.

If this is correct, then even Thomasson’s ontology does not fully conform to a strong version of PC. She is careful not to fall into the trap that other metaphysicians do when

---

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 162. Emphasis in original.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>96</sup> Davies, *Art as Performance*, 22.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>99</sup> Gregory Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 11-12.

theorizing about fictional objects and insists that an ontological view ought to begin “by paying careful attention to our literary practices.”<sup>100</sup> However, I think this approach does not go far enough. For one thing, we cannot expect to gain a full understanding of fictional objects by only paying attention to *literary* practices. Literature is not the same as fiction, and many fictional works and their objects do not originate in linguistic fiction. Also, merely paying attention to the practices and making space for things like creatability is not to place the practice in an overall theoretical framework. I think it’s evident that her aim is not to explain fiction as a whole practice; she even calls her view the artifactual theory of *fiction*, despite it being not a theory of fiction but just a theory of fictional objects.<sup>101</sup> This, in part, is why I will argue in Chapter 4 that Thomasson’s ontology misses out on an important and large part of fictional practice that bears on the metaphysics of its objects. As much as a theory of fiction ought to have something illuminating to say about ontology, an ontological view ought not to proceed without first committing to some overall theory of fiction.

#### 4. *The central paradox*

I’ve argued that not only must a theory of fictional ontology be constrained by facts about the practice, as argued by David Davies, but that it must not take place without a sophisticated understanding of what fiction is. That is, fictional ontology must be imbedded in a viable action theory. How well an account accords with our practices is an important test of its success, and a large part of our fictional practices are discursive. In the preceding sections, I have mentioned that some views do better with some types of discourse than others; i.e., Lewis’s view does well with sentences about fictional objects that are true within fictional works, while a creationist’s does well with sentences about fictional objects that are only true in the actual world. Taken together, the various kinds of claims we make about fictional objects result in a paradox. Consider the example below:

(1) Paul Atreides was born on Caladan to the Lady Jessica.

(2) Paul Atreides was created on Earth by Frank Herbert.

---

<sup>100</sup> Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 5.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



(3) Paul Atreides does not exist.

We readily assent to these three propositions, yet we can see that they are inconsistent. Paul Atreides could not have both come into existence on Caladan and on Earth; he could not have been both born like any other person and created through words by an author. Even worse, he could not have come into existence in either way if he does not and never has existed at all. What is going on here?

Much of the philosophy of fiction has been dedicated to solving this problem; indeed, we've seen that philosophers such as Peter Van Inwagen and Stacie Friend identify a whole half of the philosophy of fiction that is dedicated to solving it completely independently of the conceptual analysis of fiction. The paradox above is a particular example of a general form. The general form consists in three different types of proposition that we readily assent to about all fictional objects (or characters). These types are widely recognized in the literature and given several different labels; as far as I'm aware, no one label is generally used or preferred. I prefer to call them *intrafictional*, *extrafictional*, and *nonexistence* claims. In the example of the paradox above, (1) is intrafictional. The proposition's context is understood as somehow within the fiction. (2) is extrafictional. Also called 'metafictional,' its context is understood as outside the fiction. (3) is, quite straightforwardly, a nonexistence claim. It is a statement about the ontological status of the fictional thing being discussed. What we mean by 'within' and 'outside' of the fiction will be illuminated in what follows, so for now, we can proceed with a purely intuitive understanding of their meaning.

The paradox is a paradox because we want to assent to all these propositions, but we're bound by logic to reject at least one or even, particularly if we accept (3), two of the claims. Each proposition certainly seems meaningful. Yet there must be something wrong with one, two, or perhaps all three of them. The solution to the problem must be to decide what is wrong and with which one(s), just as it is with any paradox. There are several ways to begin and proceed; you may think there's a contextual solution, a solution involving pretense, a solution that makes use of operators, an error theory, or some combination of these. The account developed in this dissertation provides another, better way forward. If

we understand fiction primarily as a practice of social imaginings that creates social entities, we can explain our assent to each of the three types of propositions *without creating a paradox*. To start, we must understand the role of imagination and make-believe in fictional practice.

## Chapter 2 – Imagination

### *Introduction*

As we've seen, imagination and make-believe have figured prominently in the philosophy of fiction since Walton's work on representation was published. Though theorists may disagree on its specific role in the essential definition of fiction, there is broad agreement that make-believe is a propositional attitude that we take toward fictional propositions and that it should be understood in contrast with belief. For Walton and others, to make-believe a proposition is to imagine that it is the case in accordance with a prop, such as a fictional work. While Walton offers keen observations about imagination and brings out useful distinctions, he stops short of offering a full-fledged account of what it is to imagine. To imagine, he says, can "serve as a placeholder for a notion yet to be fully clarified."<sup>102</sup> Other theorists of fiction have since used 'imagination,' 'make-believe' and even 'pretense' as such a placeholder, generally sticking to a bare bones view of make-believe as a propositional attitude distinct from belief that involves the use of props.

Walton wondered whether a theory of fiction could do without a full account of the imagination, and I think he was right to have reservations.<sup>103</sup> After all, if we must imagine the contents of fictions in order to properly appreciate them, then how the imagination works must have some relationship with what appears in fictional works and worlds. It also seems true that when we imagine during our engagement with fiction, our imaginings have intentional objects in virtue of being representational mental states – plausibly, the very objects that fictional works are about. Presumably, a fuller understanding of imagination will have something important to tell us about such intentional objects. This possibility has been left untapped in the philosophy of fiction, and I intend to explore it in this chapter.

To begin, I will make precise the target of the inquiry, arguing that the term 'imagination' frequently refers to two distinct things – imagination as an attitude and imagination as a mode of presentation – and that only imagination as an attitude should concern us here.

---

<sup>102</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 21.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

The second section will lay out observable features of the imagination for which any good theory ought to account; these features will function as the desiderata relative to which I'll assess existing theories of the imagination. Section three summarizes and assesses a few prominent cognitivist views and finds that none on its own meets all our desiderata. In section four, I endorse a hybrid view of the imagination, consisting of multiple representational models the contents of which are processed much as 'boxological' or single code theories claim. In addition, I will argue that a possibility norm is essential to a model's being an imaginative rather than a belief model; that is, the imagination normatively models possibilities with no commitment to their actuality. In sum, the imagination is best conceived as a faculty of representational mental modeling very similar to belief but with important functional and normative differences. I will argue that such a view does meet all our desiderata and gives us insights into some of the features of fictional works, worlds, and objects. Finally, I will devote some time to defending imagination's role in fiction. Once more or less taken for granted, the idea that imagination is central to fiction has faced some serious criticism in recent years, notably from Stacie Friend and Derek Matravers. It is to those criticisms and responses to them that the final section will be devoted.

### *1. Types of imagination*

What do I mean by *types* of imagination? Certainly, other theorists have made distinctions between kinds of imagining. Walton, for example, distinguished between social and solitary imagining; Currie and Ravenscroft identified belief-like and desire-like imagining; Nagel famously introduced perceptual and sympathetic imagining in a footnote of "What is it Like to be a Bat?" In these cases, the types are united by a common nature – they are all instances of imagining with theoretically important differences in their features. However, it's also plausible that some of what we call 'imagining' does not share an essential nature, and that the term 'imagination' sometimes refers to completely distinct mental states or operations.

There's a shallow sense in which this is true. Sometimes we say that someone *imagines* something to be the case when what we mean to say is that she *believes falsely* that it is the

case. Take an utterance such as “He imagines that he’s out of her league,” for example. This is a derogatory use – an instance in which ‘imagines’ stands in for ‘believes’ to emphasize falsity or absurdity – rather than a literal use. However, I think there is a widespread *literal* use of ‘imagination’ that refers to a kind of mental state or act that is *not* the topic of this chapter. It is in the interest of excluding that use from the scope of this investigation that I must discuss it first.

### *1.1 Imagination and mental imagery*

The broadest distinction to make between types of imagining is between imagination as an *attitude* and imagination as a *mode of presentation*. Often, imagination as an attitude is referred to as *propositional imagining*, because it is said to have a similar character or functional role to propositional attitudes, such as beliefs and desires. This is the kind of imagining we engage in when we say, for instance, “Imagine that you’re an astronaut on the International Space Station, and it’s your turn to do a spacewalk, but your tether breaks...” Mentally representing and continuing to ‘fill in’ this scenario despite knowing that none of these propositions is true is to imagine as an attitude. To make room for the possibility that imagination represents non-propositional content, whatever that might be, I will follow Schroeder and Matheson and call it a ‘distinct cognitive attitude’ (DCA) or simply ‘attitude,’ rather than a ‘propositional attitude.’<sup>104</sup> In most explicit discussions of the imagination in the philosophy of fiction, this is the kind that I presume to be the object of inquiry. This must be particularly true of views focused on fictive utterances since what it is to be fictional involves taking a make-believe or imaginative attitude toward propositions.

Imagination as a mode of presentation is something entirely different. If imagination as an attitude is to take a certain (non-belief, non-desire) attitude toward a content, then imagination as a mode of presentation is the way the content presents itself. This is commonly called perceptual imagination or mental imagery. These mental images need not be visual, however. Perceptual imagination can present itself in the character of any of the

---

<sup>104</sup> Timothy Schroeder and Carl Matheson, “Imagination and Emotion,” in *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretense, Possibility, and Fiction*, ed. Shaun Nichols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22.

sense modalities (visual, aural, olfactory, etc.) and includes motor imagining.<sup>105</sup> This is the type of imagination we engage in when we're asked to imagine our mother's face or to imagine being on the surface of Titan. The nature of these mental tasks is perceptual in character. In the first case, we conjure up a mental image of our mother's face and 'see' her in our mind. In the second, it's even richer. We may 'feel' the cold of the surface, 'smell' the liquid hydrocarbon seas, and 'see' the view of Saturn dipping below the horizon.

Though these types of imagination already have names in existing literature, I opted to refer to them as 'imagination as an attitude' and 'imagination as a mode of presentation' to make the fundamentality of the distinction more explicit. 'Propositional imagining' and 'perceptual imagining' sound a lot like two types of the same mental state or faculty. But an attitude and a mode of presentation are not, in my view, two types of the same state or faculty. One can perceptually imagine content that she believes, remembers, and knows just as well as she can perceptually imagine content to which she takes the *attitude* of imagining.

Consider the example of perceptually imagining your mother's face. We can split this into two test cases. The subject of our first case knows her mother very well and has seen her recently. She imagines her mother's face, conjuring it up and reconstructing it from her memory. What kind of cognitive attitudes could she be said to have toward this mental image? Perhaps she believes that this is what her mother's face looks like. In that case, it seems that she takes a belief attitude toward the image. After all, it is a veridical mental image taken directly from memories of her mother, and one could infer her propositional beliefs about her mother from the image (if they somehow had access to it).

The subject of our second case has never met his mother, has never seen a photograph, and knows altogether nothing about her. To him, the request to imagine her face will sound very different. He constructs a visual image of a face, but not from actual memories of his

---

<sup>105</sup> I borrow the term 'character' from Currie and Ravenscroft, though I use it much less technically here. For an in-depth discussion on what it means for imaginings to have the character of other mental states, see Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85.

mother. Perhaps he constructs it from beliefs about what his mother might have or could have looked like, or simply conjures up some example of an elderly woman's face. He ends up with a mental image that may be very phenomenologically similar to our previous example, in the sense that it also has visual character. However, the image not only came from somewhere else – that is, not from a memory of his mother – but he also takes a different cognitive attitude to it. He does not know or even believe that this is in fact what his mother looks like. He will not be willing to believe any propositions that might be 'inferred' from the image, such as "My mother has white hair" or "My mother has my nose."

The distinction between attitudes in the two cases can be brought out more fully by constructing propositional equivalents to the mental images. Suppose our subjects are asked to verbally describe their mother's faces instead. Our first may say something like "She has large brown eyes, salt-and-pepper hair in tight curls, deep brown skin, and faint smile lines." Her description is an expression of beliefs about her mother. Our second subject is asked to describe his mother, in a situation in which both he and his interlocutor know that he does not know what she looks like.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps he says something like "She has short white hair, grey eyes, a sharp nose and hardly any eyebrows." His description is an expression of an imagining about his mother, not in the derogatory sense of a false belief but as a genuine *imagining as an attitude*.

We can *perceptually imagine* both what we believe and what we imagine *as an attitude*. One is a mode of presentation while the other is a DCA, and they easily come apart. We undoubtedly create many mental images as we engage with fiction, but we also do it in everyday life – in conversations, when presented with information, and, as noted by Friend, when we engage with non-fictional narratives. What's distinctive about our mental representations regarding fiction is the imaginative *attitude* that we take to them. It is this kind of imagining that is the focus of this inquiry, and perceptual imagining is part of that story only insofar as it is sometimes the mode of presentation of the contents of our imaginings. Henceforth when I use the terms 'imagination' or 'imagining,' they should be

---

<sup>106</sup> If this seems odd, just imagine that he is asked to do this as some sort of therapeutic exercise.

taken to mean imagination as an attitude rather than as a mode of presentation unless explicitly qualified.

Perhaps this distinction is what's behind the use of the term 'make-believe' in addition to 'imagine,' as well as to draw attention both to the similarity to and contrast with belief as an attitude. It's natural enough to say that we make-believe the contents of fictional works, but it's less clear that we make-believe the faces of our mothers when we perceptually imagine them (if we are like our first subject). Given this, I will follow what I take to be the convention and use the term 'make-believe' to mean imagination as an attitude.

### *1.2 Imagination and pretense*

There is another concept frequently conflated with imagination in the literature, particularly in the case of cognitivist theories: pretense. Much of the literature on imagination has its roots in cognitive psychology and its interest in the ability to pretend, particularly in children and regarding its purported relationship to 'mindreading' abilities – the ability to infer the feelings and thoughts of others through observations of their behavior – and autism. I have a merely verbal dispute with theories that suggest proficiency at *pretense* is at the heart of mindreading abilities and their lack. In my usage, both pretense and mindreading are activities that share a common faculty: imagination.

I shall use 'pretense' to refer to something like *observable behavior* which is often associated, *though not necessarily*, with some imaginary activity or another but which is marked by the intention to behave as if something is the case with the knowledge that it is not.<sup>107</sup> This means that the phrase 'pretend belief' frequently found in the literature on fiction and imagination will be meaningless according to my usage. It would make little sense to claim that a person standing still with a neutral expression is *pretending* that there is a bear before her. To pretend such would involve bear-before-me behavior such as running, screaming, or playing dead. It is simply more in accordance with folk usage of the

---

<sup>107</sup> This is not to say that there is nothing interesting or uniquely puzzling about pretense behavior, just that it is beyond the scope of this chapter. For interesting discussion on how pretense and imagination are related and how they come apart, see Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 119-24.



term to say that one is *imagining* that there is a bear there rather than having a pretend belief.

Furthermore, it would make little sense for a person to sip a cup of tea and claim that she is pretending to drink tea. We cannot make sense of a pretense if the person is doing the thing she claims to be pretending to do; the two are mutually exclusive. Nor can we make sense of someone engaging in pretense without the intention to do so. Suppose a child lies in bed with her eyes closed while she is trying to get to sleep or trying to talk herself into getting up. If her parents accused her of pretending to be asleep, they would be mistaken – even if her behavior fooled them into thinking she was asleep – because she lacks the relevant intention to behave as-if.

Pretense and imagination can also come apart. One may pretend to sleep in order to deceive her parents without thereby imagining that she is asleep. The conflation of pretense with imagination may be due to their so often coming together, as in the paradigm case of pretend play in children. Usually children ‘act out’ what goes on in their imaginations via pretense. Children’s imaginary activities are so often paired with pretense behavior that the terms can be used interchangeably in this context without too much resulting confusion. The tea in a tea party game played with soft toys is imaginary, but since the child engages in pretend pouring and drinking, it’s not so strange (though I would argue, it is a little strange) to call the tea itself ‘pretend’ rather than ‘imaginary.’ Nevertheless, this would technically be a mistake according to my usage. In the following discussion on theories, I will often use ‘imagination’ in place of another author’s use of ‘pretense’ when it’s clear that the theorizing is about mental faculties rather than behaviors.<sup>108</sup>

What of the other types of imagining I mentioned, such as Nagel’s sympathetic versus perceptual, or Walton’s solitary versus social? We can consider these types more like optional features of imagination. They are indeed ways that imagination can be, but they are not distinct kinds of imagination in the important way that imagination as an attitude

---

<sup>108</sup> However, pretense behavior is often a critical component of cognitivist accounts and not merely a divergence in terminology.

and imagination as a mode of presentation are. For this reason, I will leave the discussion of them for the next section on features of the imagination.

## 2. *Features of the imagination*

In addition to its being a distinct cognitive attitude, what else should guide our theorizing about the imagination? There have been several key observations made in the literature over the years that a theory of imagination should correctly explain and predict. Many of these have to do with imagination's similarity to belief and its so-called quarantine from belief. I will identify a feature of imagination that has been less explicitly noted but that I think is equally important, which is imagination's segregation into separate 'worlds.' These features will function as criteria for the assessment of theories.

### 2.1 *Imagination and belief in inference*

It has been frequently observed that imagination has interesting similarities with belief that it doesn't have with other cognitive attitudes, such as desire. Most obviously, it appears that we infer from our imaginings much as we do from our beliefs. For example, take the following propositions: 1) that it is a hot day and 2) that a milk delivery has been left outside. If we *believe* these two propositions, we will also come to the belief via inference that the milk will be spoiled. If we *imagine* these two propositions, we will also imagine that the milk will be spoiled, also via inference.

This is interesting on its own, but this simple example reveals an even deeper relationship. The inference from the milk being out in the heat to the milk being spoiled involves beliefs about milk and its relationship to heat – beliefs about the way the world is. Even when we merely imagine that it is a hot day and that the milk had been left out, our imaginative inference involves beliefs about milk. I will follow Nichols and Stich and call imagination's use of actual beliefs for development *inferential elaboration*.<sup>109</sup>

Alan Leslie, who developed the metarepresentational view of imagination to be discussed shortly, ran a tea cup experiment that demonstrates this. The subjects of the experiment were children who were invited to participate in pretend play with an experimenter, and

---

<sup>109</sup> Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich, "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense," *Cognition* 74, no. 2 (2000): 119.

shown a few key scenarios using empty tea cups and soft toys. In one scenario, a researcher pretends to fill a cup from an empty bottle of imaginary juice or tea. Then she tells the child to watch as it's 'poured' over the head of a toy pig and asks the child what happened to the pig. Nine out of ten of the children responded that the pig was wet, dirty, needed to be dried off, etc. Even at only 26-36 months old, they inferred from the imaginary proposition that tea or juice was poured on a toy together with the belief that pouring tea on a thing will make it wet to the imaginary proposition that the toy is wet.<sup>110</sup> We can also see this type of inferential elaboration in our everyday engagement with fiction. We infer things about the characters that appear in fictions all the time. If it is imaginary that a character is human, we infer from that together with our beliefs about humans that the character has two nostrils, a liver, and is conscious unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Imaginings and beliefs are thus accessible to one another – imaginings make use of beliefs for elaboration, and we can have beliefs about our imaginings. Inference as a mental mechanism doesn't appear to distinguish between the two. It's clear why this is interesting if we think of other cognitive attitudes, such as desiring or hoping. To illustrate, let's construct an inference about cake. We have three propositions: 1) I eat this cake; 2) this cake is 1500 calories; and 3) I overeat. If we believe both that we eat the cake and that it's 1500 calories, we infer (together with some other beliefs about what we've already eaten and what our daily allowance is) that we overeat. Now suppose that "I eat the cake" is an imagining and "The cake is 1500 calories" is a belief. We still seamlessly infer that, in imagination, we overeat. In both belief and imagination, this inference works in the same way.

Now let's suppose that "I eat the cake" is a *desire* and "The cake is 1500 calories" is still a belief. What we cannot infer is that we desire that we overeat. The inference simply does not go through. Despite this, we don't need to amend the original desire or the belief about the cake's caloric content to maintain consistency as we would need to if we wished to

---

<sup>110</sup> Alan Leslie, "Pretending and Believing: Issues in the Theory of ToMM," *Cognition* 50, no. 1-3 (1994): 223-4.

avoid the conclusion in either imagination or belief. This shows that, at least in the case of inference, imagination has something in common with belief that other cognitive attitudes do not. Particularly if one thinks that how a mental state is processed by mechanisms such as inference is essential to the definition of that mental state, this presents a bit of a puzzle.

## 2.2 *Imagination and emotion*

Besides mingling together in inferences, beliefs and imaginings with the same or similar content also elicit similar affective or emotional responses. Often, this is conceived as a puzzle about fiction in particular – so much so that it's sometimes referred to as 'the paradox of fiction' or 'the paradox of fictional emotions.' Many philosophers have offered answers to the question of how or why we have emotional responses to fictional scenarios almost as if they're actual scenarios.

The puzzle relies on the assumption that in order to respond emotionally to some state of affairs, we must believe that the state of affairs is actual. Put another way, we must take a belief attitude toward a proposition expressing that state of affairs in order to have the appropriate sort of feelings about it. Nevertheless, we have the same kind of feelings toward fictional propositions as we do toward straightforwardly true ones with the same or similar content. If we think that we can only have feelings toward actual things, or at least that we can only have *rational* feelings toward actual things, then our persistent affective responses to fictions need explaining. Even if we don't think that believing a thing is actual is required for feeling emotions about it, it's still a cognitive similarity between belief and imagination that should be accurately predicted by a theory of imagination.

Some formulations of and answers to this puzzle fixate on our feelings toward things or events that don't exist, as if the puzzle is about the nature of the objects themselves rather than the intentional state 'aimed' at those objects. However, I think the focus should be on the attitudes rather than the objects. People standardly have feelings about things that don't exist, but we don't consider those feelings particularly mysterious if they *believe* they exist. We can perfectly understand a person's fear of demons, for instance, if they're convinced that demons are congregating in their closet. The mystery is that we have

feelings toward states of affairs while knowing that those states of affairs don't obtain. This is a feature of imagination, not a mystery limited to fictional objects.

### *2.3 Non-occurrent imaginings*

A striking feature of imagination pointed out by Walton is that we have non-occurrent imaginings just as we have non-occurrent beliefs. Non-occurrent beliefs are those beliefs that we both have and would assent to having if asked, but that we are not consciously attending to. Most of our beliefs are non-occurrent at any given moment. Imaginings, too, are frequently non-occurrent. Walton constructs a thought experiment about a man named Fred who imagines that he wins the lottery and goes on to use his winnings to fund a successful political campaign and retire in luxury. He says that Fred also imagines that he did not win his election by fraudulent means and that he retires in good health, even though these never occurred to him.<sup>111</sup> If you find this dubious, we could say with even more confidence that in Fred's imagining he was older when he retired than when he won the lottery, that his lottery winnings were given to him in currency rather than bundles of hay, and that he wore shoes to his inauguration. Perhaps Fred never occurrently imagined these things, but it would be strange to say that they were not in some way part of his imagining.

### *2.4 Deliberate imaginings*

Related to these similarities between belief and imagination is, paradoxically, one of the most major differences: imaginings can be deliberate. We can will ourselves to imagine something in a way we simply can't will ourselves to believe. It's such a striking difference from belief that we might be tempted to suppose that being deliberate is an essential feature of imagining. However, this is not the case. While most imaginative episodes begin with a deliberate imagining – what Nichols and Stich call an initial premise – they are subsequently elaborated via inference as discussed above.<sup>112</sup> The inferences are sub-personal and spontaneous rather than deliberate, and presumably many elaborations arrived at through inference will be of the non-occurrent type. There's no sense in which either imaginings resultant from inference or non-occurrent imaginings are willed into

---

<sup>111</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 17.

<sup>112</sup> Nichols and Stich, "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense," 118.

existence in the same way as the initial premise. The contrast can be seen with further elaborations that *are* stipulated deliberately by the imaginer. Fred's imagining that he went into politics was surely not inferentially derived from his imagining that he won the lottery. Though imaginative episodes are 'filled out' by inference, much of their content is also filled out by this kind of deliberate stipulation that is never the case in (normal) instances of belief. Whatever our view on imagination, the role of deliberate stipulation should play some part without excluding spontaneous and non-occurrent imaginings.

### *2.5 Imagination's quarantine from belief and 'double knowledge'*

Despite their interactions in inference and similarities in affective responses, Leslie noted that imaginings are *quarantined* from beliefs. That is, even very young children have no problem differentiating what is real from what is imaginary. They can mentally represent that the tea cup in Leslie's experiment is empty and that it is full simultaneously without getting confused. Beliefs and imaginings are clearly accessible to one another and interact harmoniously in the inference mechanism. Yet they do so without causing any chaos; people do not come to believe the content of their imaginings, though they may well have beliefs about their imaginings. A theory of imagination should have something to say about how beliefs and imaginings mix in such specific and limited ways.

### *2.6 Imaginary worlds*

This is a feature of imagination that isn't often mentioned explicitly – for example, Walton, Leslie, and Nichols and Stich do not list it as a feature of imagination or pretense. However, I think it is frequently implicit in discussions of imagination. Consider the following quotation from *Mimesis as Make-Believe*:

It is a mistake to think of a daydream as simply a disconnected series of individual mental events, acts of imagining, as one imagines first one thing, then another, then a third, and so on. The various imaginings are woven together into a continuous cloth,

although only some of the strands are visible on the surface at any particular spot.<sup>113</sup>

This quotation illuminates Walton's distinction between occurrent and non-occurrent imaginings; the strands visible on the surface are occurrent, but there are many more non-occurrent strands that make up the whole cloth. There's something else here as well. Each individual act of imagining is woven into a whole 'daydream,' or what I prefer to call a 'world' for now. But we also have multiple worlds – *this* daydream may be a continuous cloth of individual acts of imagining, but it is not continuous with *that* daydream. We do not inferentially elaborate our imaginative episode that a milk delivery has been left out using content from our imaginative episode in which we're on the International Space Station. When we deliberately stipulate that we are an astronaut in one imaginative episode, it does not become 'true' in our daydream about winning the lottery.

Note that this is not a temporal feature. It isn't that we stipulate an initial premise at 2:00 pm, develop and elaborate it, come to some sort of conclusion or stopping point at 2:30 pm and then the imaginative world disappears. We can return to the same world later without having to go through the processes of elaboration and development all over again. We can even engage in some other imaginative world in the middle of it and return, switching between them. Our imaginative worlds are still there to be accessed and engaged with, yet they are kept separate from one another and from belief.

As imagination's quarantine from belief must be explained, so must the separateness of imaginative worlds. This separation into multiple worlds rather than a binary separation between the real and the imaginary is a feature of what Skolnick and Bloom call the cosmology of fictional worlds. Their experiments revealed that even young children know that SpongeBob and Batman belong to different worlds and cannot meet – that it is not 'true' for SpongeBob that Batman is real.<sup>114</sup> We keep these worlds separate from one another just as we keep them separate from the actual world and their contents, even

---

<sup>113</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 17.

<sup>114</sup> Deena Skolnick and Paul Bloom, "The Intuitive Cosmology of Fictional Worlds," in *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretense, Possibility, and Fiction*, ed. Shaun Nichols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 74.

though they are contents with the same attitude, do not mix in mental mechanisms such as inference. A theory of imagination should explain this as well.

### 3. *Cognitivist views*

How do we define imagination as a distinct cognitive attitude in a way that explains and predicts all these features? One way is to take a cognitivist approach, which involves a few assumptions and commitments about what imagination and the mind are. Hopefully we can all agree on a most basic claim: that imagination is a mental phenomenon. Mental phenomena, at sometimes and in some capacity, have representational and intentional content. At least some mental states have content with a quality of aboutness – content that represents or refers to something – and imagination as an attitude is one of these. This has been implicit in the previous discussion on types of imagination. I want to avoid committing to any story about the nature of representation or intentionality – I will assume that such things are real characteristics of at least some mental states.

In order to explore the so-called cognitive architecture of the imagination, I'll need to assume a broad version of functionalism (or more specifically, computationalism) about the mind. I will assume that mental states have functional properties and that every mental state of a particular kind will have some essential functional properties in common. These properties include such things as how the mental state is caused, what patterns it follows in its interactions with other mental states, and how it's processed by mental mechanisms. Some such mechanisms include inference, practical reasoning, perceptual processes, and action control systems.<sup>115</sup>

To illustrate, a belief and a desire may have identical content: say, **I walk in the sunshine**. A desire with this content may not be processed by inferential mechanisms but will have a certain role to play in practical reasoning (or decision-making processes) and action control systems. If all goes well, it will result in the person with the desire walking out in the sunshine, which may in turn result in a *belief* with the content **I walk in the sunshine**. This belief will be processed by inferential systems and may result in more beliefs or interact

---

<sup>115</sup> Nichols and Stich, "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense," 123.



with other beliefs and desires in practical reasoning to result in more decisions to act.

These different functional profiles are part of what distinguishes the *belief* with the content **I walk in the sunshine** from the *desire* with the identical content. The mind represents this content in two distinct ways in virtue of the tokens having distinct functional profiles.

It is the project of the cognitivist to give a story about the imagination's way of representing content in the mind – a functional story. We can have an imagining with the content **I walk in the sunshine**, recognizably distinct from either the belief or the desire with identical content. If we examine how this distinct attitude interacts with other mental states, how it's caused, and how it's processed by the various mental mechanisms, then we will arrive at the imagination's functional profile and thus, according to the cognitivist, its definition. In what follows, I will look at three major views that I take to be representative (though by no means exhaustive) of the cognitivist project on imagination: meta-representationalism, simulationism, and 'boxology.'

### 3.1 Meta-representation

A classic view that has received a lot of attention in the literature is the metarepresentational view. The most basic feature of this type of theory is just what you'd expect – it holds that imaginary representations are representations of representations. Metarepresentational views hold that in order to pretend, and thereby imagine, one must have a theory of mind – they must mentally represent their own acts of mentally representing. The most influential of these theories is Alan Leslie's, a theory primarily of children's pretense with the aim of telling a detailed cognitive story about pretense behavior, particularly its quarantine from belief and young children's ability to engage with another's pretense.

Leslie sees the potential to both secure quarantine and to explain social imagining (or cooperative pretense) by conceiving imaginary representations as metarepresentations. These metarepresentations have three parts: the representation of an agent, **PRETEND** as

an informational relation, and an expression.<sup>116</sup> While this may all sound quite technical, the upshot is that imagination itself involves attributing imagining to oneself. In a case of imagining that the bear is wet, the relation that makes up this imagining is I – **PRETEND** (to use Leslie’s terminology) – “the bear is wet.” This means that understanding another’s imagining (with any associated pretense behavior) is in a sense automatic, since the agent is built into the representation. For example, a child in Leslie’s experiment would have the representation **Researcher PRETEND “there is tea in that cup.”** Additionally, quarantine is secured because the semantics of the decoupled expression are suspended.

How does, or how could, the metarepresentational account explain the features of imagination from the previous section? It secures quarantine since, as Nichols and Stich note, this way of marking imaginary representations and separating them from the usual input-output relations is just to give them a distinct functional role from that of beliefs.<sup>117</sup> But I’m skeptical that a metarepresentational view can be adapted to adequately account for observations about imagination and there are independent reasons to look elsewhere for a cognitive theory of imagination. These reasons have been largely covered elsewhere in a more thorough and convincing way than I have space to offer here; however, let me bring up just a few examples. Earlier we saw that one motivation for Leslie’s addition of the agent and the informational relation **PRETEND** in the representation itself is to account for the purported simultaneity in the development of solitary and social imagining. Leslie’s account not only explains this but requires it; however, the actual psychological evidence is to the contrary.<sup>118</sup> It may also conflate a merely behavioral understanding of pretense behavior in young children with a mentalistic understanding of what the pretender is imagining.<sup>119</sup> There is also evidence that children who can imagine socially (or engage in shared pretense) fail to attribute mental states to others, indicating that possession of a

---

<sup>116</sup> Alan M. Leslie, “Pretense and Representation: The Origins of ‘Theory of Mind,’” *Psychological Review* 94, no. 4 (1987): 417.

<sup>117</sup> Nichols and Stich, “A Cognitive Theory of Pretense,” 136.

<sup>118</sup> Nichols and Stich, “A Cognitive Theory of Pretense,” 140.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

theory of mind is not necessary.<sup>120</sup> Though Leslie says that the ability to have these imaginary representations is only an “early manifestation of a theory of mind,” it’s not clear how we’re meant to understand representing an agent’s **PRETEND** relation to an expression without conceiving it as an instance of attributing a mental state to oneself or someone else.

### 3.2 Simulationism

Simulationism is traditionally the big rival to ‘theory of mind’ or ‘theory-theory’ views of mindreading and, by extension, imagination. If the essence of metarepresentational or ‘theory-theory’ views is that one must have a theory of mind to attribute mental states to others, then the essence of simulation views is that one must mentally recreate another’s perspective to engage in such ‘mindreading’ activities. While most simulationists concerned with mindreading and folk psychology at least casually call simulation an imaginative faculty, it’s not always clear whether they think other imaginative activities, such as engaging with fictions, operate this way. There are some theorists, however, who explicitly view simulation as essential to the kind of imagination that is relevant to fiction; notably, Gregory Currie and Kendall Walton have both defended a simulationist view for fiction, as has Alvin Goldman.<sup>121</sup>

The most important distinction for simulationism is not between Leslie’s primary and meta- representations but between running mental processes *on-line* or *off-line*. When a person forms a genuine belief from a perception (for example) and proceeds to form more genuine beliefs from it via inference, has genuine emotional responses, and makes decisions and acts on that belief, they are said to be running their processes on-line. Off-line processes are merely imaginary; a person stipulates an ‘imaginary belief’ and runs processes sufficiently analogous to those that they would run if their belief were

---

<sup>120</sup> Gregory Currie, “Pretense, Pretending, and Metarepresentation,” *Mind and Language* 13, no. 1 (1998): 44.

<sup>121</sup> Gregory Currie, “Imagination and Simulation: Aesthetics Meets Cognitive Science,” in *Mental Simulation: Evaluations and Applications*, eds. Martin Davies and Tony Stone (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Kendall Walton, “Spelunking, Simulation, and Slime: On Being Moved by Fiction,” in *Emotion and the Arts*, eds. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37-49. Alvin Goldman, “Imagination and Simulation in Audience Responses to Fiction,” in *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretense, Possibility, and Fiction*, ed. Shaun Nichols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 41-56.

genuine.<sup>122</sup> The basic view is that one can instigate their own ‘imaginary belief’ in place of a genuine belief and then run their cognitive systems in order to come to a conclusion about what a person who genuinely had that belief would think or do. A decision is produced at the end of the simulation, but it goes no further; the system is off-line and therefore is cut off from systems that generate real-world behavior.<sup>123</sup>

As a rival to metarepresentational views, simulationism has the benefit of not requiring that anyone who can imagine has a theory of mind, which brings it more in line with some of the empirical evidence previously mentioned. However, it does have some weaknesses relative to our desiderata. Others have pointed out that at least some versions of simulationism may not be able to account for quarantine and result in false predictions regarding emotional responses to fictions. There’s also reason to think that simulationism cannot account for imagination’s segregation into worlds.

In “A Cognitive Theory of Pretense,” Nichols and Stich suggest that conceiving of imaginings as off-line beliefs fails to secure quarantine and that, when this defect is fixed, the view collapses into one more like their own.<sup>124</sup> They recreate the cognitive architecture that simulationism requires in terms of functional roles and various mental processes and mechanisms. According to simulationism, a stipulated imagining’s content, such as **There is a bear before me**, is tokened in the ‘belief box’ – their preferred metaphor for a state’s having the functional role of a belief – and then run through mental processes. However, if imaginings are literally put in the belief box, this will result in contradictory beliefs and ‘inferential meltdown.’<sup>125</sup> For example, if the child in Leslie’s experiment *imagines* that the cup is full of tea, *believes* that the cup is empty, and her imagining has the functional role of (and therefore is identical to) a belief, then she will believe both that the cup is empty and full. This can’t be right.

---

<sup>122</sup> Alvin I. Goldman, “Interpretation Psychologized,” *Mind & Language* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 173.

<sup>123</sup> Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 144.

<sup>124</sup> Nichols and Stich, “A Cognitive Theory of Pretense,” 133.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

Nichols and Stich suggest if the simulated belief is truly ‘cut off’ from belief’s usual connections to perceptual and action systems, then it *has a different functional role* from on-line beliefs. If this is the case, it is not a belief at all – not even a temporary or imaginary one – provided we agree that mental states are individuated by functional role. According to Nichols and Stich, imaginings do not go into the belief box but have a box of their own in virtue of having a distinct functional profile. If we accept that imaginings are distinct cognitive attitudes from beliefs and go in a different ‘box,’ then we both secure quarantine and retain a truly functionalist view of mental states.

In addition, others have identified some problems with simulationism’s ability to correctly predict emotional responses to at least some imaginary representations (specifically, fictions). Initially, it appears that simulationism is uniquely well-placed to handle imagination’s emotional similarity to belief, since the imaginary representation is run through affective processes just as normal belief representations would be. However, recall that the essence of simulation is that when we propositionally imagine, we are simulating a believer of those propositions. In the case of mindreading, it’s obvious who the target of our simulation is – it is the person whose inner states we are trying to understand. However, if we accept that this is also what we do when we imagine the contents of fictions, it’s not clear who the target is.

Walton suggests that the targets of our fictional simulations are either specific characters in the fiction or ourselves as if we were present for the fictional circumstances.<sup>126</sup> Currie, on the other hand, has argued that our targets are the readers (or viewers, or listeners, etc.) of the fiction as a factual account, and that those imaginary readers are simulating someone in the fictional world. Effectively, reading fiction for Currie is to run a simulation of a simulation.<sup>127</sup> This view has received some criticism to the effect that simulating an imaginary reader who herself is simulating a fictional character simply collapses into simulating the fictional character. However, regardless of whether it does collapse, it’s

---

<sup>126</sup> See Kendall Walton, “Spelunking, Simulation, and Slime,” in *Emotion and the Arts*, eds. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37-49.

<sup>127</sup> Currie, “Imagination and Simulation: Aesthetics Meets Cognitive Science,” in *Mental Simulation*, eds. Martin Davies and Tony Stone (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

important for our purposes that this version, as well as Walton's, has it that *someone* in the fictional world is being simulated on some level.

This simulation, or perspective shifting, requires a *target* to be simulated and is essentially self-involving, or 'ineliminably ego-centred'.<sup>128</sup> This results in several mistaken predictions in the case of imagining the contents of fictions. Meskin and Weinberg point out that we're perfectly capable of imagining the contents of fictions in which there could be no agent who experiences, reads about, or is in any way aware of the events that transpire – there is no 'target' for the simulation. They use the example of a fiction about the heat death of the universe, a situation that is by definition unobservable. There are no characters for us to identify with. Currie allows that, in some circumstances, appreciators of fictions may simulate an imaginary reader who learns of the fictional events as fact without the additional level of simulating a character in the fiction. But even this allowance doesn't seem to overcome the problem. For one, a reader of a factual account of the heat death of the universe still sounds like a person who must exist in the fictional world after the heat death has occurred. At the very least, she is someone who takes the account as fact, which means she would have self-directed emotions that we don't have when we read fictions. Meskin and Weinberg call this *the problem of inappropriate de se emotions*.<sup>129</sup>

This is an extension of a discussion by Noël Carroll in *The Philosophy of Horror*. He argues that the concept of identifying with a character cannot amount to emotional duplication of that character. Carroll doesn't name simulationism specifically as his target in this discussion, and emotionally duplicating a character isn't all there is to simulating the character. However, it is a necessary part of simulation, so his criticism applies here. He notes that our emotional responses to fictional events just aren't the same as the characters involved, even those we claim to identify with. He uses the example of a

---

<sup>128</sup> Aaron Meskin and Jonathan M. Weinberg, "Emotions, Fiction, and Cognitive Architecture," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 29.

<sup>129</sup> Meskin and Weinberg, "Emotions, Fiction, and Cognitive Architecture," 29.

protagonist splashing about in the ocean as a shark approaches.<sup>130</sup> We feel terror for her, but she feels nothing of the sort.

Along with these problems, I don't think simulationism is suited to explain imagination's segregation into worlds. A simulation is a temporal thing by nature – it's a process that is begun, runs for a period, then concludes, at which point the imagining is over. However, our imaginings don't seem to conclude in this way, any more than our beliefs conclude. An episode of conscious or occurrent imagining may begin, last for a period, and then end, but the imaginative world is there for us to return to and engage with at our discretion.

Remember that for a simulationist, an imaginary representation is dropped temporarily in the belief box and run through most of the mental mechanisms that a belief would run through. Once the simulation is over, the imaginary representation is removed from the belief box, which once again contains only genuine beliefs. Consider the example of reading a work of non-fiction; let's say *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute*, a work of history by Ruth Richardson. As I read, I acquire new beliefs about the Anatomy Act, public hospitals, and grave robbing. I often pick the book up and set it back down, but the representations are in my belief box all the while – perhaps occurrent during the time I read, and non-occurrent most of the rest of the time. Now take the example of reading *Dune*. It's long and dense, so I don't read it all in one sitting. Having put it down for the night, I come back to it the next day. According to the simulationist, all the simulated beliefs from my previous *Dune* imaginings have been evacuated from my belief box; if not, there would have been a major failure of quarantine. But it doesn't seem as though I must re-run my *Dune* simulation from the beginning, nor do I run it anew from the point that I left off.

Even if a simulation could be paused, so to speak, without suffering a major failure of quarantine, how could a simulationist make sense of the separation between different imaginary worlds? Perhaps in the days that I'm reading *Dune*, I also watch the movie *Scream*. If my *Dune* simulation were still in progress but 'paused,' and I added *Scream*

---

<sup>130</sup> Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990), 90.

representations to my belief box, how would my cognitive machinery avoid mixing the two? There may be a simulationist solution to these problems, but it's not obvious what it would be.

### 3.3 'Boxology' and the single code

Even if simulationists are correct in that the *imagination as an attitude* that I've zeroed in on is in some sense an imaginary substitute for belief in some mental mechanisms, we've yet to come to a full analysis. Whether imaginings are substitutes for or simulations of beliefs or not, they still have a functional profile all their own, separate from that of belief. Examining and explaining that profile is the aim of 'boxological' or single code views.

'Boxology' is a cognitivist view initially championed by Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich and heavily influenced by Leslie's metarepresentational view. It's sometimes called 'boxology' because it uses a visual schematic to illustrate relations between propositional attitudes and cognitive processes in which attitudes such as beliefs, desires and imaginings are represented by boxes. This is the box metaphor alluded to in the foregoing discussion on simulationism. Each distinct functional profile is a distinct cognitive attitude and gets its own box. Thus, imagination has its own box.

Among the mental mechanisms and processes in most boxological models are the inference mechanism, the UpDater, the Script Elaborator or Inputter, affective systems, decision-making systems, monitoring systems, and action systems. Weinberg argues that we also have "domain-specific processors that structure our understanding of the world."<sup>131</sup> These are the capacities referred to as 'folk physics,' 'folk psychology,' and so on; what Leslie referred to as 'general knowledge' in "Pretense and Representation."

Agreeing on how many mechanisms we need for a full story of imagination is beyond the scope of this chapter, and not strictly necessary to examine how well accounts like this explain the salient features of the imagination. Quarantine is secured in virtue of having separate boxes or, as Weinberg puts it, "separate and parallel representational

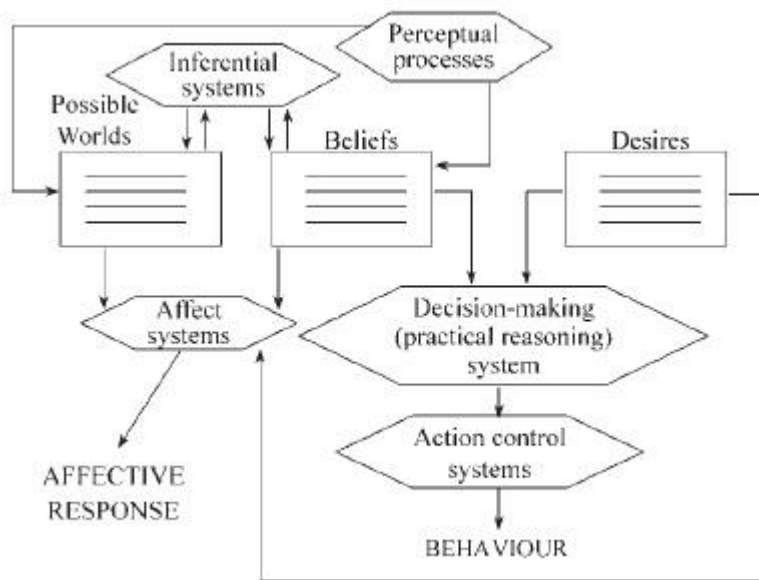
---

<sup>131</sup> Jonathan M. Weinberg, "Configuring the Cognitive Imagination," in *New Waves in Aesthetics*, eds. Katherine Thomas-Jones and Kathleen Stock (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 205.



system[s].”<sup>132</sup> But the other features – its similarities to belief in inference and emotional responses, how it can be non-occurrent, how it can be deliberate, and how it’s segregated into separate worlds – need more of a story to be explained.

The main elements of this view are the boxes that stand in for functional roles, the contents that are tokened in those boxes, mental mechanisms and systems that manipulate the tokened contents, the ‘code’ tokened contents are ‘written’ in and according to which mechanisms manipulate them, and the directional relationships between boxes and mechanisms. The clearest way to represent the view is visually, as in the schematic, given by Meskin and Weinberg who in turn adapted it from Nichols and Stich, in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A schematic of cognitive architecture with particular emphasis on the imagination (represented by the Possible Worlds box) and affective systems. Meskin and Weinberg, "Emotions, Fiction, and Cognitive Architecture," 31.

Each box represents a distinct cognitive attitude, with the Possible Worlds box representing imagination. The elongated hexagonal shapes represent various mental mechanisms, and the arrows are indicative of input/output relations. There are some differences among the versions of this architecture view. For instance, in "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense," Nichols and Stich leave out the representation of affective systems

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 204.

and responses but include the UpDater mechanism within the inferential systems and also have an additional mechanism, the Script Elaborator, with only one arrow running from it to the Possible Worlds box.

Despite these differences, we can construct the general story told by such cognitive architectural views. An imagining is begun with an initial premise or a set of initial premises that can be stipulated by the imaginer or prompted by something else, such as a perception. The content of these premises is tokened in the Possible Worlds box, which we can also call the imagination or pretense box. The contents of the belief box are then dumped into the imagination box – this is how the imaginative episode begins to fill out or be elaborated by inferential mechanisms together with our actual beliefs. This is why our imagining about Sherlock Holmes include that he has two nostrils – our belief that human beings have two nostrils is tokened into the imagination box.

To avoid inconsistency and confusion, the UpDater filters out belief contents that conflict with any initial premises of the imagining. Nichols and Stich argue that this mechanism, though perhaps mysterious, is not an *ad hoc* invention to explain the imagination, but is also necessary to explain how we update our beliefs considering new information.<sup>133</sup> That is, this filtering out of inconsistent content is not unique to the development of an imaginative episode. The Script Elaborator is posited to explain the non-inferential elaboration of imaginative episodes. In Nichols and Stich's version of the view, the Script Elaborator is also responsible for the initial premise and is thus sometimes also called the Inputter.

The imagination box has the same input/output relations to inference mechanisms and affective systems as the belief box but does not have the same relations to decision making and action control systems. Decision making systems receive input directly from the belief box, which makes sense given that we often act directly on our beliefs. Imagination's role in decision-making and action is also accounted for, however. Notice that the imagination and belief boxes interact via inferential systems. This means that when we develop an

---

<sup>133</sup> Nichols and Stich, "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense," 124.

imaginative representation of a given situation, say the situation in which we put off an assignment, and in the course of our elaboration of that representation we imagine that we miss the deadline, we can infer from that a conditional belief such as “If I put off doing this assignment, I will miss my deadline.” That belief can then mix with the desire to not miss the deadline and result in the decision to do the assignment now.

There is also an explanation available for pretense behavior. When we imagine of the mud that it’s a chocolate pie, we do not actually eat it, so it can’t be that our imaginary representation of the mud as chocolate is input directly into decision making and action systems. Rather, our imaginative representation is such that we are presented with a chocolate pie and, in that imagining, decide to eat it. The conditional belief “If this were a chocolate pie, I would eat it,” together with the desire to act as if the imagining were real, results in the pretense behavior of picking up the mud and throwing it behind us while ‘chewing’ and exclaiming “Yum!”

There are significant other advantages to such a view. Meskin and Weinberg note that it has none of the difficulties with appropriate emotions that ego-centered simulationist views have. This is because imaginary representations can have the same content as beliefs and get processed by affective systems in the same way a belief would without needing a target believer to simulate. An important element of this is the idea that imaginative and belief representations are in a *single code*. It’s not clear exactly what this code is beyond a computational metaphor. The upshot for a shared code is that, for either an imaginary or a belief representation with the same content, mental mechanisms will be activated and treat the representations in much the same way.<sup>134</sup> This single code hypothesis, though perhaps a bit mysterious, explains why both inferential and affective mechanisms treat imaginary representations in the same way. The single code is why we infer the same way in imagination as we do in belief and why we feel similar emotions about imaginary things as we do about things we believe to be real.

---

<sup>134</sup> Shaun Nichols, “Imagining and Believing: The Promise of a Single Code,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 130-1.

In terms of our desiderata, this view does very well. The similarity to belief in inference and emotional response is covered by the single code hypothesis. That imaginative elaboration makes use of actual belief representations is explained by the dumping of belief contents into the imagination box for the purposes of elaboration, while quarantine is secured by separating the boxes into parallel representational systems. It also seems that the structural similarity between belief and imagination means that imaginings can be non-occurrent for the same reason that beliefs are non-occurrent, whatever that might be. That imaginings can be deliberate while beliefs can't is explained by the Script Elaborator's single input relationship to the imagination box. It looks very promising.

However, there are two problems with this account in my view, one more serious than the other. The less serious of the two is that the single code hypothesis is just a bit unsatisfactory. While it is an explanation of some features of the imagination, it's an explanation that offers a limited metaphorical understanding. The criticism is not that it uses metaphor to help explain; if that were the problem, then it would apply equally as well to the rest of the theory and indeed to any theory of mind that used as its foundation the metaphor of the mind as a computer. It's rather that there doesn't seem to be anything behind the metaphor of the single code; if it's a genuine explanation, then it doesn't give the sense of understanding that the rest of the boxological architecture does. That the mind 'contains' and manipulates representational content is not difficult to grasp, but to say that the content is in a kind of code or language, and moreover that the same contents will be in different languages depending on the cognitive attitude involved is much less clear.

Granted, the limitation of the single code hypothesis could be one of my own understanding. The more serious issue with this view is that it has similar problems accounting for imagination's separation into worlds that simulationism has. The separation between belief and imagination is *binary*. There are two representational systems – belief and imagination, reality and fantasy – and nothing else. Furthermore, there's a similar temporal element to the story of imaginative elaboration to the simulationist view. At the outset of an imaginative episode, the empty imagination box is filled in by initial premises and the filtered contents of the belief box. Elaboration occurs until the imaginative activity

is over; presumably the ending point is related to the purpose of the imaginative episode. At that point, the imagination box is emptied. But this has the same consequences for imaginative worlds that we noted for the simulationist view. In the words of Skolnick and Bloom, such a binary separation between imaginary and belief representations does not do justice to the cosmology of make-believe worlds.

#### *4. Multiple models and representing possibilities*

Of the three major cognitivist views, none meets all the desiderata, even the two most popular in the literature on imagination and fiction. The views that come closest are the boxological or architectural views. I think that those views are, for the most part, correct and that there is a way to handle the ‘cosmology’ of imaginary worlds in a boxological framework. In my positive account, I make two major additions to the now-standard architectural view: an additional layer of cognitive structure and an indispensable normative component.

##### *4.1 Mental models*

I think the solution to the boxological view’s problem with imaginary worlds is to acknowledge an additional structural layer in the cognitive architecture: multiple representational models. The quintessential theory of multiple models was advanced by Josef Perner in his book *Understanding the Representational Mind* – a dense and thorough work on cognitive development. I won’t have the space here to offer a full treatment of his view, nor will I be a Perner purist in my conclusions. What I aim to show is that multiple models can be structurally compatible with the cognitive architecture offered by boxological accounts and will solve the problem of imagination’s separation into worlds.

According to Perner, infants start out with a single updating model of reality that they build up with sensory information over time.<sup>135</sup> For a boxological view, this equates to an infant’s belief box. Like such a view, Perner says that the single reality model is updated in the light of new information. Thus, an UpDater mechanism has a place in such model-building. However, Perner argues that the loss of information through such updating makes

---

<sup>135</sup> Josef Perner, *Understanding the Representational Mind*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 46.

an understanding of temporal change impossible for the mind that has just one reality model.<sup>136</sup> To see why this is the case, consider an infant looking up out of her crib at her mother standing over her. This visual percept contributes a representation with content like **My mother is here** to her reality model. Then her mother walks into the next room, and the infant looks at her through the bars of her crib. This new visual percept contributes a representation with content such as **My mother is over there** to her reality model. There is no mechanism, in Perner's view, to convert the content **My mother is here** to **My mother was here**, it simply gets deleted and replaced.

Thus, to gain an understanding of temporal change, we must develop more than just a single reality model, but multiple reality models for past, present and future. Perner suggests that the emergence of multiple models happens sometime around the age of 1.5 years, based on evidence that children of this age begin to understand means-ends relationships and temporal change.<sup>137</sup> Whether we all once had a single model and at what age we acquired more is not important for our purposes, however; what does matter is how multiple models aid in the full explanation of both understanding temporal change and imagination.

Perner cites some empirical evidence that children before a certain age perform poorly at tasks that require them to reason using knowledge about the past. He suggests that these failures are due to the child having only the one reality model, from which any representation of the past has been deleted and replaced. Consider what a boxological account might have to say about this. If there is some mechanism that changes belief contents from present (such as **My mother is here**) to past (**My mother was here**), then that mechanism appears to only come into operation at a certain age. I think this is no more mysterious than multiple models only emerging at a certain age, until you consider how multiple models could apply to imagination.

It's at this point that I suggest an extension of Perner's view. Like many other theorists, Perner engages quite a bit with Leslie's metarepresentational theory, and thus is explicitly

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

concerned with securing quarantine. According to Perner, “[t]he need for quarantine is served adequately by multiple models representing different situations.”<sup>138</sup> For both temporal models and imaginary models, Perner suggests that ‘markers’ do the quarantining work – a marker of ‘past’ will not only quarantine a representation of the past from beliefs about the present, but it also determines the functional role of the representation. Thus, the representation with the content **My mother is here** will not influence our behavior if it’s marked ‘past’ as it will if it’s marked ‘present.’ The same story applies for ‘real’ versus ‘pretend’ markers. A representation with Perner’s ‘pretend’ marker is equivalent to an imagining in our terminology.

This does not yet solve our problem of imaginary worlds, because the markers themselves are binary: ‘real’ or ‘pretend’ for Perner, ‘belief’ or ‘imagination’ for us. The markers indicate that the functional role will be different, so what we’re left with is essentially a notational equivalent to the boxological account – a binary separation between what is imagined and what is believed. I suggest that we have a multitude of imaginative models and that quarantine is secured not by markers but by the cognitive architecture itself.

In my view, each imaginary world is a model, and each model is quarantined from every other by the action of the inference mechanisms. Stated another way, the boundary of a model is determined by the inferential relationships of the tokened contents.

Representations belong to the same model if and only if they are processed together by the inference mechanisms, including the UpDater. Since my beliefs are not updated relative to my *Dune* representations, they are not part of the same model. By the same token, since my *Lord of the Rings* representations are not updated relative to my *Dune* representations, they are not part of the same model.

At this point one may object that one of our desiderata is to explain how beliefs and imaginings are processed together by inference mechanisms, but I’ve just said that beliefs are separate from imaginings in virtue of being inferentially quarantined. The relation must be asymmetrical, because it appears that imaginings are elaborated by using beliefs, but

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 61.

beliefs are not elaborated by using imaginings. The explanation is in how imaginative models are built. Just like in boxological views, imaginative models are functionally distinct from beliefs, including how they are formed. Beliefs are not literally a part of imaginative models at any stage; rather, in the formation of some new imaginative models, belief contents are copied and re-tokened in the new model.

This is not a new idea. Note how Skolnick and Bloom describe our imaginative engagement with fictional stories:

Every time we encounter a new fictional story, we create a new world. The default assumption is that this world contains everything that the real world contains. We then modify this representation based on several constraints: what the story tells us explicitly, what we can directly deduce from specific conventions of the fictional genre, and, most importantly, how similar to the real world the fictional world is described as being.<sup>139</sup>

In my view, this creation of a new world is a cognitive feature of imaginative model-building. Imaginative models are initially created by copying and re-tokening the content of another model. However, it does not have to be a belief model. Consider the case of fan fiction. When I read a *Harry Potter* fan fiction in which Draco Malfoy is secretly working for Sirius Black, I neither modify my existing *Harry Potter* model and muddle it with non-canon representations, nor do I begin my imaginative engagement with a copy of my belief model sans any *Harry Potter* content. Rather, I copy the content of my *Harry Potter* model and re-token it into a new model, which I then update relative to what I read in the fan fiction story.

If we didn't have this inferential quarantine between imaginative models, we would not be able to read fan fiction while also properly appreciating the original stories. Conceiving of imagination as a faculty of building many inferentially separated models explains how we can engage with many imaginary worlds without mistaking them for one another or muddling up our belief box. We can also keep all the effective cognitive architecture of the

---

<sup>139</sup> Skolnick and Bloom, "The Intuitive Cosmology of Fictional Worlds," 77.



boxology view, and thus not sacrifice any of the other desiderata. Furthermore, locating the separateness of imaginary worlds at a subpersonal, cognitive level ensures that we don't have to resort to metarepresentation to explain why everyone, even very young children, knows that SpongeBob is 'not real' in the world of Batman.

#### 4.3. *The possibility norm*

Identifying a functional role and place in the cognitive architecture is not the only way to answer the question "What is the imagination?" Trivially, this is true, as functionalism is relatively new, and philosophers have been offering definitions of the imagination for centuries. However, it's also non-trivially true – answers that don't appeal to cognitive architecture can reveal truths about the imagination that are just as important as its functional role. One non-functional way of defining the imagination is to define it normatively.

One way of doing this is to simply differentiate it from belief by denying that imagination aims at truth the way belief does. This is an important difference between belief and imagination that I will discuss further in the next section. However, as a view of the imagination, this only tells us something *negative*; we're looking for something a bit more robust. Rather than differentiating imagination from belief by denying it aims at truth – or in another way of speaking, that it has as its intentional objects actual states of affairs – we can make explicit what imagination does aim at: possibilities.

That the imagination is closely linked with what's possible is taken for granted in our everyday talk. Often such talk is primarily concerned with our own future possibilities, as seen in clichés about being limited only by our imaginations, or in the quotation – often wrongly attributed to Walt Disney – that "if you can dream it, you can do it." But this idea also holds in a more general way. We come up with all sorts of imaginary scenarios and insist that, because we have imagined them, that they *could* be the case. Crop circles *could* be made by aliens. The Brewers *could* win the World Series. It's possible. Unlike a statement such as "crop circles *are* made by aliens," these statements of possibility require no more evidence to be uttered with certainty beyond being imaginable.

In cognitivist views of the imagination, that possibilities are involved somehow is usually acknowledged or taken for granted without playing a central role in theorizing. For instance, in “A Cognitive Theory of Pretense,” Nichols and Stich originally called their imagination box the ‘Possible World Box,’ though made sure to note that their notion of a ‘possible world’ for imagination is broader than usual to include representations – such as *There is a greatest prime number* – that are impossible, because such things are imaginable.<sup>140</sup> Currie and Ravenscroft, on the first page of *Recreative Minds*, name imagination as the attitude that we have toward possibilities, along with goals and the thoughts of others.<sup>141</sup> Paul L. Harris frequently equates the imagination with a capacity to conceive of alternatives to reality and pretend play as “an initial exploration of possible worlds.”<sup>142</sup> Even Scruton notes that to “exploit the amusing possibilities” is, at least some of the time, a feature of imagination in the creation of narratives.<sup>143</sup>

One case in which possibilities take center stage in a cognitivist view is in Perner’s multiple models account. Perner makes the case for the existence of what he calls ‘hypothetical situations,’ which he equates with possible situations.<sup>144</sup> He distinguishes between *epistemic* or *informational* representations that represent the actual world with both *conative* and *pretend* representations that represent possibilities. He uses an analogy with a sandbox in a military headquarters that represents the battlefield. The sandbox – containing sticks for soldiers, blocks for tanks, and so forth – is at first set up to be an accurate representation of the actual battlefield. This is an informational model; its analogue in the mind would be a belief model. In order to plan their moves, the generals start to move the pieces about in the sandbox. It no longer represents the actual battlefield, but it still represents *something*, some non-actual situation. Sometimes that situation is conative – it’s what the generals desire to be the case. Other times it’s pretend – it’s simply what could be the case without being hoped for.

---

<sup>140</sup> Nichols and Stich, “A Cognitive Theory of Pretense,” 122.

<sup>141</sup> Currie and Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds*, 7.

<sup>142</sup> Paul L. Harris, *The Work of the Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 28.

<sup>143</sup> Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London: Methuen & Co., 1974), 99.

<sup>144</sup> Perner, *Understanding the Representational Mind*, 28.

Perner does not make much of the relationship of hypothetical situations to possible states of affairs, nor does he dwell on what notion of possibility this is meant to be. He simply says that imaginary representations are “representations of how the world might be” rather than representations of how the world is.<sup>145</sup> However, the basic point is there – *‘pretend’ or imaginary models represent possible situations.*

The connection between imagination and possibility, while not always overtly considered in theories of the imagination, has received significant attention in epistemology, specifically regarding justification and modal arguments. I mentioned earlier that we, the ‘folk,’ take our ability to imagine something to mean that it’s possible. However, this is not just a quirk of everyday talk or unreflective or non-philosophical intuition. Taking a situation or proposition’s imaginability as evidence of its possibility has a long history in the philosophical canon, perhaps most famously by René Descartes in his argument for mind/body dualism in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. About a century later, Hume wrote that “[t]’is an establish’d maxim in metaphysics, *That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible.*”<sup>146</sup>

It’s a project of epistemology to discover whether the inference from imaginability to possibility is justified, and the arguments for many positions in metaphysics, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind depend on this justification. Alarming for the devotee of Hume’s conceivability principle, it’s been observed that the inference from imaginability to possibility fails in some cases, for example when we imagine that *posteriori* necessary truths are false. Water is H<sub>2</sub>O, but we can imagine that water is not H<sub>2</sub>O but has some other chemical composition such as Hilary Putnam’s Twin Earth ‘water,’ XYZ.<sup>147</sup> However, it’s not possible that water is not H<sub>2</sub>O, no matter how imaginable (or conceivable) it is. So, we *can* imagine things that aren’t possible. Thus, the

---

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>146</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. Sir Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 32.

<sup>147</sup> Hilary Putnam, “Meaning and Reference,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19, (Nov. 1973): 699-711.

very strong reading of Hume's conceivability principle – that *nothing* we can imagine is impossible – is false.

There have been several influential and nuanced defenses and reformulations of the conceivability principle, as well as many spirited objections. However, to delve too deeply into them would take us too far into the mind/body problem. Instead, I'd like to focus on just one influential view on conceivability and possibility, one that contains the kernels of my own view of imagination's relation to possibility – Stephen Yablo's view in "Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?"

For our purposes, I will put aside the focus of Yablo's article – namely, the justification and fallibility of conceivability for modal conclusions. Instead, I want to zero in on what Yablo has to say about what it means to conceive, or which notion of conceiving gives us *prima facie* justified beliefs about what is possible. It turns out that, according to Yablo, the kind of conceiving that has the relevant link to possibilities is a kind of imagining. He says that "conceiving that *p* is a way of imagining that *p*; it is imagining that *p* by imagining a world of which *p* is held to be a true description."<sup>148</sup>

It's important that the 'worlds' that we imagine do not map one-to-one onto possible worlds. Possible worlds are fully determinate, but our imaginings surely aren't. Yablo, however, says that while our imaginings are not fully determinate in the way possible worlds are, neither are the objects of our imaginings (whether they be objects or situations) *indeterminate*. He uses the example of imagining a tiger. We imagine the tiger as having some determinate pattern of stripes, but not any particular determinate pattern. We imagine a determinate tiger, in the sense that its having the higher-order property of being determinate is part of our imagining, while the specifics of all its determinants are left open.<sup>149</sup> This is important when thinking about what the intentional objects of an act of imagining are. That our imaginary tiger is imagined as determinate – as some particular tiger – accounts for how, in one sense, we are imagining about just the one tiger. However,

---

<sup>148</sup> Stephen Yablo, "Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, no. 1 (March 1993): 29.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

because it is indeterminately imagined – its determinants are left unspecified – infinitely many possible tigers can serve as the subject of the true description. This will be important when we come back to the metaphysics of fictional objects in Chapter 4.

Of even more relevance is what Yablo notes about conceiving (of the correct imagining type) earlier in the article. He says that genuine conceiving “involves the appearance of possibility.”<sup>150</sup> He partially analyzes this appearance in terms of the ‘truth conditions’ of the state of conceiving and via an analogy with perception. If the truth condition of a perception of  $p$  is that  $p$ , then the truth condition of conceiving of  $p$  is that possibly  $p$ . An act of conceiving that satisfied this truth condition would be veridical on Yablo’s usage. However, he clearly allows for non-veridical acts of conceiving, in which it turns out that *not possibly p*.

Though I find the language of ‘truth conditions’ and ‘veridicality’ somewhat awkward for acts of imagining, I think this is equivalent to saying that it’s a norm of imaginings that they represent possibilities. Intentional states such as beliefs and perceptions have a well-recognized veridical norm, in the sense that good cases of perception or belief will coincide with actuality.<sup>151</sup> A perception that a tree stump is a bear is a *defective* perception. In the case of imaginings, the norm is that they represent possibilities. However, that does not rule out the possibility that we can and do imagine impossibilities. It is not a necessary condition for individual imaginings that they represent possibilities. It is, I think, a necessary condition for the faculty of imagination that it normatively represents possibilities. This norm partly constitutes what it is to be the imagination, just as a veridical norm partly constitutes what it is to be a belief.

There’s additional motivation for the view that representing possibilities is normative for the imagination if we consider its functions. Imagination surely has many functions of various types – developmental, cognitive, moral, social, aesthetic, and so forth – but I will focus on more basic or fundamental functions of imagination. I will define a *fundamental*

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>151</sup> ‘Good’ used here in the sense of good *qua* perception or good *qua* belief. Perhaps a non-veridical perception could turn out to be good for something, but it’s not a good perception.

*function* as a function that exists independently of complex social practices. These are functions of the imagination that we neither have to learn by instruction nor ones that are embedded in such social practices. I hesitate to use the word ‘innate’ due to its heavy metaphysical implications, but it helps to make the point. Fiction, music, science, philosophy, therapy and engineering all make use of imagination. These are not fundamental functions. A feature of fundamental functions is, I will argue, that they bear directly on our navigation of and survival in the actual world.

I should clear up some conflation that I just indulged in between functions and uses. Imagination is used in the practice of fiction, but an individual fictional use of imagination can also function to teach us something about the actual world or to help us empathize with another’s situation. Individual fictions and what they ask us to imagine often come with such lessons attached. However, that is not the primary function of imagination in the practice of fiction, a position I will clarify and argue for in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to note that those functions of imagination exist independently of the practice of fiction. Gaining general knowledge and empathizing are each what I consider to be fundamental functions. Decision-making is another key fundamental function that’s worth looking at in more detail.

In a case of decision-making, the imagination can give us *conditional beliefs about the actual world*, beliefs that are the basis of our decision to act in this way or the other. Take for example a decision between two alternatives: to cross a river by swimming or to cross by walking along a log that traverses the river. To make this decision, we create two imaginative models, or two ‘hypothetical situations’ to use Perner’s terminology. One has the initial premise “I swim across the river” and the other “I walk across the log.” These premises would be of no use unless the models were filled in with contents of the belief model. Thus, belief contents such as “I am a strong swimmer” and “The current is weak” will be central contributors to the inferential elaboration of the model that starts with the premise “I swim across the river.” Similarly, for the model that begins with “I walk along the log,” filled-in belief contents such as “My balance is poor” and “The log is narrow” will determine how the model is elaborated.

I mentioned in previous sections that a significant difference in the cognitive architecture of beliefs and imaginings is that imagination lacks the direct cognitive link with decision-making mechanisms that belief has. We do not eat the mud pie based on our imaginary representation that it's chocolate pie, even if we have the desire to eat chocolate pie. But imagination does have an indirect link with decision-making: the elaboration of imaginative models can give us conditional beliefs about the actual world, of the form "If the primary premise(s) were true, such-and-such would result." In this example, we build our models and come to two conditional beliefs: "If I try to swim across, I will make it with little difficulty," and "If I try to walk along the log, I will fall and hurt myself on the rocks." These two beliefs, with the desire to cross the river, result in a decision to swim.

In order to adequately fulfil its fundamental functions, imagination must represent possibilities. If the states of affairs represented in the imaginative model – that is, any part of the hypothetical situation represented – were not constrained by what's possible, then the resulting conditional belief about the actual world that forms the basis of a decision to act would be unreliable. Fundamental functions rely on the imagination building models of what could obtain in the actual world.

There will, however, be errors. Consistency is imperfectly kept by the UpDater and inferential mechanisms, we often lack knowledge to fill out our models, and sometimes impossible things will be imagined. Though the knowledge we gain from imagination is defeasible, it's critical to basic activities like decision-making, mind reading, and planning. These capacities are, in turn, critical for increasingly complex activities. Fiction is one such activity, but the details of that practice are the topic of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3 – Fiction’s social nature: agreement, aims, and works

### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I argued that acts of imagining are crucial in some way to fiction and that features of the imagination determine or explain some features of fiction, such as implicit truths and separate fictional worlds. However, I haven’t specified what this supposedly central role of imagination in fiction amounts to. I have only said that we imagine ‘in accordance’ with fictional works and that imagination’s role in fictional practice is not reducible to its role in a speech act. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate that role and to argue that fiction is a social practice consisting in acts of social imagining. Since it was the job of the previous chapter to dig into the imagination, this chapter will be devoted to three other essential aspects of the practice: 1) the maintenance of agreement in our fictional imaginings; 2) the aim of fictional practice; and 3) the creation of works by and for such a practice.

While a comprehensive understanding of imagination is necessary for a full account of fiction, it’s not enough to say that fiction consists in acts of imagining. Not all acts of imagining are fictional, despite our colloquial overuse of the term. On the other hand, the imagination alone leaves much of what’s important about fiction unexplained. For example, there’s an additional normative element to imaginings in fictional practice that cannot be explained by imagination’s cognitive structure or norms. In Walton’s terms, fictional imaginings are not just those that are in fact imagined, but those that are *prescribed* to be imagined. Such prescriptions cannot be attributed to the workings of the imagination alone, but seem to require some shared, implicitly known and culturally given principles. For instance, it’s conceivable that we’re prescribed to imagine that Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* books series is gay because the author, J.K. Rowling, has said that this is true of Dumbledore *and* we have some principle that authorial intentions at least partially determine what we are to imagine with their works. Not only is it not explicit in the work that Dumbledore is gay, it can’t be implicitly derived by inference from any of the explicit content of the work. It’s certainly possible for an individual reader to non-



inferentially elaborate their *Harry Potter* model such that Dumbledore is gay, but it's equally possible for an individual reader to non-inferentially elaborate their model such that, say, Professor McGonagall is gay. Nevertheless, there is a difference between one proposition's claim to fictional 'truth' in *Harry Potter* and the other's. One is plausibly prescribed to be imagined in accordance with the *Harry Potter* series, while the other is not.

The notion of prescriptions to imagine requires a work in accordance with which we imagine. If the proposition "Dumbledore is gay" does have some claim to fictional truth in *Harry Potter*, then it must be due to a connection to the work, perhaps via authorial intentions as previously mentioned. When an imagining is truly fictional, it is because it plays the proper role in fictional practice – namely, it is prescribed by principles in accordance with a work. When a proposition or a character is fictional rather than merely imaginary, it is because it appears in a fictional work. Fictional works are not just the props of fictional imaginings; they are also the proper subjects of appreciation, evaluation, and criticism. Owing to the pragmatic constraint, works must be taken seriously as created artifacts.<sup>152</sup> However, acts of imagining aren't sufficient to create such an artifact. Whatever account is provided of fiction ought to include a plausible story of the creation of, and engagement with, its central object.

In this chapter, I will argue that we ought to conceive of fiction as a social practice that is much more similar in structure to other artifact-creating social practices, such as law and language, than has previously been acknowledged. I will argue that the practice is ontologically primary in an analysis of fiction, not individual propositions or utterances or any property of propositions. This is not only to say that facts about the practice ought to constrain ontological theorizing, but that it is the primary entity in fiction. Works, propositions, characters, imaginings, and objects are only fictional insofar as they play a specified role in the practice.

---

<sup>152</sup> Davies makes this point for musical works in his discussion of Julian Dodd's work, but that works are created rather than discovered is, I take it, as important in fictional practice as musical practice.

I will provide a structural model of the practice of fiction. By providing this model, I hope to accomplish three related objectives: to place fiction in a class of similar social practices and show that accusations of fictional ontology being ‘spooky’ or ‘voodoo metaphysics’ are unfounded; to provide a way of individuating artifact-creating social practices from one another; and to capture the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. The upshot is that fiction is a social practice in virtue of its structure, and that fiction is *fiction* in virtue of its specifics (the particular activities and the aim).

Much of this chapter will be devoted to developing a view of social practices, relying heavily on an analogy with games. I will argue that there is a class of social practice consisting of practices that create abstract artifacts and that this class includes such everyday practices as language and law. They share a common structure, one consisting of activities, agreement, and aims. Each can be individuated from the other by its activities and its aim. That is, language can be conceived as a practice of uttering or signing with the aim of communication. A practice of uttering or signing that has an aesthetic rather than a communicative aim would be a practice more like singing or dancing. By the end, I will have argued that *fiction is a social practice consisting in acts of social imagining, that creates abstract artifacts through which it achieves an aesthetic aim.*

I will begin by motivating the view that fiction should be conceived as a practice of imagining rather than a practice of making certain types of utterances. I will argue that other views, even those that aim to be social practice views, make a mistake about what *kind* of thing fiction is. I will then develop a view of social practices, drawing on Rawls, Wittgenstein, and analogy with games. I will argue that both games and practices have a structure of activities, agreement, and aims, but that the nature of the agreement and the aims differ. The next section will be devoted to applying this view of social practices to fiction, and pinpointing the nature of its activities, agreement, aims, and works.

Throughout the chapter, I will aim to situate this view in the literature on fiction, social ontology, and art ontology.

### *1. What kind of thing is fiction?*

There are several reasons I need to tread very carefully in this chapter. The first and most obvious is that the question I'm aiming to answer is "What is fiction?", a question so broad that offering an answer at all, much less in just one chapter, is hugely ambitious. Beyond that, the question itself is ambiguous and admits of different kinds of answers.

There are a few things we could be asking when we ask what something is.

In philosophy, we usually take "what is" questions to be asking something like, "Under what conditions is the concept properly applied?" The answer we give is in the form of an essential definition, or a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being that thing. Providing, or attempting to provide, such conditions is the conceptual analysis that Western philosophy is known for. When reading successive attempts at analyzing the same concept, the literature takes on a trial-and-error quality: one theorist sets out conditions based on some observations about applications of the concept, and then another comes along with a counterexample to their predecessor's conditions and proposes a fix. On and on it goes until, hopefully, the conditions for applying the concept correctly have been adequately fleshed out or we've concluded that the method is inadequate for the case in question and there is no set of necessary and sufficient conditions to be found, as Wittgenstein famously suggested for the concept 'game'.

The standard case used to demonstrate necessary and sufficient conditions is the 'bachelor' case. What is a bachelor? The typical answer is that being an adult, being a man, and being unmarried are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being a bachelor. Notice, however, that we start out with the knowledge of what *kind* of thing a bachelor is. That is, these are conditions for applying a concept, but we already know what kind of thing the concept 'bachelor' can be properly applied to: people. This is implicit in all the conditions we came up with for 'bachelor'; being an adult, being a man, and being unmarried are all themselves concepts properly applied to people rather than, say, penguins or tables. The kind of thing that a concept properly applies to places constraints on the conditions that we consider for its essential definition.

This is where things become more complicated for concepts like fiction. There are several viable options for what kind of thing we properly apply the concept to in the first place. And if it can be properly applied to multiple kinds of thing, then it's possible that the conditions for application for each kind are different since the kind will place constraints on the conditions. Most of the time, it's perfectly obvious to what kind of thing a concept is properly applied, as in the 'bachelor' case. However, consider the concept 'water,' another useful and popular example in philosophy. Perhaps before we understood molecular theory, we supposed that 'water' classified a substance (in the colloquial sense). If we tried to come up with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for 'water' as it applied to the stuff poured in a glass, we would have come up against counterexamples. Say, for example, we suggested that water is necessarily liquid, clear, tasteless, and drinkable, and these together are sufficient for a substance's being water. Except water is not always liquid but can also be solid when very cold. Neither is it always clear, but sometimes cloudy. It sometimes has a metallic taste. There are examples of water that are not drinkable, such as seawater or extremely acidic water. These supposedly necessary conditions therefore cannot be necessary. There may even be counterexamples of the other type – examples of non-water that meet all the jointly sufficient conditions. Perhaps a refined alcohol could be a clear, tasteless, and drinkable liquid.

The problem here is not that water cannot be defined using necessary and sufficient conditions, but that the conditions for application of the concept to the perceivable substance are dependent on, or derive from, the conditions for application to the molecule. Once we have the correct conditions for water as a molecule *and* the correct relation between the compound H<sub>2</sub>O and the substance water, then we can derive the correct conditions for applying the concept 'water' to some substance, such as the liquid in a glass.

So, when we ask what fiction is, the first question we must answer is what *kind* of thing fiction is – what kind of thing we can properly apply the concept 'fiction' to – because this will provide the necessary constraints on what kinds of conditions we can propose for our answer. Only once we know what kind of thing it is can we get down to the specific conditions. In cases where the kind of thing isn't immediately obvious, a clue that you've

chosen the wrong target is if repeated attempts at fixing the conditions are met with persistent or egregious counterexamples.

### *1.1 Getting the kind wrong*

Conceiving of fiction as a property of individual utterances, sentences, or propositions is a project bombarded with counterexamples, both by excluding works that are fictional and including things that are not.<sup>153</sup> Faced with such persistent counterexamples, there are a few methodological conclusions that could be made, some more radical than others. We dealt with these responses in more depth in the first chapter, but it's worth going over them here.

One standard response is to conclude that the method of finding necessary and sufficient conditions for fictional propositions or the utterances that express them is the right one. What is needed is either more tweaking of the conditions or biting the bullet and accepting that sometimes our everyday categorization of works into fiction and nonfiction is mistaken. We saw that Currie responded in both ways and in depth, so unfortunately, I will be picking on him again here, but I think the general form of the criticism extends to other speech act accounts. When faced with counterexamples that met his condition but did not count as fiction, Currie revised his account so that being a fictive speech act with the right kind of Gricean intentional structure was necessary for fiction but not sufficient and added another condition: that the fictional proposition is at most accidentally true. This fix is just a bit messy. It changed a tidy view of fiction as being identical to a kind of speech act to a less tidy view of fiction as being an at-most-accidentally-true subset of a kind of speech act.

For counterexamples of the other kind, ones which seemed not to have the right intentional structure but nevertheless counted as fiction (such as the possible example *Robinson Crusoe*), Currie proposed a category of *pseudofictions* – works that are not genuinely fiction but are nevertheless treated as fictions. Previously I made several arguments against accepting the notion of pseudofictions, perhaps not all of them convincing to those

---

<sup>153</sup> Refer to the first chapter for a full account of these counterexamples.

committed to locating fictionality in speech acts. After all, that we might revise our practices or beliefs about our practices on reflection is accepted by most philosophers of art. This includes David Davies, whose formulation of the pragmatic constraint I've used to bolster my criticisms of such major revisions.<sup>154</sup> Further in Currie's favor, the distinction between something's being fiction and something's being treated as fiction is generally accepted. There is nothing stopping us from taking a fictional approach to nonfictional works. As he remarks:

If we discovered that Defoe's intention had been assertive rather than fictive, we would conclude that *Robinson Crusoe* was not, after all, fiction. But such a discovery would be unlikely to affect the attitude of the present reading public toward the work. [...] To say that *Robinson Crusoe* is not fiction is not to say that readers ought to change their attitudes toward it. [...] Making a discovery about the intention with which Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* wouldn't cause us to revise our attitude to the pseudofictional status of that work, but it might alter our attitude to its fictional status.<sup>155</sup>

This warrants some closer examination, as I think the success of this argument comes down to one's intuitions. For instance, I find the assertion that we would conclude that *Robinson Crusoe* actually isn't fiction very surprising. I certainly wouldn't make that conclusion, and I wouldn't be convinced that most or even very many people would without some kind of empirical study. After all, we can extend this thought experiment to any number of works of fiction. Suppose that the makers of the film *The Blair Witch Project* intended people to believe it was genuine footage of real events. This is by no means out of the realm of possibility; indeed that was the rumor when the film was released and the marketing of the film gave every indication that the makers intended people to believe it was documentary footage.<sup>156</sup> Even believing that the makers intended to fool audiences, did any competent adult doubt its fictional status, much less the entire

---

<sup>154</sup> Davies, "The Primacy of Practice in the Ontology of Art," 162.

<sup>155</sup> Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 37.

<sup>156</sup> Rebecca Hawkes, "Why did the world think The Blair Witch Project really happened?" *The Telegraph*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2016/07/25/why-did-the-world-think-the-blair-witch-project-really-happened/>

community of competent movie-goers? Do we now consider it not really fictional, but only pseudofictional, or convenient or expedient to treat it like it's fictional? We don't. *The Blair Witch Project's* fictional status is not even vague or under suspicion, and it seems that the intention to fool audiences has since been built into the fictional film genre of found footage horror. Nevertheless, Currie's insistence that there is a difference between treating something as fiction and being fiction strikes one as true, and he says that this is all there is to the fiction/pseudofiction distinction. So, what's going on here?

I think the intuitive force behind the fiction/pseudofiction distinction benefits from the blurring of another distinction: that between an individual's quirky engagement with a nonfictional work and a practice-wide mistake about what is fictional. Of course, a person can treat just about any piece of writing or film as though it's fictional. This is possible, but it's not normal; it would be clear to everyone around them that they were quite mistaken about what they were reading or watching, or that they were doing something strange and outside of the usual practice. We understand where they've gone wrong relative to how everyone else treats the work in question – relative to the practice. In the case of a practice-wide mistake about what's fictional, we can only recognize such a mistake relative to some theory about it. This is like the objection that Currie anticipates in just the next paragraph:

Perhaps it will be argued that this just begs the question, because the possibility remains that what I call pseudofiction is what most people call fiction. In that case my definition of “fiction” would not be an explication of the intuitive concept *fiction*, but a theory-driven attempt to put something else in its place.<sup>157</sup>

Nevertheless, we must hold on to the fiction/pseudofiction distinction, otherwise we would “have to say that *The Origin of Species* would be fiction if some or most people adopted the attitude toward it appropriate to a reading of fiction: surely an unacceptable result.”<sup>158</sup>

However, this is a false dichotomy – we aren't limited to a choice between accepting the fiction/pseudofiction distinction or giving up a notion of fiction that excludes works of evolutionary biology like *The Origin of Species*. This is because the fiction/pseudofiction

---

<sup>157</sup> Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 37.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

is not a distinction based purely on attitudes. A pseudofiction is a work that is accepted as fiction by the whole practice, and the practice need not be limited to people's attitudes. If *The Origin of Species* were considered fictional by the whole practice, it would be a very different practice from the one we actually have, with different principles and conventions. Not only would attitudes of individuals be different, but the conventions that guide the practice and provide the conditions under which works can serve as imaginative props would have to be different. That's where this example gets its intuitive force. Of course, we don't want to accept that *The Origin of Species* could be fiction just because people read it as if it is. It's a good thing, then, that the practice consists of *prescriptions* for certain attitudes in addition to actual attitudes.

Another more radical response to persistent counterexamples is the conclusion made by Stacie Friend: that the method of finding necessary and sufficient conditions for fiction should be abandoned. On her view, nothing is necessary for fiction; rather, fiction is a genre loosely composed of standard, contra-standard, and variable features, all of which are changeable. Such a view leads us to ask: What is holding these features together into a genre capable of being individuated from other genres?

Imagine if some other kind worked this way, such as lamps and tables. Suppose that lamps today have a standard feature of lighting up a room, and that being a dark, flat surface is contra-standard, or disqualifies something from being a lamp. Likewise, tables today have the standard feature of being a dark, flat surface, but lighting up a room is a contra-standard feature. Imagine that in a hundred years or so it might be that lamps are now standardly flat surfaces and tables light up rooms. It isn't just that the referents of the words 'lamp' and 'table' have changed – the referents, the concepts *lamp* and *table*, are identical to what they were before, but their standard and contra-standard features have swapped. This seems wrong. Surely, regardless of what we might call a lamp, the concept of being a lamp is essentially tied to giving off light. If there truly is nothing essential to fiction, then fiction – our fiction that exists today – could have all the standard features of biography or philosophy in the future. Perhaps one could argue for a historical linkage that



saves the identity between current-fiction and the future-fiction that looks just like current-history, but it's quite a strain on credulity that the nature of fiction should work like this.

Of course, Friend's view emerges from sound criticism of the standard speech act view of fiction, together with the observation that some things apparently central to fiction have indeed changed over time. Features that may once have been, or only seemed to be, absolutely central to fiction have been shown to be not necessary after all. For instance, postmodern works of fiction violate the apparently essential feature of having a recognizable narrative structure, but nevertheless count as fiction. A radical change in fictional practice such as this is adequately explained by Friend's genre view. However, it need not be the case that, just because some things about fiction change over time, there is nothing necessary whatsoever to fiction.

The other radical response is to abandon the distinction between fiction and nonfiction as hopelessly inexplicable and substitute another distinction in its place. This is how Matravers proceeds, sidelining fiction versus nonfiction in favor of 'confrontations' versus 'representations,' or a distinction between "situations in which action is possible and situations in which action is not possible."<sup>159</sup> I won't rehearse the criticisms of Matravers' account as an account of what it takes, cognitively, to understand a story. All that needs to be said here is that this methodological shift amounts to changing the question rather than answering it. Despite his insistence that the difference is unimportant or uninteresting, there is a difference between fiction and nonfiction and it's precisely what's at issue. Understanding what makes something fictional is our aim, not the ways in which people grasp narratives. Matravers tells us that our responses to works of fiction are identical to those of nonfiction, and thus the fiction/nonfiction distinction does not matter. However, even if he were correct about our responses, I would argue that this makes explaining the distinction between them even more pressing, since it can't come down to our cognitive responses or reading methods.

---

<sup>159</sup> Matravers, *Fiction and Narrative*, 45.

### *1.2 Fiction as a social practice*

Before we give up on the search for necessary and sufficient conditions for fiction or deny that fiction is meaningfully different from nonfiction at all, I suggest another, more moderate approach. We ought to take the difficulties we encounter in pinpointing an essential definition for fiction as a clue that we're looking in the wrong place. We don't need a knock-down argument against the standard view to explore another avenue and compare our results. So, I suggest a shift of focus from propositions and utterances to social practices; that is, that we look for features of an entire practice that make it fiction rather than a sentence, proposition, utterance, or even a work. A successful attempt at defining a practice as fiction will allow us to derivatively assign fictionality to works, sentences, propositions, content, objects, and to any things that play an appropriate role in that practice, without going through the tedious and likely doomed task of trying to tie such varied items together by some shared feature(s).

Other theorists have referred to a social practice in their accounts of fiction. Walton, as previously mentioned, often describes fiction as an institution and games of make-believe as social or collective rule-guided activities. Stacie Friend conceives of fiction as a category or genre of works, but one that is importantly embedded in certain social practices.<sup>160</sup> However, the social nature of fiction does not bear much of the theoretical weight for these views; rather, it's principles of generation and standard features that do the heavy lifting.

Lamarque and Olsen make perhaps the most use of the notion of a social practice in their book *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*. They present their view in contrast to two main views. One is the more traditional view in which fiction is conceived as a use of language that is special for being disconnected from the world, in that it contains terms that fail to refer and sentences with false truth values but is nevertheless not a deceitful use of language. This type of view captures what one might first notice is typical of most fiction, but it captures neither that which is necessary or sufficient for a use of language's being fiction.<sup>161</sup> Also,

---

<sup>160</sup> Friend, "Fiction as a Genre," 187.

<sup>161</sup> For why this is, see the discussion of Currie's theory of fiction in Chapter 1.

and importantly for my view, this limits the realm of fiction to that which is spoken, written and signed, excluding or at least requiring excessive adaptation for such everyday non-linguistic fictions as silent films and textless comic strips. The other is a view of fiction as a ‘natural’ activity, such as C.G. Prado’s view. According to such a view, literary fiction is just an extreme case of natural, everyday narrating and imagining. Much like my view on imaginative models, Prado suggests that this natural activity of narrative ‘world-making,’ originally done in pursuit of some goal, comes to be done *for its own sake* and this is what we call ‘fiction.’ However, as Lamarque and Olsen point out, “[a]ny attempt to explain how fictive stories are told and enjoyed in a community, without deceit, without mistaken inference, and without inappropriate response, seems inevitably to require reference to co-operative, mutually recognized, conventions.”<sup>162</sup> Even Prado implies that the members of a community must have certain knowledge and collaborate with one another in the process of fiction, while at the same time denying that fiction requires any special conceptual background.

Lamarque and Olsen give four main motivations for considering fiction to be a social practice. First, it serves to ground fiction in activities rather than relations, avoiding the pitfalls of views that try to define fiction in terms of relations between language and the world. Second, the grounding of fiction in the social guarantees that “works of fiction only become such given their role in social contexts.”<sup>163</sup> Third, it clearly delineates between the merely imaginary and the genuinely fictional. Last, practices are normative, allowing fiction to have both constitutive and regulative rules. This distinction, and particularly fiction’s constitutive rules, will be very important in the developments in the next section.

In addition to these reasons for considering fiction a social practice, Lamarque and Olsen provide two advantages to such a view. The first is that if fiction is indeed a practice based on conventions, this provides a systematic way of differentiating fictional narratives from narratives of other types, such as the philosophical, the historical, and the merely deceitful. Another advantage is “that it directs attention away from the search for a ‘semantics of

---

<sup>162</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, 37.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

story-telling.”<sup>164</sup> That is, features of fiction can be explained straightforwardly by appeal to the conventions of the practice rather than trying to build them into the logical structure of the sentences of a fiction. This is a great advantage for my view since I’ve argued that the idea that fiction is always made up of sentences is untenable. However, even if one does think that all fiction is made up of or can be reduced to sentences, previous attempts to exhaustively explain fiction via semantic methods have suffered from disunity, lack of clarity, and plentiful counterexamples.

The differences between my account and that of Lamarque and Olsen can be summed up in three main ways. The first is a shift from the linguistic to the imaginative. The rules of fiction do not constrain utterances or communicative acts but acts of social imagining. The second is a shift of focus from utterances to works – understood in the conventional sense rather than mere narratives – as an important object of analysis. Fiction is indeed a social practice, but it is one in the business of creating and evaluating abstract artifacts, not one governing special types of speech acts. The third is the shift from communicative aims to aesthetic aims. The primary aim of fiction is not to communicate. While there may be some transmission of content, it is in the service of imaginative engagement and aesthetic experience. While many kinds of works and utterances are intended for make-believe, those that are fictional rather than historical, philosophical, or any other non-fictional variety are such precisely because they play a role in a practice with an aesthetic aim. Fiction is not to be understood as a kind of utterance, but as a kind of social practice.

Essentially, the primary disagreement I have with Lamarque and Olsen is on where to draw the boundaries of fiction. They say that “the basic skills of making up stories, telling, repeating, and talking about stories, recognizing them as such, taking up attitudes to them, and responding in appropriate ways, all of which constitute the practice, are more like those of simple customs than of complex institutions.”<sup>165</sup> But this conception is both too broad and too narrow to explain what’s of interest here. It’s too broad because it

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, 34.

includes all acts of expressing and sharing imaginings, many of which are not fiction. It's too narrow because it only partially describes the contents of only some fictions.

One may object that conceiving of fiction as a social practice is the standard view, and that even Currie and others who hold speech act views of fiction are precisely identifying fiction as a social practice – a social practice of making certain types of utterances. However, there is a difference between embedding an account of fictionality in a social practice and identifying fiction with a social practice. The conditions that speech act theorists offer for fiction are conditions for individual utterances. The conditions themselves appeal to the practice or describe the role that utterances play in the practice, but they are not conditions for a social practice's being fiction as opposed to some other practice.

## *2. Social practices*

Up to this point, I have argued that conceiving of fiction as a property of individual propositions or utterances is misguided, but that the way forward is not as radical as abandoning the search for an essential definition of fiction altogether. Rather, I suggest we take fiction to be a kind of social practice that involves acts of imagining. My aim is to offer an essential definition of fiction as a practice – necessary and sufficient conditions for a practice's being the practice of fiction, as opposed to any other social practice. To begin, I need to say something about what a social practice is, and in particular a social practice that creates abstract artifacts like works. To do this, I will draw on Rawls and Wittgenstein, particularly Peter Lamarque's analysis of their influence on practice-based views in the philosophy of literature, as well as on an analogy between fiction and other artifact-creating social practices like language and law.

In this section, I will make the following four claims:

1. That practices both make some activities possible and are essentially composed of activities that exist outside the practice. That is, as surely as one cannot put the king in check outside the game of chess, one cannot put the king in check without moving pieces on a board.

2. That *agreement* is essential to a practice, not the specific set of principles that may achieve that agreement. This is why we need not worry about implicit principles being infamously difficult to make explicit, or about them changing over time. If agreement is maintained, the practice is maintained.
3. That practices can have both internal and external aims that are either fixed or fluid, but they will have some aim that is essential to it. We can loosely group types of practices by the structure of their aims. Along with activities, aims individuate practices from one another.
4. That the class of social practice to which fiction belongs is analogous to other practices that create abstract artifacts through which they achieve their aims, such as language and law. Thus, there is nothing more mysterious about fictional objects, including works, than laws or words.

Understanding the structure of entity-creating social practices will tell us what kind of constraints to put on the essential definition of such a practice. I will use this in the next section to argue that 1) acts of imagining, 2) agreement or corroboration among those acts of imagining, 3) an aesthetic fixed external aim, and 4) the creation of abstract artifacts through which the aim is achieved are all individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for fictional practice.

### *2.1 Activities and rules*

I've mentioned several times that it's generally accepted that there are some principles in force in fictional practice, along with acts of imagining. That practices are composed of activities and rules is also quite widely accepted. According to Rawls' influential account, a practice is "any form of activity specified by a system of rules which defines offices, roles, moves, penalties, defenses, and so on, and which gives the activity its structure."<sup>166</sup> The basic components on this view are an activity or group of activities, a system of rules, and additional elements defined by those rules. Clearly, rules play a central role in this view.

---

<sup>166</sup> John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules," *The Philosophical Review* 64, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 3. Of course, not every practice needs to include each of these things – defenses and moves, for instance, are more suited to game-type practices like chess or football than other types of social practices like literature or history.

Of particular interest is the relationship between the activities and rules in the context of a practice. Rawls' "Two Concepts of Rules" is at heart a paper about ethical practices and their justification, such as punishment and making (and breaking) promises, and distinguishes between two concepts of rules as part of a defense of utilitarianism. For Rawls, the two concepts of rules are summary rules and practice rules. Each has different origins, justifications, and governing force on actions. This distinction was subsequently picked up by theorists developing practice views of other phenomena, notably for speech acts by Searle. Searle renamed summary rules *regulative rules* and practice rules *constitutive rules*, but the distinction retains the important features of Rawls' original. Practice or constitutive rules are of primary interest because they are taken to literally constitute certain acts, so defining some acts is a matter of explicating the rules that make them possible. However, for clarity I'll briefly summarize both concepts.

The first type of rule that governs what we do is what Rawls calls a *summary rule*, and what we would often call a 'rule of thumb.' These rules are much like shortcuts – they allow one to bypass the reasoning behind a specific decision (in Rawls' case, the skipped reasoning is the application of the utilitarian principle) by providing a rule based on the outcomes of similar cases. They can be thought of as "summaries of past decisions arrived at by the direct application of the utilitarian principle to particular cases."<sup>167</sup> Summary rules take the general form "Whenever *A*, do *B*."<sup>168</sup> Because of this, the cases that *A* and *B* stand for are logically prior to the rule – they exist prior to and independently from the summary rule that governs them. Or, in other words, "[t]he performance of the action to which the rule refers doesn't require the stage-setting of a practice of which this rule is a part."<sup>169</sup> An important feature of these rules is that they can be legitimately questioned within the practice, and only have the force of guides or maxims. Since they are rules derived from decisions made in other cases, one might wonder if there had been mistakes made in the cases summarized as the rule, or whether there is a significant enough difference between the current circumstances and the circumstances governed by the rule

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

such that its application isn't appropriate. These features are preserved in Searle's definition of regulative rules. Regulative rules govern actions that exist independently of the rule, and generally take the form of imperatives. Searle uses the example of a "No taunting" rule in football. One can taunt within or without the practice of football. Searle suggests that when we think of rules, we tend to think of these regulative rules.

For Rawls, practice rules define a practice. The establishment of a practice is "the specification of a new form of activity."<sup>170</sup> Since this specification is done via the rules, the rules are logically prior to the activities that they specify. In Searle's words, the rules *constitute* the activities of the practice. Rawls uses an illuminating baseball analogy:

Many of the actions one performs in a game of baseball one can do by oneself or with others whether there is the game or not. For example, one can throw a ball, run, or swing a peculiarly shaped piece of wood. But one cannot steal base, or strike out, or draw a walk, or make an error, or balk; although one can do certain things which appear to resemble these actions such as sliding into a bag, missing a grounder and so on.<sup>171</sup>

We can see from this excerpt that not only do practice rules specify new actions, they do it by making pre-existing actions *count as* these new actions. Sliding into a bag is an action that exists prior to the practice of playing baseball, but within that practice it also counts as a new action – stealing a base. It counts as this new action in virtue of practice or constitutive rules that are in force.

This is the point that I want to bring out. Practices clearly require activity of some sort, as we simply can't make sense of a practice without any activity. But practices don't create new actions out of the ether – they must be built around pre-existing activities that acquire a new role or description in virtue of being part of the practice. Furthermore, we can identify some pre-existing activities that are *necessary* to a practice. Sticking with the baseball analogy, we can say with certainty that baseball is a sport, and if a practice is not a sport, then it is not baseball. If there were some practice for which moving a blue piece onto a white square on a board, for instance, counted as *getting a base hit*, and knocking

---

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



an opponent's blue piece off a white square counted as *getting an out*, this practice would not be baseball, no matter how similar the rules. It can't be that every constitutive rule is essential to a practice; practices can be reformed, and rules can change without creating a new practice. But we can identify some activities that are both logically prior to the practice and necessary to the practice, such as running, throwing, and swinging a bat in baseball.<sup>172</sup>

## 2.2 Rules and agreement

I've briefly gone over a basic account of practices conceived as rule-guided activities, and I've suggested that in addition to constitutive rules being necessary for certain activities, certain pre-existing activities (those that come to count as other actions according to the rules of the practice) are necessary for practices. We can see this idea reflected in the general structure of Walton's account of fiction, where the pre-existing activity is imagining, which, guided by the system of rules he calls principles of generation, count as make-believe activities. Imagination is a necessary component and fiction would not be fiction if acts of imagining were replaced by acts of believing, or acts of running, or any other acts. In Currie's or Searle's case, the activity is making utterances, guided by a system of rules governing things like intentions and attitudes, that likewise define things like fictive acts, fictional truths and, for Searle at least, fictional characters.

---

<sup>172</sup> I think this point is supported by the existence of sports-based videogames. If I told my friends that I hit five home runs in a baseball game last night, the response would be one of amazement and incredulity. Once having admitted that I did so playing a videogame, they would waste no time in concluding that my initial claim had been misleading. Even though there's a sense in which the rules in the videogame are the rules of baseball and that I did hit five 'home runs' according to the rules of the game, the game is only a digital analogue of baseball, with digital analogues of home runs. The physical action is essential. Note that I am not just insisting that any 'counts as' constitutive rule is essential – the home run was just an example. Simply saying that I had played baseball last night would have been similarly misleading. Contrast this with another popular example: chess. If I told my friends that I played a game of chess last night and revealed that it was Microsoft Chess against an online opponent, they would not have felt that I had misled them. In chess, a digital board and pieces are just as good as physical ones. My ability to play the game is not linked to my ability to raise my hand and move a piece with my own power. Someone else could move my pieces for me, but it still would have counted as an instance of me playing the game if my surrogate piece-mover moved the pieces according to my instructions. This is very unlike the baseball case, for which under no circumstances could I be said to have *really* pitched a game that was pitched by Noah Syndergaard, even if I did tell him what pitches to throw and when.

As Peter Lamarque points out in “Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice,” Rawls’ activity-plus-rules account of practices has been very influential generally, including in the philosophy of literature and fiction. I’ve already pointed out how this is the case for accounts of fiction such as Searle’s, Currie’s and Walton’s. However, Lamarque makes the case for a Wittgensteinian influence in this idea and suggests that Wittgenstein’s model of practices is more appropriate in the literature case. Much of what Lamarque says in this paper is of interest for this chapter, and ideas from it will come back again in discussions of aims and works. For now, however, I want to focus on what Lamarque has to say about principles and more complex practices such as literature. Specifically, there are good reasons to suppose that the area of rules is where analogies between practices like literature and games like chess or baseball begin to break down, and a Wittgensteinian answer to this may be more illuminating than a strictly rules-based one.

When trying to apply a Rawlsian model of practices to something like fiction, a problem soon makes itself known: if there are rules of fictional practice, they don’t look much like the rules of chess or baseball. The rules governing what we are to imagine in accordance with fictional works are famously difficult to make explicit, and some theorists such as Walton express doubt that the search for principles is fruitful.<sup>173</sup> As Thomas Morawetz argues in “The Concept of a Practice,” the constitutive rules of games like chess and baseball are readily distinguishable from optional or strategic rules, are exhaustive, simple, unambiguous, and must be known to the player before they can participate in the practice.<sup>174</sup> He distinguishes the nature of games like chess and baseball from that of practices like language and law as follows:

[P]rimary rules of a legal system are, within the ongoing practice, not definitive, just as the rules of a language are not definitive. Any attempt to freeze them in a legal code or a dictionary will fail. In spite of all the differences between language and law as practices, they are alike in that they are both in a sense organic, as games are not.

---

<sup>173</sup> “Is there a relatively simple and systematic way of understanding how fictional truths are generated, a limited number of very general principles that implicitly govern the practice of artists and critics? I doubt that any experienced critic will consider this a live possibility. I do not consider it a live possibility.” Walton, *Mimesis*, 139.

<sup>174</sup> Thomas Morawetz, “The Concept of a Practice,” *Philosophical Studies* 24, no. 4 (July 1973): 209-211.

Moves that are made within the practice have the power to erode the rules of the practice.<sup>175</sup>

A game may well be a practice, but not every practice is a game. Perhaps it's part of what it means to be a game that the rules are clearly explicable, because if they aren't, then we can't be certain about what a win or a loss is. Perhaps other, non-game practices just don't have rules like games do. This is a hard pill to swallow. For one thing, it's very difficult to maintain that things like law, language, literature, and fiction lack clear constitutive rules but nevertheless count as practices, especially if our idea of a practice is nothing more than a rule-based activity. After all, if the practice is constituted by its rules and its rules are vague and changeable, what does that say about the practice? Furthermore, while we certainly have difficulty pinning the rules down and can see that they behave quite differently from the constitutive rules of chess and baseball, the success of our collective participation is very hard to explain without appeal to definite principles, even implicit ones.

Lamarque finds an answer to this conundrum in Wittgenstein, an answer that I believe, despite all his emphasis on principles of generation, Walton himself frequently circled in his own view. What follows will be a bit heavy on quotations, but it's necessary to establish what I take to be a common thread. First, recall what Walton wrote about social imaginings:

The social activity I call collective imagining involves more than mere correspondence in what is imagined. Not only do the various participants imagine many of the same things; each of them realizes that the others are imagining what he is, and each realizes that the others realize this. Moreover, steps are taken to see that the correspondence obtains. And each participant has reasonable expectations and can make justified predictions about what others will imagine, given certain turns of events.<sup>176</sup>

This is early in the book, a point at which Walton is setting us up to move from the mental faculty of imagining, to the social activity of collective imagining, eventually to the principle-based practice of make-believe that underpins the representational arts. At this

---

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>176</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 18.

intermediary step, correspondence and the purposeful maintenance of correspondence are what's emphasized, rather than any rules or principles. He goes on to say that at this stage, correspondence is maintained at least partly by making explicit agreements of the kind "Let's imagine..." This kind of explicit agreement lacks the spontaneity, and therefore the vivacity, that's more characteristic of solitary imaginings. However, he hints that we regain spontaneity and vivacity in social imagining via things like "dolls, hobbyhorses, [...] and works of representational art."<sup>177</sup> The implication here is that the practice of representational art is intimately connected to ensuring *correspondence* in instances of social imagining with an aim toward *vivacity*. This is compatible with the notion that principles are secondary to correspondence, or agreement.

This is precisely what Lamarque finds in Wittgenstein. He notes that in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Wittgenstein says that "[t]he phenomena of agreement and of acting according to a rule hang together."<sup>178</sup> Lamarque mentions three forms of agreement: agreement in action, agreement in definitions, and agreement in judgements. Of particular interest is agreement in action, which he says "might be founded on cognitive abilities and behavioral dispositions that are more fundamental than rule-governed practices themselves."<sup>179</sup> Compare this to what Walton says of principles of generation, that the understanding of them "may be so ingrained that we scarcely notice it, so natural that it is hard to envision not having it" and that "[w]e may have been born with it, or with a nearly irresistible disposition to acquire it."<sup>180</sup> This is similar to what I argued in the previous chapter, that at least some of what we imagine in fiction is determined by our shared cognitive faculties. It's a hint that even if agreement were founded on cognitive similarities

---

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>178</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, eds. G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 344.

<sup>179</sup> Peter Lamarque, "Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 4 (Oct. 2010): 384.

<sup>180</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 41.

or shared dispositions rather than principles, the practice would remain in virtue of the agreement.<sup>181</sup>

The focus on rules comes about not just because practices with simple, unambiguous constitutive rules are a clear and convenient model on which to base messier practices, but also because it's hard to grasp how we manage to maintain a high level of agreement in complex practices like language, law, literature, and fiction without a shared understanding of implicit principles. Perhaps it is the case that our agreement is in fact maintained via rules. The point I want to make is that even if it were maintained some other way, if it were possible to have agreement not based on explicable rules, the practice would be the same. It is not having a particular set of constitutive rules, or having any constitutive rules whatsoever, that is essential to social practices. Rules are a way of securing what *is* essential: agreement. It is, as Lamarque says, "more illuminating to think of conforming to a practice as engaging in *activities of a certain kind*, underlain by agreements, than merely to emphasize the rule-bound nature of practices."<sup>182</sup>

### 2.3 Aims – *internal and external, fixed and fluid*

I've just argued that a social practice consists of certain activities and agreement, and that the agreement could be maintained by rules or by some other mechanism. However, previously I suggested that activities-plus-rules can't be the whole picture for non-game practices, because rule-guided activities are simply too broad to individuate some of our social practices from one another. This is why it sometimes seems that childhood pretend play is literally fictional on Walton's account, rather than being an analogous practice involving games of make-believe. At the same time, however, Walton suggests that many practices, including religious and scientific practices, could involve games of make-believe.<sup>183</sup> Surely religion and science are not fictional, yet they would have the right activity guided by principles of generation. If principles are in place to secure agreement,

---

<sup>181</sup> Though it should be noted that Walton seemed to be saying that cognitive similarities or shared dispositions would contribute to an *understanding of the principles* that underpin agreement. Principles would still be doing the work on Walton's view.

<sup>182</sup> Lamarque, "Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice," 384. Emphasis added.

<sup>183</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 7.

then the same counterexamples must apply against my activities-plus-agreement view. What we need is a view of practices that can account for multiple practices sharing activities and agreement (perhaps via principles) without thereby being identical.

I suggest that practices are partly individuated by their *aims* – their functions or goals. With aims, we can further distinguish between paradigmatic game practices like baseball or chess from ones like language, law, and fiction. Along with having clear and explicit constitutive rules, paradigmatic games also have what I will call *fixed internal aims*. These are not only characteristic of games but also constitutive of games – a particular game’s aim is necessary for that game to be the game that it is. By contrast, the social practices of interest to us have *fixed external aims*. Such aims are constitutive, and therefore necessary, for particular practices.

Let’s begin with the game case. The aim is easy to identify. In baseball, the aim is to get more players to home base by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> inning than the opposing team. In chess, the aim is to trap your opponent’s king such that no future move could save the piece from being captured. I refer to these aims as internal not due to any vague notion that they happen ‘in’ the game but because achieving the aim is only worthwhile in the game – the goal has game-value only. Without the practice of baseball, there is no value in more players wearing one color running over a bag on a field more times than players wearing the other color. The game provides the reason or justification for its own aim; thus, the aim is internal.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> The distinction between what is internal and external to a practice goes back at least to Rawls, when he distinguishes between summary and practice rules partly on this basis. To question a summary rule within a practice is perfectly sensible. Suppose it’s a summary rule that when an umpire calls you out, you’re out, based on many cases of umpires having sharp eyes and good judgement. But suppose that a manager disagrees that his player has struck out. If the manager asked the umpire why his player was out, the umpire would not answer “Because I called him out.” He would answer with a practice rule: “He’s out because that was his third strike.” The manager could question him further in one of two ways. One question could be “Why was that the third strike?” To this the umpire could respond with another practice rule, such as “The pitch was within the strike zone,” or “The player swung at the pitch and missed.” All the foregoing questions make sense to ask internally to the practice. But if the manager questioned the umpire further by asking why three strikes are an out, there is no further justification to be given other than “those are the rules.” Unlike the previous questions, asking this one makes sense only if one doesn’t understand the game or is proposing a change to the rules.

The aims in paradigmatic games are also fixed, in the sense that they cannot be changed while the game remains the same. We must be careful here to distinguish between the aim of the game and the aim of individual players. Someone may play a genuine game of chess, follow all the rules, but play with the goal of having their king check-mated in the fewest possible moves. While strange, this player's goal in playing would not disqualify that game from counting as a game of chess. The aim is constitutive of the game-type *chess*, not each of its instances. If we imagine a game with the same activities and the same constitutive rules of chess but in which the aim was to be the first player to have landed a piece on each square of the board, this game would not be chess. At most, it would be based on chess.

I am by no means the first to suggest that aims are a feature of games. Again, taking Lamarque as an authority on Wittgenstein, he says that "what Wittgenstein wants most from the games analogy is the basic idea of an activity with a broadly conceived 'point.'"<sup>185</sup> He mentions Wittgenstein's example in *Philosophical Grammar* of a game in which someone throws a ball in the air and catches it. Lamarque picks out catching the ball as the point, which would be the fixed internal aim in my terminology. On my view, if there was a game that also involved throwing the ball up in the air and catching it, but the point was to throw it as high as possible, then it would be a different game.

It's interesting to note that Lamarque mentions points of games in the wider context of Wittgenstein and rules of games. Wittgenstein allows for the observed variability in rules, from the complex but explicit rules of chess to the "minimal normative conditions marking success or failure" that apply in the ball-throwing game.<sup>186</sup> Lamarque conceives of the point in this game as the standard of success, presumably marked as such by the rules. This opens my view to a possible objection: that what I call fixed internal aims are not necessary to games in addition to rules or agreement because they are themselves defined by the rules. That is, what I'm calling an aim could actually be just another constitutive

---

<sup>185</sup> Lamarque, "Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice," 380.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

rule of the ‘counts as’ variety. In the baseball case, the rule would be something like “Getting the most players to home base *counts as* a win.”

I don’t think fixed internal aims can be reduced to constitutive rules in this way. The constitutive rules of games do not tell us what we ought to do without the aid of an aim. For example, one constitutive rule of baseball is that *hitting a ball that’s caught by the other team before it bounces counts as an out* and another is that *a batter making it to home base counts as a run*. These rules don’t tell you that an out has negative game-value and a run has positive game-value. An additional constitutive rule of the form *getting the most runs counts as a win* does not fulfill the same function as an aim. This is because a ‘win’ is not an action or a concept specified by the game. ‘To win’ is a pre-existing action that is not logically dependent on the rules of game, and therefore it can’t be the kind of thing that’s defined by ‘counts as’ constitutive rules. We only understand winning as something to be desired because the concept gets its meaning from outside the game – to win is just to achieve the aim. Constitutive rules do not assign value to the actions or concepts they specify; they can only get their value in virtue of the game’s aim, and the aim does not take the same form as a constitutive rule.

By contrast, social practices like language, law, literature, and fiction necessarily have *fixed external aims*. If the fixed internal aims of games are like goals, then the fixed external aims of these social practices are more like functions – what the practice achieves for its community of practitioners. The value of the aim is not confined to the practice; rather, the practice as a whole contributes something valuable to the community. Morawetz distinguished practices like language and law from games like baseball and chess along similar lines. For Morawetz, practices like language and law can be conceived as tools.<sup>187</sup> He identifies language as a tool for communication and law as a tool for securing order. On my view, communication is the fixed external aim of language and securing order (or perhaps justice or something similar) is the fixed external aim of law. For this class of social practice, the fixed external aim is necessary to it – language would not be language if the aim were not communication, no matter how similar the activities involved.

---

<sup>187</sup> Morawetz, “The Concept of a Practice,” 217.



I should make a few clarifications. The first is that the fixed external aim of a practice is not to be confused with the range of uses of a practice. For instance, a person may use (or abuse) the practice of law, the aim of which is to maintain social order or justice, to sow chaos, start wars, gain wealth for himself, and so on. It could even be the practice of a whole network of monarchs to use the law this way. But this would not change the aim of legal practice. Nor does the failure of legal practice to achieve its aim provide evidence that social order is not its aim; after all, we could not conceive of its failure without knowing that legal practice as a concept requires that it aims for order or justice.

The second is that by contrasting the necessity of fixed *internal* aims to games with that of fixed *external* aims to other social practices, I am not denying that games have external aims or that more complex social practices have internal aims. Such aims may be difficult to identify, inconsistent or varying according to circumstances, or simply not there. However, they may also be readily identifiable. Whether identifiable or not, external aims for games and internal aims for these other social practices are not constitutive of the practices. They can change without changing the practice, and so I call them *fluid* rather than fixed. It is characteristic of games that they have fixed internal aims and fluid external aims, while it is characteristic of practices like language and fiction that they have fixed external aims and fluid internal aims.

We can see this by reflecting on baseball. When we test out a few different possibilities for an external aim, each test reveals that the game in question is still baseball. Perhaps the external aim is entertainment. This is not difficult to imagine, since there is another practice built around baseball that arguably has this aim – Major League Baseball, or MLB. MLB is more complex than the game itself, with its own rules regarding trade deadlines, playoffs, and player statistics. It's not a stretch to suppose that baseball as a game occupying a central place in the larger practice of MLB has entertainment as a clearly identifiable external aim. Now we can imagine a world in which the element of spectatorship is eliminated, and baseball is only played for exercise; its clearly identifiable external aim is physical fitness. The game is still baseball, still identical to the game in MLB with a different external aim. The external aim is just not necessary to the concept of

baseball. We could run a similar thought experiment with chess or any other paradigmatic game practice. The point is not that games contribute nothing to their community of practitioners but rather that what they contribute is not necessary for the practice's being what it is.

We can perform this procedure for other social practices and see that while their external aims are fixed, their internal aims are fluid, if they can be recognized at all. Take a simplified legal practice. It consists of the essential activities of law, such as defining the right kinds of roles and offices, making decisions about what counts as a crime, codifying what is to be done in response to crimes, and so on. It also has the necessary external aim of securing order or justice. It's not a stretch to suppose that an internal aim of our actual legal system is to punish crimes that have been committed. But it's not difficult to imagine a legal practice with an internal aim of preventing crimes from happening. Perhaps an internal aim of language is to create grammatical sentences, but we can imagine a language practice for which the internal aim is to create sentences with the fewest possible words. For many social practices, potential internal aims are difficult to conjure up, I suspect because they simply aren't a necessary feature – they aren't what we care about when we talk about social practices of this type. If we want to know what a social practice like language or fiction is, we need to know what activities it consists in and what its fixed external aim is.

#### *2.4 Social entities and abstract artifacts*

So far, I've argued that what's necessary to practices are certain activities, agreement, and aims. I've focused on an analogy with games, particularly as construed by Rawls and Wittgenstein, and have tried to tease out how games and practices differ. I've suggested that while both fall under the general umbrella I've just described – activities with agreement and aims – recognizing their differences gives us an even better understanding. Games maintain agreement through explicit, unambiguous, exhaustive constitutive rules. By contrast, other, more complex social practices maintain agreement through some other mechanism, possibly implicit, adaptable principles. Games are partially constituted by their

fixed internal aims, while social practices like law and language are defined by their fixed external aims.

There's one more feature that's essential to the type of social practice that includes fiction, and it's related to the creation of social kinds. While many social practices play a part in the creation and maintenance of social *kinds*, some practices also create social *artifacts*. The distinction is that social kinds are frequently categorizations of objects that are pre-existing particulars. For instance, social kinds such as gender and race categorize people as being this kind or that, but human beings are biological entities – they would exist with or without the social kind (though perhaps they would not exist in the same way or with all the same properties). While the kind is created by or grounded in the social, the particulars are not.

Some practices, on the other hand, are responsible for the creation of completely new particular objects. That is, the social kind 'law' created in virtue of legal practice is not simply a new categorization of pre-existing propositions or commands; 'law' classifies abstract artifacts created by the practice. Analogously, language practice does not just categorize a pre-existing speech pattern as a word but creates a new object with a particular kind of relationship to that speech pattern. An analogy to paradigmatic games will again be useful here, in that this artifact creation is both similar to and importantly different from the creation of new actions via 'counts as' constitutive rules. Social practices like law, language, and fiction both create these artifacts and achieve their aims through them. Because there are social practices that arguably involve the creation of *concrete* artifacts, I will refer to social practices that create abstract artifacts as *institutions*.

Once again, the analogy with paradigmatic games gives us a simpler foundation on which to build. As Rawls notes, the practice rules of a game like baseball make some actions possible that are not possible outside of the game. It is because of the rule of baseball that says *swinging the bat at a pitch without hitting the ball counts as a strike* that strikes are possible in a game of baseball but not possible outside of the game. In a sense, *strike* is a new kind of action – perhaps it is a social kind, but it is at least a baseball-kind. It's a kind that classifies a pre-existing action as something else within the practice. This brings up

interesting questions of its own, such as whether the batter's swing and the strike are two separate actions or the same action under two different descriptions.<sup>188</sup> Whatever the case, the relationship between the movement and the strike is quite clear: one counts as the other. There can be no strike without that movement. Since they are movements and therefore a species of event, strikes also have an identifiable spatiotemporal location. There are many strikes, but a particular strike happens at a particular time and place and never happens again. This is also the case with other game-kinds like castling in chess or gimmes in golf. Some other game-kinds are not events but kinds that classify people or groups of people, such as umpires, pinch-hitters, and bullpens. In these cases, the particular instance of the kind has a spatiotemporal location and exists independently of the kind. The game's aim is achieved through these events and people.

In the social practices that I'm calling institutions, we can find many similarities. People and events will also be defined as, or count as, other things in virtue of the practice. In legal practice, individual people can be judges, defendants, and prosecutors. There are also event-kinds like trials, acquittals, or convictions. There are many trials, but each particular trial has a spatiotemporal location. There is one major difference between games and institutions in this respect, however: the primary kinds through which institutions achieve their aims are not classifications of events or roles filled by individual people, but rather abstract artifacts. They are created by the practice and have no spatiotemporal location. While they have some important relation to events or objects, the relation is not a 'counts as' relation like the kind we observe in game-kinds like strikes.

The most straightforward demonstration of this idea is in the language case. The basic view of language as a practice is one consisting of certain activities, with agreement likely secured by implicit but changeable principles, with the fixed external aim of communication. There are some language-kinds that have spatiotemporal locations – particular utterances are events, particular people count as speakers, and so on. However, the primary objects through which language achieves its aim of communication are words

---

<sup>188</sup> See Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons and Causes," *The Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 23 (Nov. 1963): 685-700; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 1-8;

(and, by extension, sentences). Particular words and particular sentences do not have a spatiotemporal location; that is, they are abstract. A particular *utterance* of a word is a non-abstract event, but it is not identical to the particular word itself.

Take the word ‘hello’ as an example. *Word* is a kind created by language practice of which ‘hello’ is a particular member. The word ‘hello’ was created by the activities of people engaged in language practice, specifically that of English. Its history and development can be traced and studied. Thus, it’s an artifact – a created object. However, it has no spatiotemporal location. This claim may seem odd, since just in this paragraph we can point to three locations of ‘hello.’ There are many instances of utterance or inscription of the word, but these cannot be the word itself, either individually or in sum. If I erase an inscription of ‘hello,’ the word ‘hello’ neither disappears nor is diminished. I uttered the word this morning, but the word is not in the past. It’s not identifiable with any concrete object or event. So the word ‘hello’ is an abstract artifact – a created object with no spatiotemporal location.<sup>189</sup>

This characterization of objects like words is controversial. For one thing, it violates some conventional wisdom about the nature of abstract objects, or *abstracta*. Abstract objects are typically thought to be eternal, necessary, and knowable *a priori*.<sup>190</sup> By contrast, I’m suggesting that some abstract objects can go in and out of existence, exist contingently, and are only knowable *a posteriori*. It also violates a standard view of particular objects in contrast with universals. Particular objects are not the sort of things that are repeatable; that feature is characteristic of universals. Yet what I’ve referred to as a particular object, the word ‘hello,’ is repeatable in the sense that it can be uttered and inscribed in many separate instances.

---

<sup>189</sup> Here I am using the word ‘abstract’ to mean only ‘lacking a spatiotemporal *location*.’ I do not intend ‘abstract’ to designate something that has no spatial or temporal properties whatsoever, as words such as ‘hello’ do, I think, come into and may go out of existence at a particular time. See Amie L. Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 37 and 127.

<sup>190</sup> For discussion, see Stephen Yablo, “Abstract Objects: A Case Study,” *Noûs* 36, no. 1 (Dec. 2002): 220-240.

These odd features of words have been the subject of much discussion in philosophy, notably by C.S. Peirce in his development of the well-known type/token distinction.<sup>191</sup> Words are paradigmatic types, able to be tokened by groups of phonemes, inscriptions, gestures, and so on. There's plenty of disagreement about the nature of types and tokens, but it's generally agreed that types are abstract while their tokens are concrete particulars. The emphasis on the particularity of tokens in contrast with types, combined with Peirce's own characterization of types as "generals," comes up against my insistence on considering word-types as *particular* objects. I have a few reasons for attributing a kind of particularity to abstract artifacts like words, even while allowing that they are repeatable types.

First, I should note that I understand particularity in contrast to *universality*, not abstraction. That is, objects are particular or universal separately from the question of whether they're concrete or abstract. For those who understand concreteness as part of the definition of particularity, then what follows will be a terminological dispute. I think there are good reasons to suppose that types are not universals, and thus more like particular objects. Linda Wetzel points out that one of the hallmarks of universals is that they are predicable of particulars, and that types are not predicable this way.<sup>192</sup> That is, we may say of a color that it is green as a way of demonstrating or defining 'green,' but we may also say of any number of non-color particular objects – leaves, carpets, book covers – that they are green. However, we can only say of an instance of a word that it is 'hello' in order to demonstrate or define 'hello.' There are no other objects to which we can predicate helloworldness as we predicate greenness of leaves or carpets. In fact, the general way that we talk about types is to talk about them as if they're objects, referring to them with singular terms.

Richard Wollheim argues that we can see the distinction between types and universals in their relations with their instances or tokens, or what he calls their 'elements.' He classifies

---

<sup>191</sup> See C.S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1931).

<sup>192</sup> Linda Wetzel, "Types and Tokens," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, (Fall 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/types-tokens>.

what he calls ‘generic entities,’ including types and universals, according to how intimate their relations to their elements are. Universals, he says, have a more intimate relation to their elements than sets to their members, since “a universal is present in all its instances.”<sup>193</sup> Types have an even more intimate relation than that, “for not merely is the type present in all its tokens like the universal in all its instances, but for much of the time we think and talk of the type as though it were itself a kind of token, though a peculiarly important or pre-eminent one.”<sup>194</sup> This is not just the point made before, that we talk of types as though they’re objects. We also attribute to them the properties of their tokens, even spatial properties such as being rectangular or being red. For Wollheim, this is not just a manner of speaking, but it’s literally true: “[e]very red flag is rectangular, but so is the Red Flag itself.”<sup>195</sup>

I think there’s another way to make this point about the abstract artifacts in which we’re interested without necessarily generalizing to all types. First, we can distinguish between a social kind and a social entity that belongs to that kind. Let’s stick with our example, in which the social kind is *word* and the social entity is ‘hello.’ We can understand the difference between the kind and the entity by using a model of ontological dependency structures developed by Amie Thomasson. I will discuss Thomasson’s view in much more detail in the next chapter, but for now just a basic overview will do the trick. Thomasson develops a system of ontological categories based on the types of ontological dependence they have on ‘real’ and mental entities. She makes two major distinctions: rigid versus generic dependence and historical versus constant dependence. Thus, an object can be rigidly constantly dependent on mental entities, generically historically dependent on ‘real’ entities, and so on. What these terms mean exactly will be explained in the next chapter.

A kind of thing, such as *word*, will have a *general* structure of dependencies while a member of that kind such as ‘hello’ will have a *particular* structure – the general structure of *word* filled out with the specific details. Let’s say that the kind *word* has the following structure of ontological dependencies: generic constant dependence on mental states of a

---

<sup>193</sup> Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968): 76.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

community of speakers and rigid historical dependence on some specific utterances. Every word will share this structure. ‘Hello’ has a particular version of this general form; exactly which mental states of what community of speakers and exactly which utterances it ontologically depends on is essential to the ontological structure of the English word ‘hello.’ Because it has that *particular* form of a general structure, I refer to ‘hello’ as a particular object in contrast with the general kind *word*.

The ontological relationship between a word-type and its tokens is not like this. It’s reasonable to think that a word is ontologically dependent on at least one of its tokens – that it needs at least one remaining token to continue to exist. It may also be dependent historically on its first tokening, as indicated by the rigid historical dependence on utterances that I suggested above. The *ontological* relation between an abstract artifact and its concrete tokens is certainly interesting, but it is not the relationship between a kind and a member of that kind, nor of a particular object and a universal.

An objection may come up at this point, that essentially what I’ve argued is that institutions like language and fiction create particular abstract artifacts like words and works, but games like baseball only create kinds that classify pre-existing objects or events. I argued this partly on the basis that particular words like ‘hello’ have particular ontological dependencies, particular properties, and traceable histories. But strikes seem no different. If the general kind *strike* has a general ontological structure, then it follows that an individual strike will have some particular version of that structure. We can also talk about ‘the strike’ as an object, trace its history and development, and make assertions about its properties like “the strike changed in 1968 with the reduction of the strike zone.” So, if I want to maintain that words and works are abstract artifacts, then I will also have to admit baseball artifacts like strikes, outs, and so forth.

There’s some sleight of hand in this objection. First, the preceding arguments aimed to establish particular words like ‘hello’ as objects, not the kind *word* as an object itself. I take it as generally agreed that kinds are not objects, hence my focus on differentiating clearly between kinds and universals on one hand, and repeatable types like words on the other. It may be that the kind *strike* has a certain general dependency structure and each



particular strike will have a particular version of this structure. But each particular strike is an event – something with a clear spatiotemporal location and therefore concreteness. There is no need, and no reason, to attempt to re-classify these concrete events as abstract artifacts. Further, to trace the history of ‘the strike’ and discuss its properties is just to discuss the development of the constitutive rules of baseball. The analogy between words and strikes does not go through precisely because there is a missing layer in the strike case: there is no repeatable particular type that both belongs to the kind *strike* and has its own concrete instances. All concrete strike events are instances of the kind *strike*, but not all concrete word events (like utterances or inscriptions) are instances of the word ‘hello.’ This is why I suggest that kinds like words, laws, and works include particular abstract artifacts that in turn have concrete instances, or tokens.

Of primary importance for this discussion, however, is the relationship between the social entity and the social practice. Each requires the other. The creation of abstract artifacts like words, laws, and works requires the stage-setting of a practice to come into existence just as the defining of moves, defenses, and roles does. This means that the above hypothetical dependence structure for the kind *word* would be missing something absolutely essential according to my view. Or, if not entirely missing, then something essential would at least be obscured by the reduction of a practice to mere mental states and utterances. The practice also requires the objects it creates, because it is through those objects that it achieves its aim.

It’s not terribly controversial to suggest that an individual person cannot create a genuine word and that language practice is required for the existence of words. One could again appeal to Wittgenstein’s view of language practice as a kind of game through which words become meaningful. Ferdinand de Saussure provided another influential account in *A Course in General Linguistics*, in which he emphasizes the system of language over individual words and argues, in a nutshell, that language is not language because it is made up of signs, but that signs are signs because of the system of language. If we accept that language belongs to a class of other practices with a similar structure – activities, agreement, and fixed external aims – then it’s not much of a stretch to suppose that a

similar practice-first ontology applies to law, literature, and fiction as well. After all, just as my utterance of a sequence of arbitrary phonemes together and a declaration that it means something does not make a word, an old man's command that kids get off his lawn or there will be consequences does not make a law.

Interestingly, an observation of one of the main differences in the theories of language of these two influential thinkers serves as an introduction to one of the enduring problems of the ontology of social entities like words. Wittgenstein emphasized action over mental states in his treatment of practices like language. Saussure on the other hand grounds language in the psychological. According to Saussure, “[l]inguistic signs, though basically psychological, are not abstractions; associations which bear the stamp of collective approval—and which added together constitute language—are *realities that have their seat in the brain*.”<sup>196</sup> Such a debate survives today in the question of the nature of social construction: what grounds social facts?

Put this way, the question is deceptively simple, implying that there is one question with one answer for the entire social world. However, when we ask about the ontology of socially constructed entities, we want to know both how they come into being and how they are constituted. What will become clear in the next section is that I don't think all abstract social artifacts need to or even could be constituted by the same things or in the same way. My preferred view of how they come into being is that the *whole* practice and its constituents – activities, principles and mental states – together ground abstract artifacts but that this is separate from the question of constitution. However, if it turned out that they come into being via mental states, conventions, patterns of activities, or functions, the practice view offered here will be compatible. I will go into greater detail on the constitution and grounding of fictional works in particular in the next section.

### 3. *Fiction as an institution*

I have just argued that a species of social practice that I'm calling an institution consists of some specific activities, agreement, fixed external aims, and the creation and use of

---

<sup>196</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *A Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959): 15. Emphasis added.

abstract artifacts. This structure marks out a class of social practice, and the details – the essential activities and the particular aims – are how we can individuate one institution from another. It is the purpose of this section to both argue for fiction’s placement in this class of social practices and to offer an essential definition of fiction by filling out the details. I will conclude that fiction is a social practice 1) essentially consisting in acts of social imagining, 2) that secures agreement via implicit, changeable principles, 3) with an aesthetic external aim, 4) that creates abstract artifacts including fictional works.

### *3.1 Fictional activities and agreement*

The most obvious and, I think, the most essential activity in fiction is one to which I’ve already devoted a great deal of space: imaginative model-building. The primary form of agreement in fictional practice is that of establishing and maintaining the correlation between our individual imaginative models. The activity and agreement together are what Walton called social imagining.

Earlier in this chapter I indicated that principles were required for this kind of imaginative agreement in fiction, even at the early stage of determining the content of imaginative models. Such principles are what Walton calls *principles of generation* because they generate fictional truths, understood as prescriptions to imagine. Later, however, I noted that some apparent principles that prescribe what is to be imagined are derived from the workings of the imagination itself, and this could be an example of agreement that’s more basic than principles, like the agreement based on cognitive abilities that Lamarque mentions.<sup>197</sup> Yet other principles are externally derived, culturally-given, and implicitly known principles, such as in the Dumbledore example. Candidates for these principles include any involving authorial intentions, community or mutual belief principles, nearest possible world principles such as David Lewis’, and others. That there is some set of principles, perhaps reducible to a single principle, that governs what is to be imagined in accordance with fictional works is a fairly common and accepted view.

---

<sup>197</sup> Lamarque, “Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice,” 384.

A sizeable amount of work has been done to make the implicit principles of fiction explicit. This is usually considered a problem of deciding what's 'true' in fictional works, or more broadly a problem of interpretation. But if we accept that principles are actually secondary to agreement, the search for principles looks more and more like a red herring, at least if the goal is to define fiction. We need only look around to see that the agreement we maintain in our fictional imaginings is imperfect, and the space left in the margins for disagreement is itself a rich source of engagement and interaction in the practice. That is, there seems to be little reason to suppose that we do in fact imagine according to exhaustive principles that can be made explicit, neither is it clear whether this would be desirable for the practice.

But the existence of disagreement should not make us worry about the stability of the practice or the fundamental agreement on which it rests. Again, what Lamarque has to say about literature is instructive here. On the topic of radical disagreements over literary works by critics, Lamarque says that "to the extent that such disagreements are grounded, thus subject to debate, within the practice of criticism, they must already presuppose fundamental *agreement* about what counts as constraints on debates of that kind."<sup>198</sup> Relatedly, "[w]e need not be overly concerned about the apparent lack of explicitly formulated rules in the practice of literature. The rules, such as they are, are made apparent in the activities that ground the practice, and the agreements endorsed by practitioners."<sup>199</sup> Something similar can be said for fictional practice. For the most part, we achieve an astounding level of agreement about what happened in, say, *Star Wars*. However, perhaps you and a friend have a disagreement about what happened in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Just before he's encased in carbonite, Han responds with "I know" to Leia's "I love you." About this fact, you and your friend agree. But your friend, no fan of Han, imagines that he meant exactly what he said with no sappy subtext. He's just an arrogant jerk. You, however, imagine that there is a subtext to Han's declaration: "I love you, too." If you were to discuss your disagreement, you would no doubt offer reasons and evidence for your imagining, perhaps pointing to other things Han has done or said, or maybe even

---

<sup>198</sup> Lamarque, "Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice," 385. Emphasis in original.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

bringing up the script or other films in the trilogy. That you both engage in the debate in good faith rather than being utterly mystified by the other indicates that you are both ‘playing the game’ correctly. Each of you ‘gets the point’ of the exercise. Thus, perhaps the implicit principles in force are simply more general than “If the work is like this, then you’re prescribed to imagine that.”

Another reason that explicating principles won’t help us define fiction is because they can change while the practice remains the same.<sup>200</sup> Without agreement of some kind, the practice falls apart. But without any one of the principles that guides us from a work to an imaginative model, the practice of fiction endures. That the principles or ‘conventions’ of fiction have changed is one of the main observations that led Friend to her view that nothing whatsoever is essential to fiction, not even imagining. But this is to confuse the main activity that constitutes the practice with a principle of the practice; it is not merely a changeable convention that we imagine fictions. We can fully acknowledge that there was, for example, a principle of fiction that prescribed us to imagine that what the narrator said was ‘true’ and that this principle was subsequently overturned by fictions featuring an unreliable narrator. Yet even with this change of convention, our understanding of what to imagine remained. Everything that grounds the practice – imagination, agreement, and its aim – does not rely on any changeable convention.

One may point out that beyond the most basic imaginative engagement lies a rich and varied collection of mental, discursive, and critical activities that also appear to be part of the practice of fiction. For Walton, as mentioned in the first chapter, these other activities are also games of make-believe, though not the ‘authorized’ ones to be played with works.<sup>201</sup> For many, this is a stretch too far in the quest for maintaining unity. It seems obvious that criticism, for instance, is not an imaginative practice or game of make-believe, but a belief-type practice involving the postulation and examination of what Van Inwagen

---

<sup>200</sup> It remains the same in the sense of retaining its identity as the practice of fiction. Of course, change in its principles counts as a change of some sort in the practice, but not a change to what’s essential for the practice.

<sup>201</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 395. This applies to criticism that refers to fictional objects such as characters. Some criticism is straightforwardly about the qualities of representations, and presumably this is not an exercise of make-believe but an examination and evaluation of artifacts, if reference to fictional objects is left out.

calls ‘theoretical entities of literary criticism.’ Such a practice, like other activities and disciplines, proceeds according to implicit principles. Thus, the principles governing fictional practice are not limited to Walton’s principles of generation that determine what is to be imagined; they also include principles that determine what is to be believed, discussed, and valued.

This is not an unreasonable thought. However, I think those other activities are not necessary to *fiction*, and that the distinction between practices is more fine-grained than is supposed in some accounts, including in Van Inwagen’s assessment of fictional objects. Lamarque talks about practices being embedded in other practices and suggests that perhaps the practice of fiction-making is subsumed by the practice of literature.<sup>202</sup> Of course, I disagree with this characterization, as so much of fiction is surely not literature. However, the insight is valuable; fiction is a practice that overlaps with many others. Writing literary works is a practice in its own right, as surely as filmmaking is. When the work being created is fictional, these practices play a creation role in fiction. All that is necessary for creation in fiction is the communication of an original imaginative model. This can be done by any number of other practices.

I think there are such fictive speech acts as Searle, Currie, and others describe. But these are optional parts of fictional practice. They are ways that fiction can be made, but not the only way. Additionally, instances of fictive speech acts are sometimes instances of fiction, but other times they’re instances of something else. We’ve seen this in the oft-mentioned counterexamples. What the analyses of fictive speech acts amount to are analyses of non-assertive *expressions of imaginings*. As fiction is a practice of shared imaginings, it’s hardly surprising that communicating a model to the community via speech acts would be a common feature. But expressions of imaginings happen in all sorts of non-fictional contexts and practices, including analogous things like the children’s games discussed by Walton but also in practices we traditionally think of as diametrically opposed to fiction. This is supported by observations made by Stacie Friend that imaginative expressions

---

<sup>202</sup> Lamarque, “Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice,” 386.

played a large role in ancient works of history. The relationship between these speech practices and fiction is one of occasional overlap.

In addition to practices of creation, the practice of criticism is separate but related to that of fiction. Fiction as a practice has grown up alongside a practice of evaluating works, a practice that creates many theoretical entities of its own, such as those mentioned by Van Inwagen. The evaluation of works is not necessary to fictional practice, however. Fiction is a practice of imaginative model-building with works as props. The analysis and evaluation of works is not an imaginative practice, but a belief-based practice. It is a practice often involving fictional works, but one that centers on how a work is to be valued and what we are to believe about a work, not what we are to imagine in accordance with it. It's no surprise, given fiction's aesthetic aim, that a practice of aesthetically evaluating works has grown up alongside it. In fact, at least some of critical practice can be described as the practice of evaluating how well particular works achieve the aim of fictional practice.

Walton makes a similar point:

Appreciating paintings and novels is largely a matter of playing games of make-believe with them of the sort it is their function to be props in. But sometimes we are interested in the props themselves, apart from any particular game. And we are interested, sometimes, in seeing what contributions it is their *function* to make to games of make-believe, what fictional truths it is their function to generate, and what sorts of games would accord with their function, without necessarily actually playing such games. This is often the interest of critics, those who seek to understand and evaluate representations.<sup>203</sup>

Here, Walton takes the function of a work to be its role within the practice: to prescribe imaginings. While criticism does involve discussing works in this way, I think it is in the service of evaluating them relative to an aim *external* to the practice. I further suggest that this external aim is implicitly acknowledged in Walton's work.

---

<sup>203</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 53.

### 3.2 Fiction's fixed external aim

Imagine there is a robust institution of career guidance counselling. Perhaps in the past these counsellors created detailed narratives of a 'day in the life' of particular careers in which their clients imaginatively immersed themselves. Perhaps they have upgraded to first-person perspective films or even virtual reality simulations, involving a great deal of skill and planning in their construction. Those who need career guidance have read and viewed these day-in-the-life guidance-works for generations - imagining their contents, discussing them with one another, debating, and considering. There are online forums dedicated to them. Vintage guidance-works are revisited and compared to contemporary ones; trends in their construction come and go, and people debate whether or not black-and-white guidance-films were better for counselling than newer ones with distracting color and effects. In this scenario, there is an established social practice of shared imaginings that maintain agreement, most likely through implicit principles. Yet, the career counselling practice is not fiction, it is counselling. This is why imagination and agreement are not enough. It is the fixed external aim that makes the career counselling what it is, and that makes the artifacts it creates guidance-works rather than fictional works. What, then, is the aim of fiction?

In the last section, I mentioned that Walton refers to the function of fictional works as their role within the practice, and that an assessment of how they fulfill this function is part of criticism. While this thought is very similar to the view I'm developing, I should be very clear about the differences. As discussed in the first chapter, one of Walton's definitions of 'fiction' is functional – something is fictional if it functions as a prop in games of make-believe. This indicates that 'fiction' is a social kind rather than a social practice, specifically a species of representation. Understanding social kinds in terms of their functions is a well-established view in social ontology and is perhaps most famously argued for by Ruth Millikan in her 1984 book *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories*. Without getting too far into the minutiae of the view, the basic idea is that kinds are created via the copying or reproduction of objects *because* they perform a certain function. In this view, historical factors, individual tokens of a kind, and the function of the



tokens all play an ontological role. It could also be that, because the copying has to be the right kind of copying, principles that determine what counts as appropriate copying could also be ontologically important.

Functional views like Millikan's are typically focused on instances of a kind, meaning that historical factors and what makes an act of copying appropriate will sometimes involve the individual actions and intentions of the creator of the object, at least in the case of artifacts. However, there are views according to which the functions of artifacts are not traceable to the intentions of creators but rather to their use in the present.<sup>204</sup> This bears a greater similarity to Walton's view. All this is to say that Walton's view of fiction as a species of representational artifact understood in terms of its function is well-supported. It is also not the view I'm advocating.

More accurately, it's not the whole view I'm advocating. I think Walton is correct in that playing the appropriate role in a particular practice is what makes an *artifact* fictional (or literary, or lawful, or linguistic, etc.). But playing the role of a prop in games of make-believe only makes an artifact fictional if those games are played in fictional practice. A doll that plays the role of prop in a child's make-believe game is not a *fiction*, it is a *toy*. In children's pretend games, props in their make-believe are toys: the practice of *play* gives the prop its toy-ness just as the practice of fiction gives artifacts like works their fictionality. This is why simply defining the role of a representation within a practice does not define fiction.

Thus, the fixed external aim of the practice as a whole is part of the essential definition of fiction. This is the sort of functional view that's needed, not a view of the functions of individual representations, utterances, or artifacts. Making explicit the roles of kinds defined by the practice, such as works, is not enough. I think this point is emphasized if we look to the actual intentions of individual authors and artists, as indicated by a view more like Millikan's. There are a huge number of ends pursued by fiction-makers via their creative acts. They may want to move people to tears, to teach them, to make a few bucks.

---

<sup>204</sup> See Beth Preston, "Philosophical Theories of Artifact Function," *Philosophy of Technology and Engineering Sciences*, ed. Anthonie Meijers (Amsterdam: Elsevier B.V., 2009), 213-233.

But these are not part of what makes fictional works what they are, and no fictional work can be excluded as a genuine fictional work because it was created to make the author money. As for how the community at large in fact uses fictional works, it is similarly varied. Readers and viewers often aim to escape reality, to be thrilled, to learn about fashion in the Regency, and to avoid talking to their date in the course of consuming fictional works. Surely none of these are the function that individuates fictional works from other social kinds. This is similar to the chess example used in the previous section: if we identify the aim as belonging to the practice rather than to any individual acts or objects, we don't have to disqualify a game of chess from really being chess when a player pursues an errant aim.

Having argued that aims belong to whole practices, what exactly is the aim of fictional practice? Earlier, we saw that Prado considers fiction to simply be the 'natural' act of world-building done for its own sake, something often said of art.<sup>205</sup> This is similar in a sense to the view I expressed in the previous chapter, in which fictional imagining was built out of more typical goal-oriented acts of imagining, but was not itself clearly an instance of goal-oriented imagining. Perhaps what characterizes fictional imaginative practice is that it's done for its own sake – that what makes fiction distinct from other imaginative practices is that it doesn't have an aim. I think the reason this suggestion seems so plausible is that it lends to fiction the kind of goal-free purity that we've attributed to *aesthetic* practices ever since the influence of Kant's ideas of disinterestedness and autonomy.

I think this is tantamount to acknowledging that there is something essentially aesthetic about the practice of fiction. As Walton notes, make-believe is not "centrally or paradigmatically or primarily a feature of the arts or an ingredient of 'aesthetic'

---

<sup>205</sup> This is typically attributed to Kant's *Critique of Judgement* but is also evident in the views of other influential thinkers, such as Theodor Adorno and Paul Valéry. It's also evident in many contemporary views of aesthetic experience, according to which having an aesthetic experience involves valuing an experience for its own sake. For example, Gary Iseminger, "The Aesthetic State of Mind," in *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Matthew Kieran (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005): 98-112.

experience.”<sup>206</sup> The aesthetic is not in the imagining or in the agreement – it’s in the aim. This is why it’s no coincidence that a practice of critical, *aesthetic* evaluation of works has grown up alongside fiction; fictional works strike us as appropriate objects for aesthetic evaluation because the aim of the practice to which they contribute is aesthetic. The aesthetic element of fiction is easily overlooked, perhaps in part because of the colloquial tendency to call everything that’s false or made-up ‘fiction,’ and many false or made-up things are not particularly aesthetically valuable.

Recall what Walton said about the use of props in social imaginings: they reduce the need for explicit agreements (of the type “Let’s imagine this ... now let’s imagine that...”) for the purpose of regaining *vivacity*.<sup>207</sup> That is, fictional works do not just function as props to prescribe imaginings; they are vehicles of an aesthetically heightened experience. We can socially imagine just fine with explicit agreements, and to any level of *completeness* that we desire. We can make as many fine-grained, detailed explicit agreements as we like, but our imaginings will nevertheless lack *vivacity*. This shows that mere completeness, or merely being fully fleshed, is not all that’s required for an imagining to be *vivid*. Vivacity is an aesthetic quality and an aesthetic merit; a focus on vivacity indicates a focus on aesthetic value or experience. If vivacity is indeed of primary value in fictional make-believe – so primary that fictional works exist in order to achieve it – this indicates that the aim of the practice is aesthetic.

But to say that an aim is aesthetic is vague. We would not say that the aim of law is justice-y or order-y in some unspecified way. However, there can be, and in fact are, disputes as to what the specific aim of a practice is or what it ought to be. For example, perhaps the aim that law actually achieves in a given society is to suppress the populace, and those in power reinforce a ‘might makes right’ ideology to this end. A philosopher comes along to argue that the real aim of law is justice or protection for the people. The arguments he makes are not that we should change the aim of law or make an entirely new practice, but that the ‘might makes right’ crowd is wrong about what the aim is. This disagreement

---

<sup>206</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 7.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

reinforces the idea that there is an aim of the practice rather than refutes it; otherwise, our philosopher and his interlocutors would be having a merely verbal disagreement.

As with law and other social practices, it's possible to have meaningful disputes about how to precisely characterize the aesthetic aim of fiction, but we can survey a few promising options. One is to characterize it as providing aesthetic experiences. However, how well this answer holds up depends on one's view of aesthetic experience. Some views ask very much of the concept and would mean that much of the 'low brow' material that is nevertheless properly fictional, such as the infamously bad *50 Shades of Grey*, fails to achieve the aim of fiction. Jesse Prinz, for example, understands aesthetic experience as an emotional state of wonder.<sup>208</sup> This aim seems too high for fictional practice. While some fictions certainly do create wonderment in their audiences, most do not. This would not be a refutation on its own, since most works could indeed fail to achieve the aim of the practice. However, it's telling that we don't seem to notice this failure. Presumably, if indeed aesthetic experience was to be identified with (or akin to) wonder, and aesthetic experience was the aim of fictional practice, it would be common knowledge that most fictional works are failures. We might agree that *50 Shades of Grey* is not a great work of literature, but it doesn't seem to be a failed fiction.

This only rules out aesthetic experience as the aim on that view, though. Suppose you have a view like Matthew Kieran's, who says that "[w]hen we truly appreciate a work, we appreciate [...] the ways in which the artistry shapes and guides our responses."<sup>209</sup> That is, aesthetic experience involves a particular kind of aesthetic attention that almost has the form of a judgement, making a connection between what the creator of the work has done and what our responses are. This standard seems too high for the community rather than for the work. Any fictional work can be attended to in this way, but it seems unreasonable to think that the majority of people bring this level of attention to the aesthetic qualities of works in their everyday consumption of fiction. This sounds much more like critical attention. If this kind of attention were the aesthetic aim of fiction, then we would expect

---

<sup>208</sup> See Jesse Prinz, "Emotion and Aesthetic Value," in *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology*, eds. Elisabeth Schellekens and Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71-88.

<sup>209</sup> Matthew Kieran, *Revealing Art* (London: Routledge, 2005), 213.

that the community of fiction makers and appreciators would be much smaller than it is, perhaps displaying the exclusivity of the world of high art.

Similar discussions could be had for other proposals as well. Perhaps the aim of the practice is to provide aesthetic value to the community via their imaginative experiences, even if they don't qualify as properly aesthetic experiences according to some views. That is, perhaps practitioners can have an aesthetically valuable experience without needing to be in a state of wonder and without necessarily paying any special attention to the aesthetic properties of works or the imaginative experience itself. Again, depending on one's view of aesthetic value, it could be objected that much of what's considered good by fictional standards fails to count as genuinely aesthetically valuable. Maybe the kind of aesthetic value provided by fiction could be more correctly characterized as entertainment.

Frustratingly, this seems to set the bar too low. We could reasonably classify the aim of a practice like slapstick comedy as entertainment, though there could plausibly be outliers – examples of slapstick routines that deeply move us. But those fictions that deeply move and even upset us don't seem to be outliers in fictional practice, nor are they examples of failed fictions. It's hard to argue with Aristotle's assessment that the 'pity and fear' elicited by tragedies is a reason to watch them, whether you agree that it is for catharsis or something else. Entertainment has the connotation of 'fun' or 'light-hearted,' and as such I suspect that many would struggle to characterize their response to works like *Schindler's List* as 'being entertained.'

Despite these disputes, fiction does have *some* aesthetic aim. This is not to say that fiction does not or cannot achieve other things, either externally or internally. Individual fictional works often have many actual uses and relatedly have many types of value, from the cognitive to the moral.<sup>210</sup> However, these other aims are fluid rather than fixed. In virtue of being created by a practice which has the aesthetic as its fixed external aim, fictional works

---

<sup>210</sup> For discussion on the many uses of works, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980): 1-29. See also Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Eileen John, "Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 331-348.

have a primarily aesthetic aim. What individuates the practice of fiction is that it consists in acts of social imagining for an aesthetic purpose. Social imagining without an aesthetic aim can be, as we saw in the previous section, any number of other practices, from therapy to philosophy to history. An aesthetic aim without social imagining can be any number of non-fictional art practices, or even ritual or ceremonial practices. It is the imaginative activities, agreement, and an aesthetic fixed external aim that makes fiction what it is.

### *3.3 Fictional works*

I've argued that, like other practices of the same kind, fictional practice is in the business of creating entities that serve the practice's function. These are entities that, though I differ with Van Inwagen on whether 'theoretical entities of literary criticism' is the most apt characterization for all of them, may include such things as "novels (as opposed to tangible *copies* of novels), poems, meters, rhyme schemes, borrowings, influences, digressions, episodes, recurrent patterns of imagery, and literary forms ('the novel,' 'the sonnet')." <sup>211</sup> However, I think some of the foregoing, and maybe even all of them, are entities of literary criticism as Van Inwagen supposed, a related but separate practice from fiction. The primary entity in fiction, and the one we can be sure is a product of fictional practice rather than a related practice, is the fictional work. Its centrality to the practice is as Walton describes – the fictional work is the prop in our social imaginings, it is what streamlines agreement in our imaginings and gives us the vivacity we want from fiction. From works and combinations of works we build our models and 'worlds.' So, when we ask about fictional entities, fictional works should be the first place to start.

What are fictional works? It's a question I can't hope to answer fully here. From the preceding arguments, we can say that fictional works are abstract artifacts. They are created in virtue of fictional practice in order to achieve the aesthetic aim of that practice. They play the role of prop in the imaginative activities of the practice. They may be created by certain actions within the practice, such as fictive speech acts, the molding of clay, or the writing of computer code. Relatedly, they come in the form of various media, such as written language, films, cartoon drawings, computer animations, and so on.

---

<sup>211</sup> Van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction," 303.

As a ‘what is’ question, again I think there are multiple forms the answer can take. One thing we want to know about is the composition of a fictional work, for lack of a better term. We want to know about its structure, its intrinsic properties. What is it *really*? Perhaps for fiction this is more difficult than for other classifications of works, precisely because of the possible variation in medium. If a written work is different in nature from a painted work, but either kind of work can be fictional, then perhaps there is no unity to fictional works. Even worse for my view, perhaps painted works just are the physical object – the canvas and the paint. If there is a distinction between abstract, repeatable works and concrete, unrepeatable works, this casts considerable doubt on my insistence that fictional works are always abstract.

We need not accept this distinction. Let’s take paintings as paradigm concrete works of art and let’s grant for the sake of argument that DaVinci’s *Mona Lisa* is a fictional painting.<sup>212</sup> There are a few intuitions that lead us to suppose that the canvas and paint is the work and that copies of the *Mona Lisa* are fundamentally different from copies of *Hamlet*. Most obviously, “I saw the *Mona Lisa*” and “I saw *Hamlet*” have different meanings in a very important respect. You would not say you had seen the *Mona Lisa* if you meant that you’d seen a copy of it, but you would say you’d seen *Hamlet* if you’d seen any one of its many token performances. This indicates that *Hamlet* is the sort of repeatable thing that has tokens, and seeing the token is how one sees the work. On the other hand, the *Mona Lisa* is not the kind of repeatable thing that has tokens. You can only say you’ve seen the work *Mona Lisa* if you’ve seen the physical object. It does not have tokens, merely copies.

An obvious response here is that I *would* say that I’ve seen the *Mona Lisa* despite never having stepped foot in the Louvre, that everyone has seen the *Mona Lisa* unless they’ve lived under a rock. My interlocutor would surely grant this but clarify that the way in which I’ve seen the *Mona Lisa* is like the way I’ve seen the Grand Canyon, not the way I’ve seen *Hamlet*. In some sense, everyone has seen the Grand Canyon unless they’ve lived

---

<sup>212</sup> This may be a stretch for some who take a narrative to be necessary for a work to be fiction. I hope that something like “There is a woman. She smiles enigmatically,” is enough to count as a narrative, or is at least close enough for this thought experiment.

under a rock. But mere photos or representations of a thing are not tokens of the thing. Such is the case with the *Mona Lisa*.

However, I think this difference in intuitions is explained by contingent cultural factors rather than any essential differences between the works. There are many more similarities than differences in the ways we treat originals of any work, be it literary or painting or even architecture. We live in an artist-worshipping world that all but deifies our creative geniuses. As such, we value what they've touched with their own hands. We feel that the original is a more important part of artistic and human heritage than any other tokens of the work, because they represent the creation of that work. Though works are not identical to any physical object, many of them are created via the creation or manipulation of a particular physical object.

If literature is supposed to be a paradigm case in which the work is not physical, and the physical object is valuable because it's the work itself, what explains the obsessive search for a piece of original Shakespearean writing? If an original, handwritten draft of *Hamlet* was ever found, it would no doubt be encased in glass in the British Library, monitored by some of the most sophisticated security systems on Earth. It would be an absolutely priceless object. Yet, I know of no account on which it would be identical to the work *Hamlet*. Let's revisit our apparent disanalogy. When I say I've seen the *Mona Lisa*, it's generally understood that I mean I've seen the painting in person. A listener would be helped in this if they knew I've been to Paris recently, and if I tell them that I've seen it with the appropriate amount of excitement. Now imagine that it's common knowledge that there's a handwritten original *Hamlet* in the British Library (there isn't), and I come back excitedly from my trip to London and tell my friends that I've seen *Hamlet*. The apparent differences dissolve once the scenarios are corrected for contingent factors.

But let's consider a sad possibility: that the original *Mona Lisa* is destroyed. We would be more inclined to say that the *Mona Lisa* has been destroyed rather than to say that the original *Mona Lisa* has been destroyed. Furthermore, we would be less inclined to say of *Hamlet* that it has been destroyed in the event that the original handwritten manuscript was



destroyed, or so the thought goes.<sup>213</sup> There is reason to think that in this case, our way of speaking is odd. Suppose we think that a copy of the *Mona Lisa* is not itself a token of the work, but more like a photograph of the Grand Canyon, and this explains why we would consider the work to be destroyed rather than just a culturally important token of the work. This is rather odd, since the copy fulfills the same function as the original painting. We can imagine a perfect copy hanging in its place, affording aesthetic experiences to its viewers. Being a perfect copy, it can be analyzed and criticized exactly as the original could. We've lost no information about it, whether it be formal, historical, or socio-political. We can still talk about the work having those historical, social, and formal properties just as we'd talk about *Hamlet* having those properties. Conversely, a photo or other representation of the Grand Canyon cannot fulfill the same function as the original – you can't climb down it, or fly over it, or camp in it.

Of course, the view that all aesthetic works are abstract objects is not new and has been a staple in art ontology. In fact, the kind of view I've argued for can be summed up by this passage from C. I. Lewis' *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, after noting that works of music, literature, and drama cannot be identified with any physical object:

On these points, a painting, a cathedral, or a piece of sculpture seems to differ from a musical composition or a literary product. A picture, edifice or statue may likewise fail to incorporate fully the intention of the creator. But at least esthetic objects of these classes are embodied once for all in physical individuals; and the distinction of any entity so incorporated from the physical embodiment of it seems uncalled for. On second thought, however, this difference can be viewed as one of degree rather than of kind. For example, when we stand before a masterpiece of painting or of sculpture, we may be reminded of something which is common to this physical object and various more or less adequate reproductions of it, some of which we may have observed before. Is it this canvas or this marble which is the object of esthetic contemplation, or is this only the 'original' and most adequate incorporation of

---

<sup>213</sup> I'm not convinced this is true, but I'll grant it for the sake of argument.

it; the thing itself being an abstract entity here embodied or approximated to, in these fading pigments or this stone which already shows the marks of time?<sup>214</sup>

Lewis considered these abstract entities to be theoretically repeatable, or able in principle to be incorporated more than once.<sup>215</sup> This view, together with Rudner's analysis, marked the introduction of the type/token distinction in the ontology of art.<sup>216</sup>

So perhaps fictional works are created abstract types with a special relationship to the concrete objects or events that are their tokens. This general answer is all we need for now, though it may not be very satisfying. There are some more specific views on offer from the world of art ontology that we can conclusively rule out, and others that make good candidates for adaptation to the fictional case.<sup>217</sup> For instance, we can rule out Lewis' view that the abstract object is an "esthetic essence" that is in turn constituted by "a complexus of properties."<sup>218</sup> If a complexus of properties is a set of properties, then this is not an artifact but an eternally or atemporally existing thing. Similarly with Wolterstorff's view of works as norm-kinds, or kinds that can have properly or improperly formed examples.<sup>219</sup> While his view of works as norm-kinds offers solutions to pervasive problems in some type/token views, giving up the artifactuality of works is a price we can't afford to pay.

There are some promising possibilities elsewhere in the literature. Wollheim's type/token view initially seems to allow for types to be invented.<sup>220</sup> The problem is that sometimes Wollheim's view is so general that it's not very helpful, or even confusing. He says that "[a] very important set of circumstances in which we postulate types [...] is where we correlate a class of particular with a piece of human invention: these particulars may then

---

<sup>214</sup> C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle: Open Court, 1946): 470.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 477.

<sup>216</sup> Richard Rudner, "The Ontological Status of the Esthetic Object," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 10, no. 3 (Mar. 1950): 385.

<sup>217</sup> It should be noted that these views are specifically about *art* works. I make no assumptions about the relationship fictional works have to art works. Specifically, I do not mean to say that fictional works are a species of art work, nor that the present disqualification of any of these views amounts to a refutation of them as views of art works. Art ontology simply provides the best body of work from which to mine ideas.

<sup>218</sup> Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, 478.

<sup>219</sup> Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, 58.

<sup>220</sup> Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 78.

be regarded as tokens of a certain type.”<sup>221</sup> Essentially, either a particular object is created and subsequently copied or a set of instructions is laid out from which particulars are made. This may be how we identify a type, but it’s not clear what the ontological status of the type is in this view. It doesn’t seem to be the ‘original piece of human invention;’ that is, the original particular or the set of instructions. Perhaps it’s the content of the instructions, like a structure of some sort. But if that’s the case, then the type cannot be invented but only discovered and then communicated for copying, in which case we have to rule out Wollheim’s view on the same basis as the others.

However, Levinson develops a type/token view for musical works that could be adapted to the fictional case. For Levinson, types are structures of a particular sort, but they’re *indicated structures*. In the case of a musical work, Levinson thinks that the work is a structure of sound and performance means, or a S/PM structure. Of course, these structures exist eternally. However, the act of composition serves to *indicate* this structure in a particular place at a particular time and in a particular context. By an act of creative selection, the composer’s indication of this structure creates a new type – the S/PM structure with the musico-historical properties attained by its indication in a unique context.<sup>222</sup> Though Levinson argues for the S/PM structure particularly for musical works, it’s conceivable that works in other media can be adapted to an indicated-type view. Perhaps literary works are indicated verbal structures, visual works may be indicated color structures, and so forth. What we get from Levinson is primarily the hope that we can develop a view according to which works are both abstract and artifactual.

Besides our urge to know what exactly fictional works are supposed to be, we may also wonder about their special relationship to their tokens, particularly their originals. This is related to another type of answer we could give about fictional works – an answer detailing its structure of ontological dependencies. I’ve argued that fictional works have ontological dependence relations with their tokens as well as to the practice itself, including the mental states and actions of its practitioners. However, I will leave these more intricate

---

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Jerrold Levinson, “What a Musical Work Is,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 1 (Jan. 1980): 20.

metaphysical details for the next chapter on fictional objects, in which we'll trace Amie Thomasson's nuanced ontological argument from the acceptance of fictional works to the acceptance of fictional characters on the basis that they share an ontological category. For now, it's enough to say that we have good independent reason to think that fictional works are abstract artifacts created in virtue of fictional practice and through which fictional practice achieves its aim.

### *Conclusion*

I've argued that rather than identifying fiction as a type of utterance embedded in a social practice, we should identify fiction as a social practice of a particular class, with a focus on what individuates that practice from others. I've developed a view according to which practices in general consist in certain activities, agreement, and aims. Games, the typical paradigm case, are the most straightforward: they maintain agreement via exhaustive constitutive rules and have clearly identifiable fixed internal aims. I've called the class of social practice that includes language, law, and fiction *institutions*. Institutions consist of some necessary activities, agreement (plausibly maintained by implicit rules), and fixed external aims. They also create abstract artifacts through which they achieve their aims. Fiction is an institution, the necessary activity of which is social imagining. Agreement or collaboration in what is imagined is maintained partly by cognitive and dispositional similarities in the practitioners and partly by implicit principles. Fiction's aim is aesthetic, and it achieves this aim by its created artifacts, particularly fictional works. Assuming fiction is a social practice, its individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions are that it: 1) consists in acts of imagining; 2) maintains collaboration or agreement in the imaginings of its practitioners relative to particular works; 3) that has an aesthetic fixed external aim; and 4) that it creates abstract artifacts through which it achieves that aim. Having arrived at this characterization of fiction, we can formulate definitions for fictional works, fictional propositions, and any other fictional thing by explicating its role in fictional practice. Anything that is fictional is fictional in virtue of fictional practice. Put another way, all uses of 'fictional' derive from fiction as a practice. Having arrived at a view according to which fiction is an imaginative practice that creates abstract artifacts, we

can construct a metaphysics of fictional objects that performs better than others according to the central paradox.

## Chapter 4 – A dualist theory of fictional objects

### *Introduction*

“We agree that any consistent theory of fictional objects must give up appearances somewhere.”<sup>223</sup> Conventional wisdom tells us that fictional discourse is so hopelessly contradictory that either radical paraphrases or ‘voodoo’ metaphysics is necessary to solve the problem. I aim to challenge this wisdom by offering an account of fictional objects that directly follows from what was argued in the previous two chapters. The account may be surprising, as it’s a synthesis of two positions that appear diametrically opposed: possibilism and creationism. One might think that this doesn’t challenge the conventional wisdom at all, but merely gives up consistency to achieve full (or fuller) compliance without our fictional intuitions. However, ‘consistent’ need only mean ‘monist’ if one approaches the question of fictional objects from a purely metaphysical perspective, with no foundational theory of fiction as a whole on which to build. Though the metaphysical account I offer here is dualist, it is consistent in virtue of following directly from an independently plausible view of fiction – a view which itself is based on and explains the same intuitions about fiction that guide the purely metaphysical views.

I’ve argued that imagining is the primary activity in fiction and that an understanding of the basic structure and functions of imagination will help us understand what fiction is and how it works. In terms of imagination’s cognitive structure, I argued that it is a modelling faculty much like belief, but that it involves no commitment to the actuality of what it models. That is, with respect to the actual world, there is no veridical norm for imaginative models as there is with belief models. I argued that both belief models and imaginative models are similar in their (albeit imperfect) maintenance of internal consistency and the inferential enrichment of the model. These are basic features of all representational mental models. Imaginative model-building, however, is not simply belief-type model-building unrestrained by veridical or evidential norms. Imaginative model-building has norms of its

---

<sup>223</sup> Francesco Berto, “Modal Meinongianism and Fiction: The Best of Three Worlds,” *Philosophical Studies: A Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 152, no. 3 (Feb. 2011): 314.

own, one such being that it represents what is *possible*. It follows from this that the intentional objects of our imaginings are *possibilia*.

The previous chapter was an exploration of fiction as an artifact-creating social practice built around these central acts of imagining. I argued that fictional works, like words and laws, are abstract artifacts that are socially constructed by practices. As a consequence, the creation of a fictional work requires more than just the creative acts of an individual – those acts must be contextualized by the ‘stage-setting’ of the practice. This is why I say that the practice creates the works rather than mere individuals. I suggested that we conceive of works as abstract artifacts, perhaps similar to Levinson’s indicated types, that enjoy a particular position in the ontological hierarchy given by Thomasson. Moreover, I hinted that works are not the only *abstracta* created in the course of fictional practice.

In this chapter, we’ll see the culmination of these two views into a novel dualist theory of fictional objects. There are those objects about which we *imagine*, and those objects we create and about which we have *beliefs*. The first I will argue are *possibilia*, and the second are abstract artifacts with a special type of ontological relationship to fictional works. These two kinds of object are intimately related; so intimately, in fact, that we call them by the same names, sometimes within the same sentence. This interchangeability is a large part of the motivation for hanging on to the monist assumption – that ‘Paul Atreides’ refers to the same object, if any object, in any utterance in which it appears. However, there are many examples of everyday talk in which we implicitly differentiate them from one another. We have an intuitive grasp that they are different kinds of thing and consider someone confused if they do not have a similar grasp of this fact. Both of these tendencies can be explained by reference to the practice and the dualist metaphysics that follows from it.

I’ll begin by addressing a major consequence of my view that is importantly related to the question of fictional objects: what counts as fictional truth. I will offer a view according to which fictional worlds are hypothetical projections of perfect agreement among fictional imaginings, and as such there is no fully determinate fact about what’s ‘true’ in a given fictional world. I will then lay out an alternative conception of fictive utterances, which I

will simply call imaginative utterances, based on Gricean intentional structures and the mental models account from Chapter 2. This sets up a preliminary semantic analysis of fictional names, which is the topic of the third section. Finally, I will move on to an analysis of the objects about which we imagine: the possibilia that are the intentional objects of our representational imaginative models, which I will call *fictitious objects*. The biggest hurdle for this view is the question of indeterminacy – how do we ‘choose’ one possible object over another to be our fictional object, when there are so many that fit the description given by the fiction? In overcoming this, we will have to do some philosophy of language and ask ourselves how fictional terms and names operate. Ultimately, I’ll argue for a view in which fictional terms and names function much like roles do, a view heavily inspired by Currie’s account of transfictive uses of fictional names. However, unlike in Currie’s view, it is not the function itself that the name picks out in the case of our imaginings about fictions. It is the values of the function: the cluster of possible objects about which we imagine.

Following this, I will use the idea of fictional terms and names as predicates to make the connection to fictional objects as described by Thomasson: abstract artifacts with a particular ontological dependence structure. For clarity, I will dub these abstract artifacts *ficta*, singular *fictum*.<sup>224</sup> Both these types together form the class of objects that are typically called ‘fictional objects’. I will argue that *ficta* come into existence initially with a fictional work and develop as independent entities with further imaginative acts, enabling them to ‘appear’ in other works. Thus, like fictional works, they also depend for their existence as *ficta* on the cultural institution and its rules and have the properties that they do in virtue of these rules. They belong to the same ontological category as fictional works and because of this, as argued by Thomasson, we gain nothing in ontological parsimony by denying fictional objects while admitting fictional works.

Once having developed the dualist view in light of the current theory, I shall put it to the test by way of the central paradox. I will use two methods of solving the paradox: one in

---

<sup>224</sup> I’m aware that, of course, this is a synonym for ‘fictional objects’ in the literature, as is ‘fictitious objects’ and ‘fictional entities.’ As far as I’m aware, no one else has made the distinction, so my use of terminology is stipulative and intended to avoid confusion.



which each type of fictional sentence is treated as a proposition *simpliciter* with a fixed meaning and truth value, and one in which each is treated as an utterance to which we assent. The first solution, which I call the *externalist* solution, makes use of operators and modifiers and results in each sentence being true and consistent with the others. This solves the paradox by dissolving it. However, I will show why I find it insufficiently explanatory, and opt instead for a solution in which the types of fictional claims are utterances made and assented to with respect to particular mental models. I will call this the *internalist* solution. This solution is both informed by the theory and overcomes the various shortcomings of the externalist solution.

### *1. What is true in fiction?*

The question of truth in fiction has been a mainstay in the philosophical literature on fiction, both for aestheticians and for metaphysicians and philosophers of language. While ‘truth in fiction’ can mean a number of things, only one of these meanings is related to the metaphysics of fictional objects in the way that concerns us here. One conception of ‘truth in fiction’ is the one that most likely comes to mind first: the presence (or absence) of truths about the actual world in fiction. We could talk about the truth in fiction as thinkers like Aristotle or Hume did. For Aristotle, the made-up particulars of mimetic art served to illuminate universal truths about the kinds involved; thus, the tragic story of Oedipus, though Oedipus is not a ‘real’ particular man, expresses universal truths about mankind.<sup>225</sup> Similarly, Hume had the following to say about truth in fiction:

Poets themselves, tho’ liars by profession, always endeavour to give an air of truth to their fictions; and where that is totally neglected, their performances, however ingenious, will never be able to afford much pleasure.<sup>226</sup>

It’s reasonable to suppose that this ‘air of truth’ is not mere realism, since he contrasts it with everyday lies, which themselves can often be very realistic. It seems similar to Aristotle’s thought, that some kind of truth lies within the made-up content of fiction,

---

<sup>225</sup> Aristotle, *On Poetics*, trans. Seth Benardete and Michael Davis (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), 1451a37-1451b34.

<sup>226</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 118.

though perhaps not universal truths as Aristotle had it, and this is why poems are pleasurable while mere deceit is not. Whatever the connection may be to our experience of the fictions or to their aesthetic value, many contemporary theorists hold that fiction can contain some kind of truth and that, moreover, we can gain some kind of knowledge from it. Many accounts limit this kind of knowledge to modal, moral, or conceptual truths, but others contend that we can learn empirical facts about actual particulars from fiction as well.<sup>227</sup>

Though I think the account I offer has interesting things to say about the cognitive value of fiction, unfortunately I don't have the space to engage with that notion of truth in fiction here. Instead, the notion of truth in fiction that we'll be dealing with is more aptly called 'truth *according* to fiction,' or just 'fictional truth.' This is the sense of the truth or correctness of a proposition like "Paul Atreides was born on Caladan" in contrast with "Paul Atreides was born on Mars." Even for one who thinks we can learn empirical facts from fiction, this surely would not count as one of those actual-world truths. However, we cannot say it's false and leave it at that, since we must explain why it's not false in the way that "Paul Atreides was born on Mars" is false. That is, it's not false according to the fiction.

It may seem that saying it's true only according to the fiction is enough. Equivalently, we might say that it's not *actually* true but that it's part of the story, that everything that's 'fictionally true' is just what happened in the story, or some other approximation of the same idea. It's tempting to say that fictional truth is nothing more than that, and that asking repeatedly what this notion of 'truth' really amounts to is just a bit pedantic. However, further complications arise when we consider disagreements about what's fictionally true,

---

<sup>227</sup> For some examples, see Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 133-164; Stacie Friend, "Believing in Stories," in *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*, eds. Greg Currie, Matthew Kieran, Aaron Meskin, and Jon Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 227-244; David Novitz, *Knowledge, Fiction & Imagination* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Dustin Stokes, "Art and Modal Knowledge," in *Knowing Art: Essays in Epistemology and Aesthetics*, eds. Dominic Lopes and Matthew Kieran (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 67-81; Ben Blumson, "Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (Sep. 2015): 46-57.

or what happened in the story. Did Han really mean that he loved Leia when he said, “I know,” or is he simply arrogant? Who is correct and why?

We could break up the field of discussion on fictional truth into a number of interwoven debates and spectra on which positions may fall. There are debates regarding how what’s true according to a fiction is related to what’s explicitly expressed by the work; while many accept there are implicit truths in fiction and debate over the principles that determine them, others completely deny this.<sup>228</sup> We’ve seen that there are anti-intentionalist views such as Walton’s according to which what the creator of a work intends may not figure at all in what’s true according to a fiction, while on the opposite end there are views defending a sort of extreme intentionalism according to which every fictional truth is intended by the creator.<sup>229</sup> Some argue that truth in fiction is restricted in the same ways that it’s restricted in the actual or other possible worlds, while others argue that truth in fiction is not restricted at all.<sup>230</sup> What’s common to all these debates is the assumption that there is a fact of the matter, whether or not truth in the actual world acts as a model for ‘truth’ in fictional worlds.

All of these positions, even those written from a non-aesthetic perspective, build from and aim to make their view consistent with at least some purported facts about fictional practice. David Lewis, for example, though he approaches the problem as a challenge for modal semantics, rests his view on the plausibility of two claims about fictional practice. One is about reception – that the audience regards fictions as if they’re stories told as known fact – and the other is about creation – that fictions are created in acts of storytelling that are essentially acts of pretense.<sup>231</sup> Whether these claims are true of

---

<sup>228</sup> For an interesting recent debate on this, see William D’Alessandro, “Explicitism About Truth in Fiction,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 56, no. 1 (Jan. 2016): 53-65; Ioan-Radu Motoarcă, “A Bad Theory of Truth in Fiction,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 57, no. 4 (Oct. 2017): 379-387.

<sup>229</sup> Kathleen Stock, *Only Imagine: Fiction, Interpretation, and Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>230</sup> See Richard Hanley, “As Good as it Gets: Lewis on Truth in Fiction,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 1 (March 2004): 112-128; Nathan Wildman and Christian Folde, “Fiction Unlimited,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 75, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 73-80.

<sup>231</sup> Hanley considers these the “core ideas” in Lewis’ approach to truth in fiction. Hanley, “As Good as it Gets,” 112.

fictional practice is another matter, but the view is not disconnected from any account of how we do fiction; even Lewis sees the importance of looking to the practice.

Looking to the view developed here, a basic answer to fictional truth presents itself. Remember that we have something of a Waltonian inheritance, modified by shifting the focus from principles to agreement and from any and all games of make-believe to an imaginative practice with a fixed aim. For Walton, what's true in a fiction is what's prescribed to be imagined with the work and the principles do the prescribing.<sup>232</sup> Though the principles do a lot of explanatory work, Walton doesn't hold out much hope for making them explicit, much less reducing them down to a single principle. He also thinks that some disagreements about what is true in a fiction, even when everyone involved is fully informed about the features of the work, can't be settled even in principle.<sup>233</sup> Further, he argues that it's in the nature of fictional worlds that they're indeterminate – there are no facts about Gregor's grandfather in the fictional world of the *Metamorphosis*, it's not just that we have trouble coming to know them.<sup>234</sup>

What we call 'fictional worlds' are not worlds in the way that possible worlds or even Currie's qualitative worlds are. They're hypothetical projections of perfect agreement. In other words, they're a hypothetical, completely determinate imaginative model. The perfect model doesn't exist and this is not down to our inability to properly follow the principles. As I argued in the previous chapter, whatever implicit principles there might be that prescribe what we are to imagine, they are simply not exhaustive. However, we represent fictional worlds *as being determinate*. That is, while the principles may not prescribe any particular imaginings about Gregor's grandfather, it is certainly part of our *Metamorphosis* model that there are facts about Gregor's grandfather *for Gregor*. The model is not itself determinate, but it represents the 'world' of its contents as being determinate. We can understand, then, why we debate, discuss, and hypothesize about

---

<sup>232</sup> It's worth noting that works are not the only things that can function as props in make-believe for Walton. Individual propositions or passages can also serve as props, which means for Walton, as for Currie, the same work can have fictional and non-fictional 'parts.' My use of 'works' here describes the Waltonian element in my practice theory more than it does Walton's original position. See Walton, *Mimesis*, 90.

<sup>233</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 138.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

fictional ‘worlds’ as if there is an answer, even though, as Walton says, there sometimes is no answer. This does not make our analyses or debates about the contents of individual fictions pointless, however. After all, we aim to achieve vividness in our imaginative experiences of fiction. To strive for a more fleshed-out ‘world’ and treat it as an exercise in discovering what’s really there is to deepen the engagement with the prop for a more vivid and immersive experience.

What does this have to do with fictional objects? It’s usually assumed that if one is a possibilist about fictional truth, as David Lewis is, then being a possibilist about fictional objects follows. This may be true, but the reverse is not. I’ve advertised this as a synthesis view broadly between possibilism and creationism, or artifactualism, and as such I do accept possible objects as a partial analysis for fictional objects. But this is not on the basis that truth in fiction is truth relative to possible worlds. Rather, it’s on the basis that the intentional objects of our imaginings are possibilia. The answer to why “Paul Atreides was born on Caladan” is true is not that it’s true in a restricted set of possible worlds that are candidates for the fictional world. The answer is that it’s true in the story; that when we express the proposition that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan, we are predicating of the objects of our imaginings that they are candidate subjects of the fiction. What exactly this means will shortly be explained, but for now it’s enough to say that a possibilist solution to fictional objects does not presuppose a possibilist solution to so-called fictional truth.

## *2. An alternative conception of fictive utterance and fictional operators*

I’ve argued that fiction is a complex practice that creates social kinds and abstract artifacts. The practice is one of acts of shared imagining and necessarily proceeds with agreement among participants – likely through implicit principles – and has an aesthetic fixed external aim. By conceiving fiction as a practice of imagining, I’ve followed Walton in veering away from the intentionalist and creation-focused character of the standard fictive utterance accounts. I’ve also repeatedly indicated that this is only one of many imaginative practices that may involve the kind of discourse that is typically called ‘fictional discourse.’ I think now is the right time to clarify what my view has to say about fictive utterances and to make clear the important ways in which it differs from standard accounts.

In standard accounts, the fictive utterance is a special kind of creative speech act. By having the right intentional structure and (on some accounts) being embedded in the right kind of practice, the fictive utterance conveys the property of fictionality to the proposition that it expresses. This is unlike a property of propositions such as truth, which belongs to propositions independently of how they're uttered. Similarly on Lamarque and Olsen's account, the fictive utterance determines the content of the proposition that's expressed, again unlike other utterances such as assertion.

Importantly, fictive utterances are only made when one is *telling a story*, distinct from any other type of engagement with fiction. This makes sense if it's the utterance that's responsible for a proposition's fictionality. Subsequent utterances of the same sentence-type as a storytelling utterance, even though they may appear to be identical in meaning, cannot be the same type of utterance because they do not convey fictionality to what's expressed. I do not make it fictional that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan each of the many times that I repeat it. There's something intuitively correct about the idea that Frank Herbert's original utterance is special, because he *couldn't have been wrong about where Paul Atreides was born*. He could have written that Paul Atreides was born anywhere and he would have been correct. By contrast, if I subsequently say that he was born on Mars or on Arrakis, I would be wrong, whether I imagined that of Paul Atreides or not. So, if you have a fictive utterance view of fiction, it makes sense that this difference would be explained by the original utterance's being a special kind of speech act: a *fictive* act. Every subsequent utterance, even of the same sentence-type and with the same meaning, is not one of these fictive acts but an *assertion*. This is why my subsequent utterances about Paul Atreides can be either *right* or *wrong*. They're genuinely true or false assertions, depending on how accurately they report the content of a story.

However, Herbert's privileged position in *Dune*-related utterances need not be explained by a different speech act if we accept a representational modeling view of the imagination and that fiction is an imaginative practice. In fact, I think this is not the most intuitive or consistent way to go about it. Again, an analogy with assertion is illuminating in this case. Many conversations are composed mostly of assertions. In such conversations, we

generally expect that our interlocutors will conform to some conventions, such as Searle's rules for assertion; we expect that each participant will believe what they say is true and be willing to provide evidence for its truth. Assertions are *expressions of beliefs* (when they're not defective in some way, as in the case of lying). We can frame this by looking back to the view of mental representation from Chapter 2. Our belief models are representations of a single world: the actual one. Since we all live in the actual world, we expect our belief models to represent the same thing and thus conform to one another. This is how a conversation can proceed meaningfully. Even when we have disagreements, we understand that our disagreements are about the same thing: the actual world. Presumably, the point of these assertive conversations is to bring our belief models to a greater degree of conformity or agreement. We utter our own beliefs intending that others will come to believe them and sometimes we come to new beliefs ourselves when we have a persuasive interlocutor. When someone engaged in this type of conversation obstinately asserts a belief that can be clearly demonstrated as false, or simply lies, then *they're doing it wrong*, but they're still asserting.

The assertive conversation consists of speakers giving verbal expression to what's represented in their belief model. Their representations are all aimed at the same thing – the actual world – and this provides the measure for correctness. The right way to go about the conversation is the way that brings about the greatest conformity of belief models and belief models conform to one another by representing what obtains in the actual world. Ultimately, then, the measure of the correctness of an act of assertion is how true it is. In an assertive conversation, no one is in a privileged position. *Every interlocutor is equally capable of being wrong relative to the truth*. The truth is determined by the actual world, so anyone other than God is possibly wrong. So far, this fits with standard accounts of fictive utterance. The one doing the fictive uttering does not have the same capacity for being wrong about the same content as someone making an “In the fiction” assertion, so perhaps this difference can be attributed to a difference in speech act type.

However, consider non-assertive, imaginative conversations. These are also conversations that consist of speakers giving verbal expression to what's represented in one of their

mental models. However, imaginative models do not represent a world that comes pre-differentiated from all others, with a determinate set of facts. Some imaginative models do not even represent single or determinate worlds.<sup>235</sup> This means that the conventions of imaginative conversation cannot be the same as for assertive conversation. While we still aim for conformity in our models, the standard to which we conform is not truth, nor is it already given by any state of affairs independent from the conversation and its context.

In casual imaginative conversations, no one person is in a privileged position regarding the direction that the conformity of the models takes. For example, a group of friends may engage in some shared imagining purely for laughs. It could start with one friend saying, “What if...” and the rest of the group building on the initial premise. Each person adds every other’s addition to their own representational model in this instance of social imagining, maintaining the sort of stipulative collaboration that Walton says is typical of social imagining without the use of props. Each person performs the same kind of speech act in expressing their imaginings: the sentences they utter express propositions that have as their content what is represented in their imaginative model and they intend that the others imagine the content with them. Despite there being no pre-differentiated world they all aim to represent, the participants in this imaginative conversation still operate according to a minimal standard of correctness and this standard is determined by the goal of the conversation. Say that among this group of friends the goal is amusement. If one chimes in with an imaginative utterance that spoils that goal, that friend has done it wrong. The others will not add the spoiling contribution to their individual models and the episode will probably grind to a halt, particularly if the imaginative offering was offensive, gruesome, or tragic. Nevertheless, that friend still expressed an imagining and intended her friends to

---

<sup>235</sup> I should clarify this use of language, since it could be argued that *no* imaginative models represent single or determinate worlds. There are two senses in which a mental model could represent a determinate world. On one sense, it represents a determinate world by being a *determinate representation* of a world. This is the sense according to which no imaginative model represents a determinate world, since we could never mentally represent every fact in a world. However, according to this sense our belief models would also not represent a determinate world. There is a sense in which both our belief and some of our imaginative models represent determinate worlds: when ‘this world is determinate’ is part of the content of the representation. The model represents a world *as being determinate*, without being itself a determinate representation. I think there are clear cases in which imaginative models do not represent worlds as being determinate, most obviously in some philosophical thought experiments.



imagine it as well. She still performed the same speech act, just as in the assertion case, but she did it wrong.

We should not expect that this model would change when the standard of correctness privileges a particular participant. We can understand why one person might have a privileged position relative to the content of imaginative models by appealing to the practice, rather than by positing a distinction between otherwise identical speech acts. Take an intermediary case, one in which there is a person with content-privilege *and* in which other participants can add to the content: an improvisation exercise between scene partners and an acting coach. This practice is more formalized than the casual conversation, but less formalized than fiction. The acting coach has the final say on what happens in the imaginative scenario. The students elaborate on the initial premises provided by the coach and they can do so both with imaginative utterances and by other means, such as facial expressions or body language. In the course of the exercise, the coach can change the model at any point by shouting a new premise from offstage, because the aim is to challenge the students and to develop their ability to imaginatively react.

However, developing the imaginative scenario consistently with the coach's premises is not the only standard of correctness for the students. It's also conventional that no student should make a contribution that is inconsistent with or overturns a previous contribution by another student. Acting students will recognize it as the "never say no" rule. This does not privilege any particular student, but instead privileges elaborations that come first.<sup>236</sup> This standard can again be attributed to the goal of the exercise: students are being taught to be imaginatively flexible and reactive. If they cannot maintain collaboration with their scene partners by developing an imaginative scenario with them, rather than steamrolling over other contributions with their own individually developed model, then they are not achieving the objective of the practice.

---

<sup>236</sup> This may seem like basic courtesy, but the same rule does not seem to apply to casual shared imaginings. If the purpose is amusement among friends, one friend could say "Imagine if she dropped the birthday cake, how funny would that be?" Then another friend could add, "No, what if she tripped and threw the cake at the birthday boy?" This would be perfectly within the bounds of such a conversation because it builds on a theme (ruining the cake) for the purpose of amusement. The overturning of a previous premise is acceptable because the standard for 'correctness' is relative to the goal of making the participants laugh.

We can further elaborate on this example to anticipate an objection. In the scenario with the acting students and their coach, every participant is still able to contribute original content to the imaginative narrative. But suppose that the scene partners are just two students in a twenty-student acting class. The remaining eighteen students are merely an audience, with no power to contribute to the developing narrative. If they utter anything at all about the improvisation, then surely they are making assertions about what happened in the scene. This is not the same as making fictive utterances *within* the scene. When they are wrong, they're wrong because they make a false assertion about what happened, not because they made a rejected contribution to the scene. This audience is analogous to appreciators of fictional works, so the objection goes, while the scene partners and the participants in the casual conversation are analogous to authors.

This is a compelling point, because there *is* something special about some imaginative utterances in fiction. In the practice of fiction, some of these utterances are used to make works and we tend to think of those works as arriving to us in a state of completion. That is, the props around which we imagine are completed objects to which we as imaginers can add nothing. But this is not the same as adding nothing to the *collaborative imagining*. The analogy between the audience of the acting exercise and all the non-creator participants of fiction fails in the *boundaries of the practice*. In the acting exercise, the only participants are the students in the scene and the coach; the aim is the skill development of those two students, guided by the coach. No work is created in that exercise – this practice of in-class improvisation play is not a work-creating practice. Though the other students may watch with interest, they are not participants and their watching does not contribute to the aim.

In the case of fiction, the aim of the practice as a whole is aesthetic and our imaginative engagement with props strives for vividness. The 'audience' watching a fictional film is not like the audience that watches an improvisational exercise. The film is made for the active imaginative engagement of those watching. The film 'audience' is an active participant in the practice and the vividness of their acts of imagining are the aim of the work that they watch. It is part of the practice of fiction that a participant can take on a creator role – a role defined by the practice – and set the foundations of a new model by

creating a prop that we call a work. Sometimes, this work is created by making imaginative utterances of the type I've described: utterances that are expressions of the imaginings of the utterer, the contents of which the utterer intends others to imagine. Creating the prop lays the foundations for the new model. It's not the creator of the fiction that enjoys a privileged position, but rather the prop that they created with their utterances. Once having released the prop, the creator cannot simply make any new fictive utterance and thereby change what is to be imagined with the work.

In the case of the novel *Dune*, Herbert crafted a work with imaginative utterances. The aim of this work was to be a prop in shared imaginings. We put our tacit understanding of the practice to work in our imaginings of *Dune* and this allows us greater immersion and vividness. Herbert sets the foundation of our *Dune* models, which we collaboratively build. Having the model set for us, we do not have to overtly signal the model that we give verbal expression to when we discuss the events and characters of *Dune*. The work is the standard of correctness for our later expressions, but those expressions are not assertions about the content of any work. They are the same kind of imaginative utterances as Herbert made. When I express my imagining that Paul Atreides was born on Mars, I'm wrong because I have failed to build my model according to the standard of correctness given by the practice of fiction. I'm wrong in a way that's *analogous* to someone's wrongness when they assert a demonstrably false belief, but not in precisely the same way. Assertions can only be wrong relative to actual truth and it is not actual truth that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan.

Similarly, some works are made by making assertions, such as autobiographies. Once having read R. G. Collingwood's *An Autobiography*, I've acquired beliefs about Collingwood and the evolution of his thought, presumably just as he intended that readers of his autobiography would. I can assert those beliefs about Collingwood without asserting anything about the autobiography. Once I have a particular attitude toward some content, I can express that content without making any implicit comment about how that content or my attitude toward it originated. Since my view of imagination is one of building

representational models of our own, there's no reason that an expression of that content needs covertly be an assertion about a story.<sup>237</sup>

This view has consequences for the work done by the "In the fiction" operator. Like other views, particularly Currie's, it's important to acknowledge that there actually is no single "In the fiction" operator. The fictional 'operator' is always specific to something. For Currie, it's specific to individual works. For the view developed here, it's specific to the hypothetical perfect model. It's part of fictional practice for us to strive for agreement between each of our *Dune* models, but it's also part of the practice that we update our *Dune* model with everything in the *Dune* canon, or 'world.' This may consist of multiple works. This is important because the operator shifts the context of the utterances under it, not to some general fictional context but to the context of the *Dune* 'world' in particular. Like the original fictive utterances, the operator fixes the model that is being talked about. This is similar to Lamarque and Olsen's view, on which fictive utterances and the fictional operator both do the work of cutting off inference to the actual world and shifting from make-believe direct reference to actual indirect reference in the case of fictional names. However, unlike Lamarque and Olsen's view, *the operator does not capture what the speaker means by the utterance.*<sup>238</sup> The speaker who utters "Paul Atreides was born on Caladan" no doubt has the mental transparency to also believe that in the work *Dune*, Paul Atreides was said to be born on Caladan. However, this is not what she means by her utterance. She does not make an assertion, or express her belief, about a story. She gives direct verbal expression to some of the content of her *Dune* model. The fictional operator is a device used to identify the model from which our speaker expresses content; it makes the context of utterance explicit. It is not part of the utterance itself, either semantically or with regard to speaker meaning.

To sum up, my view has it that we have many representational mental models, at least one of which is a belief model and many of which are imaginative models. When we verbally express the contents of our belief model, we make assertions: we believe what we say and

---

<sup>237</sup> 'Story' here is used to refer to an actual entity of some sort, like 'narrative' or 'work.' It is not meant to refer to any temporally ordered set of possible states of affairs that may be *described by stories.*

<sup>238</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, 85.

intend for others to come to believe it, partly because they will grasp that we are asserting. However, we are not limited in our verbal expressions of models to assertions of belief. There are many contexts in which we express our imaginings with the intent that others imagine them, partly because they grasp our intention. Since belief models represent the actual world, the standard of correctness is truth. Imaginative models are built differently, for purposes that are not related to their veridicality. Their standard of correctness will be determined either by the goal of the particular instance of imagining or by the practice of which they are a part. In fictional practice, works serve as props to enhance the vivacity of our collaborative imaginings. Works are sometimes composed of imaginative utterances. When they are, these utterances that craft a work form part of the standard of correctness for imaginings using the work as prop. However, while the work is a special object in the practice of fiction, the imaginative utterances that make it are still the same type of speech act as everyday imaginative utterances.

A proponent of the standard account of fictive utterance may object that the speech acts performed in Herbert's utterance and my utterance of "Paul Atreides was born on Caladan" are not the same, because they do not have the same individuation conditions. There are two objections of this type. One has to do with the basic intentional structure. We can see this if we think back to Wolterstorff's basic definition of the fictive stance as one of "*presenting, or offering for consideration, certain states of affairs.*"<sup>239</sup> Only the storyteller can be accurately described as presenting the fiction, hence why subsequent utterances of the content are described as *reports*. Presenting is fictive, but reporting is an assertion about what was presented. Subsequent utterers may indeed imagine the content themselves, but they do not intend others to imagine it – they come to the discussion already knowing that their interlocutors imagine it as well.

I think this objection overstates the difference and would apply to assertions just as easily.<sup>240</sup> It's true that, when we discuss fiction, we often discuss it with others who are

---

<sup>239</sup> Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, 233.

<sup>240</sup> To avoid moving off into another discussion on contentious matters in the philosophy of language, I'm sticking with what I take to be a standard assumption in much of the philosophy of fiction: that assertion can be understood via a Gricean intentional analysis. I don't deny that some other definition of assertion

familiar with the works and who we can be fairly sure already have imaginative models of the right type. This is how someone may be said to be ‘already imagining’ something, even if they’re not imagining it occurrently at this moment, or before we bring it up.<sup>241</sup> The possible objects and states of affairs that are the intentional objects of our imaginings have already been ‘picked out’ by the work and thus have already been presented. So, when we discuss with each other, much of what we say will already be part of our interlocutors’ models. It’s also true that, when we discuss *actual* matters, we often discuss it with others who are familiar with the topic at issue. Even when we discuss a topic about which we disagree, much of what is said are basic facts known to all participants. The subsequent interpretation of those facts is presented for others to believe. Yet, even the statements of facts known to all involved count as assertions. They are expressions of belief that the utterer intends others to believe, no matter how weakly.

Analogously, much of fictional discourse consists of utterances the content of which every participant will already have represented in their model. However, there are disagreements in fictional discourse just like any assertive conversation about the actual world. My friend and I agree that Han said “I know” to Leia, but she presents to me the imagining that Han is just arrogant and meant nothing more than what he said. The balance between what is newly presented and what is already accepted is the same in the case of assertions as it is in fictional discourse. Yet, we would not say that assertions of already-known content are not really assertions. We standardly have conversations with our friends during which we reminisce, tell each other stories we already know, and bond by expressing and evaluating shared opinions and beliefs. Nevertheless, these conversations consist of assertions of belief.

The other objection of this type is one that points out that the practice of storytelling is itself part of the identity conditions for a fictive utterance, at least according to views like Lamarque and Olsen’s. This is indeed part of their view, but it need not be the case that speech acts of the type we’re interested in are individuated this way. The disagreement is

---

may yield different results. See Herbert Paul Grice, “Meaning,” *The Philosophical Review* 66, no. 3 (July 1957): 377-88.

<sup>241</sup> Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 16-18.

about where to draw the bounds of discrete actions. For Lamarque and Olsen, fiction is the practice of making the type of utterance they describe. The utterance consists in several conditions, two of which are a particular intentional structure and the compliance with a practice of storytelling. These conditions define the creative, fictive act on their view.

Conversely, I have argued that fiction does not necessarily involve utterances. On my view, there is a type of speech act that is an expression of an imagining. This imaginative speech act *can* be used to craft fictional works, but it can also be a stand-alone act in a casual conversation, or an act constitutive of some other practice. The act of creating a work is the type of act, like Wolterstorff's world projection, that is done *by doing something else*. Sometimes, this something else is making utterances of a certain kind. Just as an assertion is still an assertion whether it's made in conversation or in crafting an autobiography, so the imaginative speech act is still an imaginative speech act whether it's made in conversation or in crafting a fictional work. On my view, an imaginative speech act's involvement in the act of creating a work does not change it into a different act.

### *3. Fictional reference and the foundations of dualism*

I've argued that there is an imaginative speech act involved in fictional discourse, but that is neither necessary nor sufficient for creating fiction. The imaginative speech act is analogous to assertion but is an expression of content from a particular imaginative model rather than one of content from a belief model. Since imaginative models represent possible objects and states of affairs with no commitment to their actuality, imaginative utterances are not true or false the way assertions are. The standard of correctness for an imaginative utterance depends on the context of utterance, the purpose of the model, and the practice of which the instance of model-building is a part.

In Chapter 2, I argued that it's a norm of imagination that it models possibilities. Therefore, the intentional objects of imaginings are possible objects and states of affairs. The names and terms we use in our imaginative utterances refer to the intentional objects of the mental state that we express. So, when we make an imaginative utterance, we normatively refer to

possibilia.<sup>242</sup> Additionally, fiction is the kind of social practice that I call an institution; it is a large-scale, collaborative practice that creates social entities and artifacts. Some of these artifacts are fictional objects. When we make assertions about fictional objects, such as “Paul Atreides was created by Frank Herbert,” we refer to these actual abstract artifacts.

This means that the reference of ‘Paul Atreides’ is ambiguous. The ambiguity of reference in the case of fictional names is a well-established view, at least as far back as Kripke. Often, however, it is ambiguous between referring to nothing at all and referring to an abstract artifact. On my view, it either refers to a cluster of possible objects or an abstract artifact. This is a consequence of my imaginative practice view of fiction, as I just described. Another, more familiar way to frame the view is as a modification of Currie’s ontology. Remember from Chapter 1 that Currie has a three-part semantic analysis for fictional names. His fictive and metafictional uses are based on his analysis of fictive utterance versus assertions made under the fictional operator. On my view, however, there is no difference between so-called fictive and metafictional uses – they are both imaginative utterances.

The part of Currie’s analysis that is of primary interest here is that of transfictional uses. When we appear to talk about fictional characters outside of the fictional operator, we refer to roles that pick out possible people. This is a broadly similar picture as the one that results from my imaginative practice view of fiction. Rather than merely specifying work-bound roles, however, creators of fiction bring dynamic abstract artifacts into existence: artifacts that transcend their originating works and whose properties and relations can change over time. The relationship between the abstract artifacts and the possible candidates on my view is not as straightforward as the function-and-value relation in Currie’s theory. The abstract artifacts that we tend to call ‘fictional characters’ are created by the practice and their relation to possibilia is determined by the practice. When we imagine with a fictional work, we represent some possible objects and states of affairs and we refer to those possibilia with our intrafictional talk. Intrafictional talk is a practice-based species of

---

<sup>242</sup> I stress that this is normative rather than descriptive, as things can go ‘wrong,’ such as in the case of *a posteriori* identity failure mentioned in Chapter 2 and the connection between our imaginative acts and possible referents fails.



imaginative utterance. When we use the name ‘Paul Atreides’ in an intrafictional claim, we refer to all those possible people that are candidates for the character in the story. We use the name ‘Paul Atreides’ to predicate of those possibilities that they are such candidates. The practice is responsible not just for establishing the relationship between its abstract artifacts and the possibilities represented in the imaginings of each participant, but also establishing the relation between the possible Paul Atreides candidates imagined by each participant and those imagined by each other participant.

This semantic view and the specifics of the resulting metaphysics is what I will develop in the coming sections. However, there’s one major hump left to get over before we entertain dualism. On Currie’s view, we never refer to the possible candidates picked out by the role, only to the role itself conceived as a theoretical entity. He explains:

Someone is Holmes in a world  $w$  if he is the value of our function  $f_h$  at  $w$ . If it is possible for me to have been and done all the things Holmes is said to be and do, then there is a world in which I am and do those things and in that world I occupy the Holmes roles; I am Holmes in that world. But that does not make me or the countless others about whom we could say the same thing the *subject* of the Holmes story. Doyle’s use of Holmes is not a reference to me – no more than the policeman’s use of “Smith’s murderer” is a reference to me just because I might have murdered Smith.<sup>243</sup>

What he’s showing here is that talk about a role is not talk about each or any of the role’s possible values. However, the force in the Smith case comes from the fact that, in this example, Smith was murdered in the actual world, the detective believes the role of Smith’s murderer is occupied by an actual person, and he makes assertions about that person via his use of ‘Smith’s murderer.’ Of course, there is no person he refers to merely because that person is *possibly* the murderer. But surely he does refer to *some* person by his use of ‘Smith’s murderer,’ because that person occupies that role in the actual world – the world about which the detective is making his assertions. This, I hasten to add, comports

---

<sup>243</sup> Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, 180.

perfectly well with Currie's account, according to which our transfixive utterances are assertions about roles in the actual world that just happen to have no actual-world value.

However, we shouldn't ignore the disanalogies in the Smith's murderer case. First, when the detective talks about Smith's murderer, he is never talking about the role, but always its actual-world value. The detective does not need to know the identity of the murderer to talk about him. It's difficult to conjure up an example in which the detective would be referring to a role, because 'Smith's murderer' isn't the kind of socially-defined office that counts as a theoretical entity of the type that fictional characters are on Currie's account. To make things clearer, let's use the office of the president of the United States instead. When we say that the president was born in the 1940s, or that the president is a man, or that the president gambles, we are referring to the actual-world value of the role. When we say that the president has never been a woman, we are saying something about the role rather than any one of its occupants. Most sentences about the office are explicit about this: "The office of the president was established in 1776," "This behavior is beneath the office of the president," etc. The detective never uses 'Smith's murderer' this way; this 'role' can only have one actual value because it picks out the perpetrator of a singular, unrepeatable crime. There is no reason to talk about Smith's murderer unless you are referring to the actual person who murdered Smith. The *interest* for this role is entirely in its actual-world value.

Fictional characters are not like this. We can distinguish between types of roles based on the possibilities for their values. Presumably, some roles have no actual values and no possible values. Others will have exactly one actual value and many possible values. A third kind may have many actual values and even more possible values. A fourth kind will have no actual values but many possible values. 'Smith's murderer' is a role with only one actual value, but many possible values. 'The president of the United States' is a role that has many actual values *and* many possible values. Our primary interest in roles that have actual values is *in their actual values*. We care about the role 'Smith's murderer' only because we want to catch and imprison the actual value of the role. We care about who is, has been, and will be the *actual* president of the United States. Only secondarily might we

imagine about the non-actual possible values of that role. Merely fictional characters have no actual value; we have no beliefs and make no assertions about the actual value, other than the trivial belief that it doesn't exist. Our primary interest is in their possible values. It is the possible candidates for those roles that we represent in our imaginative models.

When Currie uses the murderer analogy, we think "*Of course* the detective couldn't be referring to him just because he possibly fills that role!" This is because the way we treat actually-filled roles is importantly different from how we treat fictional characters.

However, even without the analogy, it's plausible enough that the Sherlock Holmes stories are not *about* Greg Currie. I think there's also a sleight of hand in this move. It does not follow that a fiction is about an actual person if that actual person's possible counterpart is a candidate for a fictional character. There's a difference between imagining of an actual person that they did all the things Sherlock Holmes has done and imagining about possible Holmes candidates, of which one is an actual person's counterpart. Even if we accept that names are rigid designators, this does not mean that we have *no* way at all of referring to some of an actual person's possible counterparts without also referring to that actual person.

What is of interest to us in the Holmes stories is not which actual people may have Holmes counterparts, and our 'picking out' of possibilities in our imaginary representations need not be transparent or determinate. For me to imagine the possible blond-haired version of myself and make imaginative utterances about him, I need not consciously know exactly how many blond-haired counterparts I'm mentally representing, or what their other features are, or anything else about them to nevertheless represent them and refer to them with singular language: 'the possible blond-haired Ash.' I pick these possible people out by an identity relation, and predicate of them that they are me with blond hair. In the fiction case, we pick out the cluster of possible people not with an identity relation but with a Holmes-candidate relation, or an Atreides-candidate relation, and predicate of them that they are candidates for subjects of the story. We need not know whether or how many actual people might have an identity-relation counterpart among these possible people in

order to mentally represent and refer to them. The picking out is interest-relative, and the interest is determined by the practice.<sup>244</sup>

#### 4. *Fictitious objects*

To begin our discussion of the metaphysics of fictional objects, I will start with those objects we discuss imaginatively in intrafictional contexts: fictitious objects. Fictitious objects are the fictional objects about which we imagine using a fictional work as a prop. They are the intentional objects of our acts of imagining in fictional practice: that which is represented in our imaginative models. This is true in the telling, experiencing, and recalling of fictional narratives. Fictitious objects are at once types of possible object, imaginary object, and fictional object.

What I'm about to argue for is partially a possibilist account of fictitious objects. David Lewis is perhaps the best known possibilist about fiction, and this view is certainly indebted to his. However, our positions have very different motivations. Lewis's primary motivation was to provide an analysis for fictional truths – those propositions that are considered true according to particular fictions – using modal semantics. My motivation comes from considerations about our imaginings; if imaginings are representational models of possible states of affairs, then it follows that the constituent parts of those states of affairs are possible things.

The basic idea is that both creating and appreciating a fiction involves building an imaginative model. The model is a representational or intentional state. Imagination normatively represents possible states of affairs. Possible states of affairs consist of possible objects and events. Representational models consist of representational tokens. Thus, to model possible states of affairs, representational tokens in an imaginative model represent possible objects and events – the corresponding constituents of the states of affairs they model. Parts of models can be expressed propositionally, which in turn can be

---

<sup>244</sup> The idea of fictional characters being interest-relative is also present in the creationist account offered by Peter Lamarque in *Work and Object*, 191-8.

expressed via language.<sup>245</sup> This is so both with belief models and imaginative models. Thus, when I express some portion of my *Dune* model propositionally, such as “Paul Atreides was born on Caladan,” that proposition represents a possible state of affairs, and its constituents such as ‘Paul Atreides’ and ‘Caladan’ represent the constituents of that state of affairs – in this case, a possible person and a possible planet.

#### 4.1 Indeterminacy

The first problem that must be addressed is indeterminacy. If the Paul Atreides about which I imagine is a possible person, which possible person is he? There seems to be no principled reason to choose one possible person accurately described by the fiction over the many, perhaps infinitely many, others. Implicit in this objection, famously made by Saul Kripke, is that fictional names like ‘Paul Atreides’ are rigid designators – terms that pick out the same object in all possible worlds. The name ‘Frank Herbert’ as we use it in the actual world picks out the man who is author of *Dune* in the actual world. However, we can use this rigid designator to discuss that very man as he is in other possible worlds, regardless of whether or not his name is ‘Frank Herbert’ in that world or if he’s the author of *Dune* in that world. Thus, it does not function like a role such as ‘the current president of the United States.’ In the actual world, that expression refers (unfortunately) to Donald Trump. In some other possible world, it refers to Hillary Clinton. It is a non-rigid designator.

It’s reasonable at first blush to suppose that all names come to have their referents in the same way and that they function as referring terms in the same way. After all, it may seem a bit strange to accept the causal theory of reference for some names but be a descriptivist about others. However, standard views of fiction, particularly fictive utterance views, do deny that fictional names function like ordinary proper names, and have principled reasons to maintain this small disunity. I think there are two ways to go about an analysis of fictional names, and which is better will depend on one’s prior commitments. If one is committed to the view that proper names are directly referring expressions, then we can

---

<sup>245</sup> This may be redundant if one takes propositions to be linguistic entities, but I’ll remain neutral with respect to the ontological status and metaphysical nature of propositions.

proceed with a view that the names of fictitious objects do not function in the same way as everyday names do. The difference would not be arbitrary or *ad hoc* but would have to do with how we come to know these names. If one is put off by the disunity of suggesting a completely different semantic analysis for fictional names but is not particularly committed to a direct reference view, we could instead conceive of names as predicates.

To put it very simply, to use a name is to predicate of an object that it has that name.<sup>246</sup> This is controversial, because proper names are widely thought to have only their one referent as their semantic content. Though many people have the ‘same’ name, on direct reference and definite description accounts, the ‘same’ names that refer to different people are not really the same, but merely homophones. On a predicate view, they genuinely are the same name, because they predicate the same property to objects: the property of being called that name.<sup>247</sup> Nevertheless, instances of names that appear to be the subject of an utterance, or in the ‘argument position,’ can still designate a limited number, including just one, of the things that bear the name. This restriction is done by context.<sup>248</sup> In the case of fictional names, it is true of each possible Atreides candidate that he has the name ‘Paul Atreides’ in his world. However, not all possible people who bear the name ‘Paul Atreides’ are one of our candidates.<sup>249</sup> The context that restricts the designation of the name is fixed by the same thing that fixes the context of our utterances: the practice. Specifically, the work and the ‘world’ of the work, determined by the practice, fix the context.

Even on such an accommodating view as predicativism, there’s still something unusual about our use of fictional names. Fictional names are count-nouns on this view, meaning that we can refer to multiple people with a single use of the name.<sup>250</sup> However, even in those uses, we still pluralize the name. That is, we will talk about all the *Alfreds* we know or the two *Clotildes* at the party. However, we only seem to talk about the one Paul Atreides, despite the name and context picking out many possible people. Though this is

---

<sup>246</sup> Kent Bach, “The Predicate View of Proper Names,” *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 11 (Oct. 2015): 772.

<sup>247</sup> Delia Graff Fara, “Names are Predicates,” *The Philosophical Review* 124, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 65.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>249</sup> I have already restricted the context to possible people, having established that no actual person could be our fictional Paul Atreides regardless of what his name is.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-3.

strange, I don't think it's unique to *fictional* names. Rather, I think it's a feature of using names for possibilia in general. Any time we talk about possibilities, we necessarily talk about many, even infinitely many, possible individuals; this is because the descriptions we use to pick out possibilia are always indeterminate. Typically, we talk about the possible counterparts of actual people related by identity. Because I am in some way identical to all the possible blond-haired Ash counterparts, it makes some kind of sense to just talk about 'the possible blond-haired Ash.' Perhaps when we pick out possible counterparts by some other relation, such as the non-identity relation of being an Atreides candidate, the mechanism is the same despite the counterparts being non-numerically identical.

However, there may be a principled reason that our talk about fictional possibilities is anomalous. Consider first the name of the actual-world person Frank Herbert. Without committing to any particular view of reference, let's simply describe the facts as we know them. Frank Herbert was born and at some point, dubbed by his parents 'Frank Herbert,' and this name was confirmed by our society in the typical ways, with official documents and perhaps a christening. From then on, that particular person was introduced and known by this name.<sup>251</sup> Some people were introduced to him directly and came to have knowledge of the reference of 'Frank Herbert' by their own perceptions. Others, such as myself, came to know Frank Herbert via a description: the author of *Dune* and other novels. Though my knowledge of the man is limited, the intentional object of my belief that Frank Herbert wrote *Dune* is the same as those who met him directly.

Now let's think about Frank Herbert's possibilities. We know that there is a possible Frank Herbert who is not called 'Frank Herbert' in *his* world but is named instead 'John Smith.' We also know that there is a possible Frank Herbert who never wrote the novel *Dune*. We also know that there is a possible Frank Herbert who was a peanut farmer. We also know that there is a possible Frank Herbert named 'John Smith' who never wrote *Dune* and was a peanut farmer. How do we know all these things? Merely because they are conceivable:

---

<sup>251</sup> This is only intended as a description of typical usage of the name, not any commitment to a view about what makes the name refer to a particular person.

this is how we get our knowledge about possibilities.<sup>252</sup> There can be no knowledge of mere possibilities gained by directly perceiving the merely possible, as possible worlds are causally isolated from one another. Yet notice that in each of our propositions about possible Frank Herberts, ‘Frank Herbert’ refers to the very man regardless of whether he is named ‘Frank Herbert’ in his world. We use the name as a rigid designator, fixed by an actual-world person. We comfortably refer to his possible counterparts with that name, and there is no confusion caused by the proposition “Frank Herbert is named ‘John Smith’” when we understand that we are discussing other possible Frank Herberts.

Most fictitious objects are different.<sup>253</sup> There is no one person about whom we imagine in accordance with *Dune* that we rigidly designate with the name ‘Paul Atreides.’ When we imagine about Paul Atreides, we are not imagining the possibilities of any one actual person, conjuring up propositions about their possible-world counterparts and only their counterparts (whether those counterparts enjoy an identity relation with the actual person or something like Lewis’ counterpart relation).<sup>254</sup> The possibilities we imagine are instead what I’ll call *free floating*; they are possible states of affairs known to be possible only through their conceivability and that are unanchored to actual-world objects.

If it’s conceivable that the reader or I are named ‘Paul Atreides,’ live far in the future, and otherwise have all the properties and experiences about which we imagine in accordance with *Dune*, both the reader and I imagine, in some sense, about our own possibilities when we imagine about Paul Atreides. But this is only true in the loosest sense; we need not ever explicitly think that we, or any other actual person we know of, could have been Paul Atreides.

---

<sup>252</sup> This is a controversial point but arguing for it is beyond the scope of this work.

<sup>253</sup> I say ‘most’ because sometimes we imagine the possible counterparts of actual people who are rigidly designated by their name in works of fiction, such as the common example of Napoleon in *War and Peace*.

<sup>254</sup> From now on, I will frequently refer to either identity or a ‘counterpart relation.’ By this I mean particularly Lewis’ I-relation, not something else like Lewis’ counterparts by acquaintance, which will be mentioned shortly. Though the I-relation is not identity, it functions similarly to identity in that it makes modal claims true. The basic account argued for here ought to get along either with transworld identity or something like the I-relation, without having to elaborate too much about what exactly the I-relation is beyond the truth-maker for modal claims.



It's worth recalling the distinction discussed in Chapter 2 between object-based imagining and propositional imagining. Object-based imagining is the kind of imagining in Walton's tree stump example. To imagine that a tree stump is a bear during an imaginative game is to imagine of an actual thing that it is something else. Propositional imagining need not involve imagining of any actual thing that it is something else. So, in keeping with the example, imagining while you sit at your desk that you are in a forest and that there is a bear before you is propositional imagining. There is no prop in your environment to materially represent the bear. But even much of propositional imagining is object-based in a different sense. To imagine that you are in a forest is to imagine something of an actually existing object: yourself. Represented in your imaginative model is the possible state of affairs that you are in a forest.

To imagine free-floating possibilities, on the other hand, involves the creation of a role that possible objects fulfill. To imagine my possible selves involves no such creation – the 'role' exists independently of any creative activities of mine as a prior, metaphysically existing relation (either an identity or counterpart relation). The roles created by imaginings of free-floating possibilities are created via descriptions that possible people and objects fulfill. Thus, all the possible people who fulfill the role of my *Dune* model's Paul Atreides are not identical to one another in the way that I'm identical to my possible manifestations. This view is a notational variant of Lewis' counterparts by acquaintance and Currie's account of transfixive uses of fictional names.<sup>255</sup>

We ought not to think that these are two distinct types of imagining, as with the distinction between object-based and propositional imagining, but rather imagining about two distinct types of things. For example, in *War and Peace*, 'Napoleon' rigidly designates the actual historical figure. Thus, in my *War and Peace* model, the content of my imaginings includes a collection of possible Napoleons: possible men who must bear an identity relation to the actual man Napoleon and who do and say all the things Napoleon does and says in *War and Peace*. 'Napoleon' in *War and Peace* models is a rigid designator and is

---

<sup>255</sup> The major point of departure from Lewis' view is that I'm not convinced it's necessary that we limit the candidates for fictitious characters to those possible people residing in a world in which the fiction is told as known fact. More on this to come.

not a free-floating possibility. In the same model, I imagine a free-floating possible person Pierre Bezukhof. ‘Pierre Bezukhof’ is an entirely created role fulfilled by many, perhaps even infinitely many, possible people who do not necessarily bear an identity relation to one another. ‘Pierre Bezukhof’ functions more like ‘the president of the United States.’ Alternatively, the name is a true predicate of all the possible objects that are restricted by the context of *War and Peace*.

#### 4.2 Impossible fictions

It has frequently been observed that there are impossible fictions. Some fictions are shallowly inconsistent, or trivially impossible. Lewis cites John Watson’s infamous moving wound in the Sherlock Holmes stories as this kind of impossibility. Since it can be attributed to a mistake in the telling of the story, we can essentially throw out the inconsistency and just say that there is no definite truth about where Watson’s wound is, but he at least does not impossibly have the same wound in two different locations.<sup>256</sup> Then there are deeply inconsistent or non-trivially impossible fictions. These are fictions in which the plot itself, major events, or major figures are impossible. Lewis cites time travel fictions as an example of this kind of ‘blatant’ impossibility. In these fictions, Lewis says that everything is vacuously true because, as logic dictates, anything follows from a contradiction. For Lewis, this is a natural and expected conclusion. However, from the perspective of our actual engagement with impossible fictions such as time travel stories, this looks plainly false. We can correctly say of the Time Traveller in H. G. Wells’ novel *The Time Machine* that he lives in Victorian England, and we cannot correctly say of him that he lives in modern-day France. If Lewis is correct, then the Time Traveller does, trivially, live in modern-day France and in Victorian England.

It’s worth remembering that though I advocate a possibilist view of fictional objects and states of affairs, I do not subscribe to a view of fictional truth. The existence of deeply impossible fictions poses a slightly different problem for my view. Up until now, I have not made a sharp distinction between my version of possibilism and Lewis’s version, and in fact have modelled much of my semantic discussion on his ideas as well as Currie’s.

---

<sup>256</sup> David Lewis, “Truth in Fiction,” 46.

One difference that I have made clear is that fictional objects are possible objects because our imaginative models normatively represent possibilities, not because modal semantics is the best solution for fictional truth. Other than that, it may seem that the upshot is basically the same: we talk about possibilities that are consistent with fictional works in both Lewis's and my view. Impossible fictions are precisely the point on which I must depart from Lewis. I do not accept that everything is vacuously true in impossible fictions, because this is undoubtedly contradicted by our actual fictional discourse.

Having ruled out Lewis's approach, there are a few options available. One option is to deny that fictions have any non-trivial impossible content. Thankfully, I could take this route without obstinately denying what is obvious, since this position has already been robustly argued for by Emily Caddick Bourne and Craig Bourne.<sup>257</sup> Availing myself of this position would also have other benefits, since they further argue that fictional worlds are *unique* possible worlds. This means we could achieve reference to fictional objects as singular possible individuals and need not bother explaining the strangeness of our singular-sounding reference to clusters or complexes of possible objects. Alternatively, I could take a route that Lewis suggests we take only under cover of pretense: accept that there are impossible worlds. Some theorists have done just that, out with any pretense, to accommodate impossible fictions and reference to other impossible things, notably Yagisawa and Berto.<sup>258</sup>

While I don't wish to conclusively rule out these options, I'm disinclined to embrace them fully. To deny that there are impossible fictions does not seem true to the practice, nor does the suggestion that a fiction picks out and describes a unique possible world. The acceptance of impossible worlds stretches our notion of existence. It's not difficult to understand possible but non-actual existence as a genuine kind of existence, even a

---

<sup>257</sup> Emily Caddick Bourne and Craig Bourne, *Time in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>258</sup> See Takashi Yagisawa, *Worlds and Individuals, Possible and Otherwise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 357-283; Francesco Berto, "Modal Meinongianism for Fictional Objects," *Metaphysica* 9, no. 2 (Oct. 2008): 205-218 and "Modal Meinongianism and Fiction: The Best of Three Worlds," *Philosophical Studies* 152, no. 3 (Feb. 2011): 313-334.

concrete kind of existence as argued for by Lewis, Bourne, and Bourne. Impossible existence, on the other hand, borders on the incomprehensible.

These are not strict refutations because, again, it is beneficial to retain these options when dealing with the difficult problem of impossible fictions. However, I can offer a preview of how this might be dealt with in a way that has much more to do with our actual practices and that fits with the overall theory being developed. The problem for my view is with *impossible fictional objects* more than impossible plots, since my view of fictional truth is one according to which fictional ‘truth’ is determined by principles that are neither exhaustive nor consistent with one another. However, a John Watson who has the same wound in two places is an impossible John Watson. Likewise, a character that is both a man and death, such as Joe Black in *Meet Joe Black*, is an impossible fictional object.

We first need to acknowledge that there is sometimes a disconnect between the abstract artifact that is the fictional character and the possibilia that we imagine. Consider an analogy with science. Science creates many theoretical entities that are meant to pick out actual-world phenomena. We can talk about the graviton, who suggested it and when, its place in the development of physics, and so on. We also talk about properties of the graviton such as its spin, its antiparticle, and its mass. One of these things is a theoretical entity while the other is an actual-world particle. However, it’s a live possibility that the relation between the theoretical entity and an actual-world particle will fail: there may be no actual particle that is the graviton.

Similarly, there are fictional characters for which there are no possible candidates. Often, this is done purposely, for aesthetic or thematic effect. This is the case for personification examples like that of Joe Black.<sup>259</sup> However, this does not mean that our imaginative representations are empty or missing. There is a disconnect between what we imagine in these cases and what we understand is meant to be part of the content of the fiction. What we actually imagine is a man who says and does all the things that the man Joe Black is described as saying and doing. We understand that Joe Black is meant to be death, but

---

<sup>259</sup> See Daniel Nolan, “Personification and Impossible Fictions,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 1 (Feb. 2015): 57-69.

none of the possible Joe Black candidates that we represent will be death in their world. Bourne and Bourne conceive of this difference as a difference between the content of a representation and *what is done with* a representation.<sup>260</sup> Rather than an identity relation between Joe Black and death being part of the content, the character Joe Black is a possible person that the creator of the fiction uses to draw a metaphor with death. I think a view like this is more grounded in the practice and has the potential to dissolve any worries we might have about impossible fictional objects.

### 5. *Ficta*

In the previous chapter, I argued that ‘fiction’ primarily (non-derivatively) refers to a rule-based cultural practice. This is in contrast to speech act views that take ‘fictional’ to be a property only of individual propositions or the sentences that express them, and that ‘fictional’ describes other things, such as works, only derivatively.<sup>261</sup> This has some important consequences, including the exclusion of other imaginative exercises, such as philosophical thought experiments, from the realm of fiction in my account. Thus, utterances that would qualify as fictional under a speech act theory, utterances that express thought experiments or some found in non-fictional works such as histories, do not qualify as properly fictional. This, I take it, is as it should be.

It also means that the discussion of objects I’m calling ‘ficta’ is more restrictively applied than, say, Lewis’s modal semantics. Lewis’s analysis would apply to non-fictional cases of imaginative utterances, such as the aforementioned thought experiments. This seems correct, as philosophical thought experiments typically ask us to imagine what is possibly but not actually the case in order to get at a conceptual truth. However, those possible objects are not fictional objects according to my account, because the context of their reference is not fixed by fictional works or related the kind of abstract artifacts that I’m calling *ficta*. There may, perhaps, be cultural artifacts associated with such other practices, but those will not be my concern here.

---

<sup>260</sup> Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne, “Personification without Impossible Content,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 58, no.2 (April 2018): 168.

<sup>261</sup> Voltolini, “How Fictional Works are Related to Fictional Entities,” *Dialectica* 57, no. 2 (2003): 226.

What *is* my concern in this section is a class of actual-word entities, literally created through the actions of authors and artists. These objects are what I call ‘ficta,’ and they are an indispensable aspect of my account. One may rightly ask why, given that I have just argued for a version of possibilism, I would posit such things as ficta. Any dualist account ought to have some pretty robust motivation. There are at least two such motivations. One is internal to the account; given that fiction is a rule-based institution that results in the abstract artifacts we call fictional works, it would be, as Amie Thomasson says, false parsimony to then deny that there are abstract artifacts we call fictional objects or characters.<sup>262</sup> It is this motivation, and creationism’s compatibility with possibilism, to which this section is dedicated. It is a positive section, devoted to building a new view out of others. The other motivation for dualism relies on a comparison with monist accounts: a comparison that shows that dualism is the best way to preserve meaning in all types of fictional utterances and that its advantages in simplicity, explanatory power, and completeness outweigh the seeming disadvantage of positing two types of fictional object. That motivation for dualism, along with criticisms of monist versions of both possibilist and creationist views, will be reserved for the next section.

### *5.1 Bringing possibilism and creationism together*

As I have just argued, a possibilist view applies only to our *imaginings* in fiction and, contra Walton, there are practices of engagement and criticism that are distinct from purely imaginative engagement with fiction. Lewis himself omitted such engagement from his account, saying of expressions such as “Holmes has acquired a cultish following,” that he had “nothing to say...about the proper treatment of these sentences.”<sup>263</sup> This is because, of course, such sentences come out false when prefixed by “In the fiction,” and Lewis’s method is to give an analysis of the function of such an operator.

Lewis considers terms such as ‘Holmes’ in the above example denotationless, assuming a kind of irrealism about fictional objects when they’re referred to in contexts that are not

---

<sup>262</sup> Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 139-45.

<sup>263</sup> Lewis, “Truth in Fiction,” 38.

properly prefixed by the fictional operator.<sup>264</sup> (Thomasson refers to these as ‘real’ contexts, but I will call them ‘actual.’) Since the terms involved are denotationless, the sentences are false. Peculiarly, Lewis says they are not true for this reason while simultaneously calling them “truths about Holmes.”<sup>265</sup> What is missing from Lewis’s account is some reason why something like “Holmes has acquired a cult following” is a truth, or at least a *seeming* truth, about Holmes while something like “Holmes is a parody of Dick Tracy” is not. If both contain a denotationless term, then both are either false or meaningless for the same reason and thus on a par with one another. Yet one is, or seems to be, a ‘truth’ about Holmes while the other is a falsity.

Alternatively, we could drop the assumption that ‘Holmes’ is denotationless in actual contexts. It is after all much simpler to suppose that “Holmes has acquired a cult following” is true because in the actual world the character Holmes has acquired a cult following, and “Holmes is a parody of Dick Tracy” is false because in the actual world the character Holmes is not a parody of the character Dick Tracy. If we take a look at fiction as a practice, there is no principled reason to assume that there are no fictional characters. The assumption that ‘Holmes’ is denotationless appears to be a philosophical prejudice, or perhaps based on a preference for nonexistence claims on the basis of ontological austerity. However, this would be to overlook an essential element of Occam’s razor – *that all things be equal*. Without a theory of fiction, it may seem that simply assuming that there is no such thing as Sherlock Holmes is the most reasonable starting point. Starting from an examination of fictional practices, it becomes clear that this is a mistake.

In the previous chapter, I argued for a view of fictional works as abstract artifacts. Such a position is far from radical in view of the greater project of social metaphysics, and arguably it has not been wildly controversial at least since Levinson’s “What A Musical Work Is.” Thomasson has argued convincingly that acceptance of fictional *objects* as abstract artifacts follows from acceptance of fictional *works* as abstract artifacts. Additionally, observations from the practice of fiction support their existence. What

---

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

follows is a sketch of the path from creationism about works to creationism about fictional objects.

Creationism about fictional objects is certainly not a new view. Notably, it was suggested by Kripke in his 1973 *Reference and Existence*, argued for by Van Inwagen in 1977 in “Creatures of Fiction,” and played an important role in Searle’s 1975 account of fictional discourse. I choose these three as my creationist paradigms not only because they are so well known but because they are both clear precursors to more detailed creationist views to come – namely, Thomasson’s – and contain the seeds of some central features of my own view.

Kripke arguably set the tone for much of the subsequent philosophical examination of the language and metaphysical puzzles of fiction in his 1973 *Reference and Existence*. In the earlier *Naming and Necessity*, he made some arguments against possibilist views, specifically that fictional names necessarily do not refer – at least, not to any people, actual or possible. In *Reference and Existence*, however, he accepts that there is an ontology of fictional characters and sketches a view much like the one Searle later developed. It’s worth reminding ourselves just what that view is, which he sums up in the following passage:

A fictional character, then, is an abstract entity. It exists in virtue of more concrete activities of telling stories, writing plays, writing novels, and so on, under criteria which I won’t try to state precisely, but which should have their own obvious intuitive character. It is an abstract entity which exists in virtue of more concrete activities the same way that a nation is an abstract entity which exists in virtue of concrete relations between people.<sup>266</sup>

This basic outline is still the core of contemporary creationist theories like Thomasson’s. The comparison to other abstract social entities such as nations may be the first, and I think is the best, defense against the oft-used irrealist line that fictional objects are spooky or mysterious.

---

<sup>266</sup> Kripke, *Reference and Existence*, 73.



I've previously mentioned the now-traditional view that the names of fictional characters are referentially ambiguous depending on context. Accordingly, Kripke says there are 'two senses' in which a fictional character such as Hamlet exists: that he exists *according to the fiction* as a person, and that he exists in the world as a fictional character.<sup>267</sup> These two senses map onto our intrafictional and extrafictional distinction. This dances around the idea of dualism, because although the combination of nothing with something is of course not two things, the central idea that the reference changes according to different uses is the first step toward a dualist view. I think Kripke's not-quite-dualism has a complementary opposite in Lewis's "Truth in Fiction." Recall that, contra-Kripke, Lewis takes fictional names only under the fictional operator to refer, and those uses of fictional names outside of the operator are denotationless. Perhaps both Lewis and Kripke got things right about what is there, but not about what is *not* there.

### 5.2 Thomasson's ontology

In Chapter 1, I spent some time on the creationist ontologies of Kripke, Van Inwagen, and Searle, with the promise that I would devote considerable discussion to Amie Thomasson's ontology in this chapter. Though I do not endorse the whole of Thomasson's view on fiction, I think her argument that takes us from accepting fictional works to accepting fictional objects is correct, and that her ontological categories are the best way to understand the nature of abstract artifacts.

She begins her inquiry into fictional objects by considering actual practices, conforming to the pragmatic constraint and avoiding the error of trying to fit fictional objects into a "ready-made ontology."<sup>268</sup> She takes stock of important ways that fictional objects seem to be, with the intent that preservation of these features be a priority of theorizing about them. Some such important features include that they are literally created and that, after creation, they continue to exist only if certain other things exist, namely works and audiences capable of understanding the works.<sup>269</sup> Turning the focus to creatability and dependence on other entities is no accident, as this sets the foundation for her system of ontological

---

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>268</sup> Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 5.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 12.

categorization based on structures of dependencies. These are systems of special, existential relations that individuals have to other individuals.<sup>270</sup> Simply put, A is existentially dependent on B if necessarily, if A exists then B exists. Fictional objects are existentially dependent entities, and the structure of their dependencies both determines their ontological category and is essential to their nature.

Though there are many types of dependency in Thomasson's theory, two distinctions are required to understand the dependencies of fictional objects: constant versus historical dependency and rigid versus generic dependency. If A is constantly dependent on B, then A will cease to exist when B ceases to exist. This is the kind of dependence that one has on their own brain. If A is historically dependent on B, then A requires B to have come into existence but can continue to exist after B no longer does. This is the kind of dependence we all have on our parents. If A is rigidly dependent on B, then A is dependent on B *in particular* – no other object can play B's role in A's dependency structure. We are all rigidly constantly dependent on our brains, as some other brain existing does not mean we will exist. We are also rigidly historically dependent on our parents, as it is those exact individuals, rather than any individuals like them, that were required to create us. If A is generically dependent on B, then some other object relevantly like B could play the same role for A's existence. Thomasson uses catalysts as an example of this. While a particular sample of alcohol is rigidly historically dependent on the particular sample of sugar it's made from, it is generically historically dependent on the yeast that was used as a catalyst. Any sample of yeast would have resulted in that particular sample of alcohol; hence its existence on the sugar sample is rigid while its dependence on the yeast is generic.

With these distinctions in mind, we can get an idea of what ontological category ficta belong to, using our intuitions about them as a guide. According to Thomasson, ficta are rigidly historically dependent on the particular creative acts of their makers. That is, they depend on their particular creators to come into being but can continue to exist once the creative acts are over and once the creator no longer exists. This is because it is part of our

---

<sup>270</sup> I'm following Thomasson here in my use of 'individuals,' intended to "refer to individual objects, tropes, events, processes, and states of affairs," as these are all things for which dependency relations can hold. Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 27.

practice to acknowledge fictional objects as literally created and created essentially by their actual creator. While this may seem like a strong modal condition, it is supported by our intuition that two authors who coincidentally write identical stories with identical characters, they will neither produce the same work nor the same fictional objects. As objects “created by the purposeful acts of humans,” this dependency makes them artifacts.<sup>271</sup>

They are also generically constantly dependent on fictional works. They are only generically dependent because multiple works can involve the same fictum, the survival of any of which is sufficient for its own survival. Yet they are constantly dependent on some work because a fictum exists only as long as at least one work about it exists. If we again take Paul Atreides as our example and suppose that, for whatever terrible reason, all works of fictional literature are lost, Paul Atreides will still exist as long as, say, Lynch’s 1984 film version of *Dune* exists. If another great disaster erases all works of film from existence, only then will Paul Atreides cease to exist. Given our arguments from last chapter, this means ficta are dependent on a kind of abstract artifact as well as on particular human acts.

We cannot conclude from the dependency relation alone that, because the work is an abstract artifact, the fictum is as well. However, the only conceivable, actual ‘place’ where a fictum might exist is *in* the work. Even if this was not merely metaphorical, the work itself has no spatio-temporal location, so this does not provide us with concreteness. So, the argument for ficta being abstract piggy-backs on previous arguments for works being abstract, not because of their dependence relation but because they were created by the same acts and because ficta simply cannot be spatio-temporally located. There are also positions available for what kind of artifacts fictional objects might be. For example, I made a tentative suggestion in the previous chapter that fictional works may be something

---

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 35.

like Levinson's indicated types. Happily, a similar position exists for fictional characters, argued for by Peter Lamarque in *Work and Object*.<sup>272</sup>

Thomasson notes that accepting abstract artifacts is a break with some long-held philosophical traditions in which only material objects or, at the most, material objects and necessary abstract objects (such as mathematical objects) are allowed.<sup>273</sup> However, as we are following in the footsteps of those such as Levinson and Kripke who find contingent abstracta unproblematic, I shall not devote space to a defense of abstract artifacts generally here.

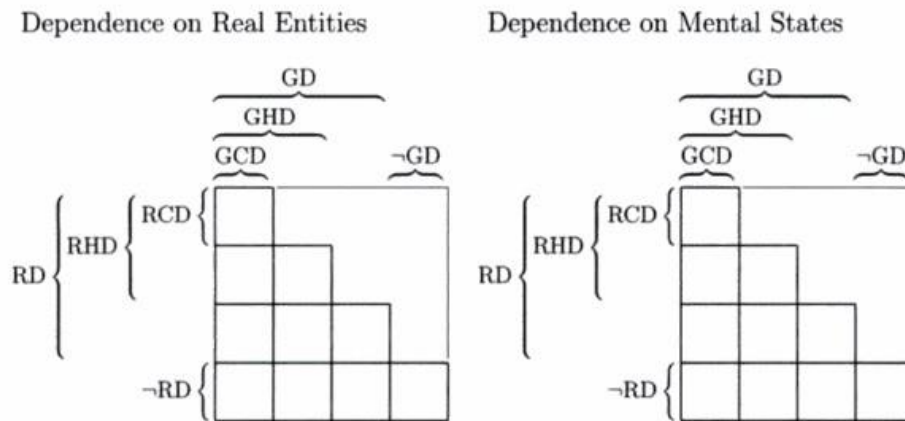
Being abstract artifacts is not the only thing ficta have in common with fictional works according to Thomasson. Fictional works have a dependence structure of their own. They are rigidly historically dependent on the creative acts of their makers, generically constantly dependent on some copy or memory of them, and generically constantly dependent on a competent audience. Dependence is transitive, so ficta are also generically constantly dependent on a copy or memory of some work that features them and on an audience to comprehend that work.<sup>274</sup> Because they have the same kind of dependencies, they occupy the same place in her ontological categorization system, illustrated by the charts below.

---

<sup>272</sup> Lamarque, *Work and Object*, 188-207.

<sup>273</sup> Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 37.

<sup>274</sup> For arguments establishing the transitivity of dependence, see Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 33-34.



**Figure 2 Thomasson's ontological categories by dependence.**<sup>275</sup>

In this figure, the acronyms refer to types of dependence – ‘RHD’ is ‘rigid historical dependence,’ ‘GCD’ is ‘generic constant dependence,’ and so on. Every entity will fit into one and only one of the boxes on each of these charts, and the ‘box’ it occupies is its ontological category. According to Thomasson, categorizing entities according to their existential dependencies is truly systematic, rather than simply abstracting from particular things arbitrarily according to certain properties. So, rather than saying simply that one might as well accept ficta if one accepts fictional works because they are both abstract artifacts, Thomasson makes a stronger claim: that positing ficta is no addition at all to the ontology, because ficta and fictional works are the same category of thing. Both ficta and fictional works occupy the second box down in the left-hand column of both the ‘Real Entities’ and ‘Mental Entities’ charts. They are ontologically equivalent. Thus, to deny ficta while accepting fictional works is truly false parsimony.

### 5.3 *Ficta*

Considering our view of fictional works and practices, we get a synthesis of creationist views. The general picture articulated by Kripke remains – that there is some sense in which fictional objects exist, and that this ontology of fictional objects consists of abstract

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

artifacts that would never had existed if fictional practices had not existed.<sup>276</sup> As Van Inwagen argues, it is the practice that has the power to create abstract entities like characters, plots, and so on, and that, following Searle, the rules that govern the practice are essential for this creation. Finally, Thomasson's ontological analysis gives us a deeper understanding of the nature of these entities and a system of categorization that demystifies them and guarantees their existence if we grant the existence of such everyday things as fictional works.

These ficta fit neatly into the analysis given in previous chapters; in fact, it would be very odd to have gotten to this point only to argue that there is no such thing as fictional objects. We retain one of the essences of fictional practice: that it is *literally creative* as well as imaginative. Perhaps most importantly, we get the expected truth values for extrafictional sentences without endless *ad hoc* paraphrases. Paul Atreides really was created on Earth by Frank Herbert. Sherlock Holmes really has acquired a cult following. As created objects, they are the kinds of thing that can be based on other things, that can symbolize something else, or that can be a plot device. We can do away with awkward category mistakes in addition to eliminating paraphrases because ficta are the referents for fictional terms in extrafictional claims only. In the next section, I will clarify how the union of possibilism and creationism works by way of solving the central paradox and showing how dualism gets the best of monist accounts without inheriting their biggest flaws.

### 6. *The central paradox test*

This section marks the return what I'm calling the central paradox of fictional discourse. The central paradox is a semantic puzzle, the solution of which calls for an account of the reference of fictional terms which in turn calls for an account of fictional objects. I've formulated the paradox as follows:

- (1) Paul Atreides was born on Caladan to the Lady Jessica.
- (2) Paul Atreides was created on Earth by Frank Herbert.

---

<sup>276</sup> Kripke, *Reference and Existence*, 76.

(3) Paul Atreides does not exist.

We readily assent to these three propositions, yet we can see that they are inconsistent. Paul Atreides could not have both come into existence on Caladan and on Earth; he could not have been both born like any other person and created through words by an author. Even worse, he could not have come into existence in either way if he does not and never has existed at all. In Chapter 1, I settled on terms for each of these three types of proposition about fictional objects: *intrafictional*, *extrafictional*, and *nonexistence* claims.<sup>277</sup> Irrealists, possibilists, and creationists all have ways of dealing with this paradox.

I will critique the solutions already on offer from irrealists and monists and offer my own solution. I will argue that the paradox is only a paradox superficially, and that in order to take it as truly paradoxical, one must make two flawed assumptions: that 1) the name ‘Paul Atreides’ refers to the same object in each of the three propositions (what I call ‘the monism assumption’) and that 2) our assent to these propositions consists in assigning each a positive truth value. These assumptions have gone unremarked upon previously in the literature. They certainly seem reasonable enough, but we have good grounds for rejecting these assumptions, given the conclusions of the previous two sections. Thus, rather than rejecting or paraphrasing away any of the three propositions as other solutions to the paradox do, I’ll reject the two underlying assumptions that make it an apparent paradox. This solution is not only grounded in the independently plausible theory of the nature of fiction, but it provides the maximum preservation of our intuitions about and the meanings of our utterances about fiction.

### 6.1 Available solutions

Here I will reconstruct a representative solution for each of the main ontologies that we covered in Chapter 1: irrealist, possibilist, and creationist. My aim is to make the best possible solution for each, measured by how well it conforms to the practice, our intuitions about fiction, and the usual meaning of fictional discourse. In this pursuit, I will sometimes

---

<sup>277</sup> I’m following Yagisawa in the choice of these terms.

mix-and-match some features and devices from the specific versions of each general ontology or from the overarching theories of fiction; for example, the solution I construct for irrealist views makes use of Walton's make-believe framework but rejects his view of reference and propositions. I will do this initially without worrying too much about whether and how these pieces will fit together or what the solution's consequences may be for other puzzles unrelated to fiction. The goal is to first make the best hypothetical solution to this particular paradox for each general category. After constructing the solution, I will then make note of its possible internal inconsistencies, the burden it carries in terms of other commitments about language and reference, and so on. Importantly, *I will not touch on any theory's analysis of intrafictional statements as made in the creation of works*. What I take to be at issue here is the utterance of intrafictional claims as made by appreciators of fictions. For each solution, I will consider one type of proposition at a time, then offer and evaluate the solution as a whole.

#### *6.1.1 An irrealist solution*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, irrealist solutions favor nonexistence claims; they are the very claims that irrealist views take to be straightforwardly true at the outset. The claim that you would expect them to have no trouble with is **(3)**, because fictional objects do not exist and hence their names cannot refer. However, when it comes to the semantic puzzle, this brings back the very issue that troubled Russell and Meinong in the beginning of the twentieth century. If Paul Atreides does not exist, then 'Paul Atreides' has no reference. This means that the irrealist will have to deny that fictional names are directly referring, because the presence of an empty name will render the supposed proposition meaningless. It seems that the best option for the irrealist to retain the truth and meaning of **(3)** without committing to fictional objects is to settle on a paraphrase using a description in place of the name. The irrealist's nonexistence claim will then look something like the following:

**(3)'** It is not the case that there a person who does, says, and is all the things that the hero in the novel *Dune* is described as doing, saying, and being.

I've had to be careful with this paraphrase, because it's difficult to come to a sufficiently unique description of a fictional object without mentioning other fictional objects, which



will subsequently need their own description, possibly involving other fictional objects, and so on. I think I've managed it here, and it doesn't look too bad. As a paraphrase, I think it captures what we mean when we say that Paul Atreides doesn't exist, and it's true.

For intrafictional claims, irrealists can use the "In the fiction" operator. Though some make vague use of the operator, or of the notion that we're pretending something when we make intrafictional utterances, this won't be good enough for our solution. Instead, it seems best to make use of the suggestions made by an irrealist who has a comprehensive view of fiction: Walton. For Walton, these claims are 'true' in specific games of make-believe. However, this has a further complication. Because he subscribes to a direct reference view, apparent propositions containing fictional names are not propositions. He suggests that there's another layer of make-believe: that we first of all imagine that "Paul Atreides was born on Caladan to the Lady Jessica" expresses a proposition, and then we make-believe that imaginary proposition's content. I don't think this is the best way to go about it; it's ugly and difficult to wrap one's head around. That is, it's not clear how we make-believe that something that's not a proposition is a proposition, and then make-believe that not-proposition's content, despite it technically not having any content because it's not a proposition. A cleaner way is to keep the make-believe game analysis of the fictional operator and again appeal to a description view. Or perhaps take a view of the content as the sense and conceive of the sense in fictional contexts as something like a description, similarly to Lamarque and Olsen's view of fictional content. For intrafictional claims, we get something like this:

(1)' In the make-believe game for *Dune*, the hero of the novel *Dune* was born on [sufficiently unique description of Caladan] to [sufficiently unique description of the Lady Jessica].

I haven't filled in the descriptions for the Lady Jessica and Caladan because it's difficult and time-consuming to come up with a sufficiently unique description that does not name other fictional objects. I assume that there is some way to create these descriptions that only refers to existing things for the irrealist, such as the novel *Dune*.

Extrfictional claims are very tricky for the irrealist. They cannot be placed under the “In the fiction” operator, because it is not true in *Dune* that Paul Atreides was created on Earth by Frank Herbert. The solution is also not as simple as finding descriptions to replace all the fictional names, because extrfictional claims ascribe properties to things that don’t exist, so even with a description in hand we can’t secure the truth or explain the widespread acceptance of extrfictional claims. In Chapter 1, we discussed the possibility suggested and rejected by Van Inwagen, that there will always be an *ad hoc* paraphrase for these claims that makes them about aspects of works. Again, this is quite ugly, so perhaps it’s better to choose a systematic method of paraphrasing.

Walton takes *all* fictional discourse to be in the realm of make-believe, including all of literary criticism and all of extrfictional discourse.<sup>278</sup> To handle extrfictional claims, Walton suggests that every utterance that purports to be about fictional objects takes place within a game of make-believe. Thus, my claim that Paul Atreides was created on Earth by Frank Herbert is part of a game of make-believe with *Dune* as prop. This game, though, is *unauthorized*. It does not obey the principles of generation like authorized *Dune* games do. We don’t *really* believe that Frank Herbert created Paul Atreides on Earth, we just make-believe it. So, our extrfictional claims can be paraphrased as follows:

(2) It is make-believe in an unauthorized game for *Dune* that Paul Atreides was created on Earth by Frank Herbert.

While this is the best systematic option we have, one problem with this solution is that it’s simply unbelievable that all of extrfictional discourse, including all of literary criticism, is make-believe. I simply *do* believe that Frank Herbert created Paul Atreides; in fact, I’d go so far as to say I *know* he did. To dissolve the distinction between intrafictional and extrfictional claims to one of games of make-believe played by different rules is highly unintuitive and deals a sizeable blow to the meaning of extrfictional claims. The difference between intrafictional claims and extrfictional claims is precisely that extrfictional claims are *not* make-believe. Even the solution for intrafictional claims gets

---

<sup>278</sup> Walton, *Mimesis*, 393-5.

messy when trying to account for what kind of content they might have without ‘real’ proper names. Still, even if we think that this solution can be technically made water tight, it’s very revisionary with respect to our engagement with fiction and literary criticism as a discipline.

### 6.1.2 A possibilist solution

This brings us to our two species of realism. As I’ve hinted, the two primary forms of realism available each affirm one type of claim to the detriment of the other. We’ll begin with possibilism. Remember that possibilism takes fictional objects to really exist in some possible worlds. Paul Atreides refers to the possible object that is, does, and says all the things Paul Atreides is said to be, do, and say in *Dune*. The great advantage of this view is that intrafictional claims are covered. For anyone who takes claims about possibilities to be true, whatever analysis they prefer ought to also cover intrafictional claims. We routinely attribute properties to possible objects and discuss possible beings, doings, and sayings; whatever the truth-making states of affairs are for such statements will be the same for fictional propositions of the same type. This means we can take intrafictional claims as true by using a Lewisian type of modal semantics as well as not having to worry about making awkward category mistakes. So intrafictional claims will look like this:

(1) In some possible worlds, Paul Atreides was born on Caladan to the Lady Jessica.<sup>279</sup>

The possibilist also has an intuitive explanation for nonexistence claims. It’s a general rule of everyday discourse to conflate actuality with reality. “Paul Atreides does not exist” means Paul Atreides is not actual – just as we might say other merely possible things do not exist. It creates no real obstacle for the possibilist, particularly for Lewisian realists; actuality is indexical, and we occupy the actual world, so it’s perfectly natural to make such a claim without needing to include the covert ‘actual.’ The paraphrase of nonexistence claims is this:

---

<sup>279</sup> This is an abbreviation of Lewis’s view. Precisely, it should say that *in some possible worlds where Dune is told as known fact*, Paul Atreides was born on Caladan.

(3)' Paul Atreides does not *actually* exist.

Neither of these two paraphrases is wildly revisionary or inconsistent with the meanings or apparent truth values of fictional discourse. The deal breaker is the way it deals with, or more properly does not deal with, extrafictional claims. Lewis briefly acknowledges these claims in his original paper, but simply admits to having no analysis for them. The only concrete thing he has to say is that these apparent truths are actually false, precisely due to their containing denotationless terms. However, in his 1983 Postscripts, he appears to embrace at least some of Walton's make-believe framework. Though not explicitly mentioned by Lewis, it's possible that he could account for extrafictional claims (particularly involving use of fictional names) by creating paraphrases that make them about the game being played or the story being told. This is not dissimilar to some irrealist tactics for handling extrafictional claims. Such paraphrases, as I've argued, significantly alter the meanings of the claims and are best avoided, if possible. However, a possibilist paraphrase that avoids the potentially *ad hoc* mess of making all extrafictional claims about features of works could look like this:

(2)' It is make-believe in fictional practice that Paul Atreides was created on Earth by Frank Herbert.

I have previously argued that the application of make-believe to extrafictional claims is inappropriate. I think that Currie's method for dealing with transfictional claims is a natural option for possibilists, since these roles serve as functions that pick out possible individuals – those individuals that intrafictional claims are about. However, roles are actual theoretical objects and thus this would bring us back to my dualism, in which fictional objects would not *only* be possible objects but these abstract entities as well. However, as a monist position, possibilism must either make use of endless *ad hoc* paraphrases, propose that all extrafictional talk is make-believe, or provide some other error theory for why we continue to make the mistake of talking about fictional characters as if they exist.

### 6.1.3 A creationist solution

This brings us to our species of realism about fictional objects that prioritizes extrafictional claims. We saw in the previous section how well it deals with its preferred type. However, as a monist position, creationism provides paraphrases for intrafictional and nonexistence claims that are open to some objections. Happily, since fictional objects are abstract artifacts on a creationist view, no paraphrase is needed for extrafictional claims. These are straightforwardly true claims about abstract artifacts. As long as we accept that fictional works are permitted into the ontology as abstract artifacts, there is no principled reason to reject fictional objects as abstract artifacts.

There are at least two available methods for creationists to deal with intrafictional claims. Van Inwagen suggested that for claims like **(1)** we should not understand them as predicating properties of fictional objects in the usual way. Rather we ought to understand them as engaging in a special type of ascription.<sup>280</sup> An uncharitable interpretation of this suggestion would be that Van Inwagen is inventing a mysterious new relation that looks like predication but isn't. However, I think a better way to understand the ascription relation is something like a *described-as* relation. Given that Van Inwagen took Meinongians to be the main rivals to his creationist view, we could think of this as a more intuitive version of the Meinongian position that fictional objects are specified by certain properties and as a result literally have them. This is strange, not least because it's hard to understand how something with no spatiotemporal existence, much less no existence at all, can literally be blue. However, what Van Inwagen seems to be saying is that an object with no spatiotemporal existence, but rather some genuine abstract existence, can be *described as* being blue even if it literally is not. So, a possible creationist paraphrase of **(1)** is something like this:

**(1)'** The abstract artifact Paul Atreides is described as being born on the abstract artifact Caladan that is described as being a planet, to the abstract artifact the Lady Jessica that is described as being a woman in the work *Dune*.

---

<sup>280</sup> Van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction," 305.

More recently, Thomasson makes use of a pretense operator for intrafictional claims. This is a strategy familiar from irrealists including Walton. When we utter something like our sentence (1), there is a covert operator placing it within make-believe. Unlike irrealists, however, the creationist has an object to which ‘Paul Atreides’ refers that saves the proposition itself, including the larger operator-clad version, from meaninglessness. This means we don’t need any of the clunky descriptions to replace the fictional names. When we utter (1), the covert operator is an indication of the pretend context; we are merely pretending about the abstract artifact Paul Atreides that it is a man who was born on Caladan to the Lady Jessica.:

(1)” It is fictional in *Dune* that the abstract artifact Paul Atreides is a person, that the abstract artifact Caladan is a planet, that the abstract artifact the Lady Jessica is a person, and that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan to the Lady Jessica.

This use of a fictional operator is simpler and less *ad hoc* than an irrealist use, since there’s no need to construct a description that doesn’t refer to any other fictional object to replace every instance of a fictional name. However, it isn’t an ideal solution. When we engage in this type of object-based imagining – imagining of something that it is something else – it’s transparent to us that we are doing so. For example, when we pretend of an actor that she is a character, or of a tree stump that it is a bear, we have no problem acknowledging that this is what we’re doing. More than this, it doesn’t seem that we could even be described as pretending that a tree stump is a bear if we did not *realize* that’s what we were doing. If we didn’t know that we were pretending, we would simply be mistaking the tree stump for a bear. It’s startling to be told that what we are doing when we read *Dune* is pretending of an abstract artifact that it is a man. It’s not clear how, conceptually, we can pretend without intending to or even know that’s what we’re doing. Even more strangely, when we watch *Dune*, we are pretending of Kyle MacLachlan that he is an abstract artifact that we are pretending is a man. Perhaps more damning than this vague sense of strangeness, however, is Yagisawa’s criticism of creationist use of pretense. He argues:

If x exists as a result of being created by y, and y created x as an F,  
then x exists as an F. So, given creationism, Mrs. Gamp exists as a fat

old human female. But according to creationism, Mrs. Gamp is neither fat, old, human, nor female.<sup>281</sup>

That is, for all creationists, the author creates the fictional object via their fiction-making activities. Presumably, an author creates an object as a certain thing – as Yagisawa notes, Dickens created Mrs. Gamp as a fat old human female rather than a slim young reptilian male. It's a strange result, then, that Mrs. Gamp is none of these things that she was created as being.

As for nonexistence claims, creationists adapt some version of the following idea to their specific argument: nonexistence claims are shorthand for the acknowledgement that the things which we are pretending fictional objects are in intrafictional claims are not actually what they are. In fictional contexts, we pretend that Paul Atreides (the abstract artifact) is a man with a certain set of properties. Our claim **(3)** means that the abstract artifact about which we're speaking is not a man with those properties.

**(3)**' There is no man who does, says, and is all the things the abstract artifact Paul Atreides is described as doing, saying, and being in the work *Dune*.

There's nothing particularly egregious about this paraphrase, but I want to motivate the view that it could be better if combined with a possibilist view. For creationists such as Thomasson, the covert pretense operator is meant to flag up the uses of fictional terms that treat them as the things they are in the fiction. However, the operator cannot be applied in the case of nonexistence claims, or they would come out false. A creationist might say that competent speakers and appreciators of fiction easily use context to help them decipher such claims. This is surely correct, but context typically tells us which referent of an ambiguous term we are aiming at. Recall the previous discussion of names as predicates, in which we used the example of the ambiguous (or incomplete) description 'the party.' The context tells us which event of all the possible events accurately described as 'the party' the term refers to. Yet, the creationist denies that there is really *anything* that is Paul-Atreides-as-described-in-*Dune*. The solution would be easier to understand if the context

---

<sup>281</sup> Yagisawa, "Against Creationism in Fiction," 160.

guided us to different referents of the same name. If it isn't the case that 'Paul Atreides' is an ambiguous term in this sense, then it isn't clear why we say that Paul Atreides doesn't exist when we mean is that of course he exists, but with different properties than those we pretend he has.

## 6.2 *Embracing dualism*

I've reconstructed and evaluated solutions to the central paradox based on the ontological views of fiction. Each solution must give up appearances somewhere, as Berto said they would in the opening quotation of this chapter. Because the solutions all make the monist assumption, patches and fixes are inevitable. The cleanest way of delineating between the propositions are that (1) and (3) discuss fictional people *qua* people (and other fictional objects *qua* the objects they are described to be, such as planets, brooms, and spaceships), and propositions like (2) discuss fictional objects *qua* abstract artifacts. This is clear by the kinds of properties we attribute to them and the contexts in which we assent to these kinds of claims. Instead of recognizing this distinction between objects, the monist prioritizes claims about one type of object over the others and subsequently fits claims about distinct objects into the analysis.

The various solutions often make use of contextual variations in the circumstances of utterance, but without going the full way toward questioning their assumptions about the utterances themselves. Irrealists and creationists hold that intrafictional claims are made in a pretend context, but they still conceive as the claims as *assertions*, modified with a fictional operator. However, this is a bit strange if assertions are expressions of belief, because we don't believe what is merely pretend, or more accurately, what is merely imaginary. They assume that the nature of our assent to these propositions is either assigning them a positive truth value or asserting them ourselves and thus assuming a belief in the proposition's truth.

The preceding accounts begin their inquiries with some observations of fictional discourse, but I suggest that they proceed with a mischaracterization of that discourse. Before we begin a semantic analysis of claims, we ought to ask what the nature of our utterance and assent to these claims actually is in the context of the practice. We cannot suppose that we



have a paradox before this is done, since we may find that the nature of the assent is different for the different types of fictional discourse. This oversight together with monist assumptions and premature irrealist assumptions are where the previous solutions have gone wrong.

This means that, despite my view broadly being a synthesis of possibilism and creationism about fictional objects, my solution to the paradox is not to simply merge the other two solutions together. I have hinted how they might fit together, but the full solution requires the incorporation of mental models and imaginative utterance. If we kept the assumption that the assent to the three fictional claims amounts to asserting them or assigning them a positive truth value, then our combined paradox solution would look something like the following:

**(1)** 'In some possible worlds, Paul Atreides was born on Caladan to the Lady Jessica.

**(2)** 'Paul Atreides\*' was created on Earth by Frank Herbert.

**(3)** Paul Atreides does not **actually** exist.

Let us examine each in turn. **(1)** is a true proposition when indexed to some possible worlds, most notably in those in which the events of *Dune* occur. 'Paul Atreides' in this proposition, along with 'Caladan' and 'the Lady Jessica,' refer to *merely possible objects*.

**(2)** is a true proposition when indexed to the actual world. 'Paul Atreides\*' refers here to an actually existing abstract artifact. It is what we often call a character, something literally created in the actual world and having such properties as appearing in a work, being based on someone or something else, driving forward a plot, and so forth. Because Paul Atreides\* is not the same object as Paul Atreides in **(1)**, there is as yet no conflict.

**(3)** is a true proposition when indexed to the actual world. 'Paul Atreides' refers to the same merely possible object as it does in **(1)**. As creationists say, it means that Paul Atreides as he is described in the fiction does not exist and that, as possibilists say, this is to be conceived as a lack of *actual* existence. Notice that, since this Paul Atreides is not the Paul Atreides\* of **(2)**, there is no conflict between **(2)** and **(3)**. Further, since Paul Atreides

of (1) is merely possible, then it follows that he does not exist. Or, if you take actuality to be indexical, since he is merely possible, he does not *actually* exist. Thus, there is no conflict between (1) and (3).

This is what I'm calling the externalist solution, because it separates the propositions from their utterance and treats them as propositions with a positive actual truth value. The underlying assumption is that when we utter these, we are asserting them. So far, it looks good. Unfortunately, I think there is a problem with it. Though this solution makes the claims consistent with one another, it needs more to be fully explanatory. For one thing, the modality operator on sentence (1) makes it *trivially true*; the same operator on any other sentence, provided it's logically possible, will also make it true. If this is all there is to the analysis, then "Paul Atreides was born on Mars" is equally true, since it's equally possible. Lewis's solution did not suffer from this problem because his analysis includes the condition that intrafictional claims are true in possible worlds in which *Dune* is told as known fact. I resist taking this route because that condition has nothing to do with the practice of fiction but is merely suggested in order to make the modal semantic analysis cohere. I need something else to replace it, since it is not enough to stick on covert operators and posit distinct objects that dissolve the inconsistency. I must explain why this analysis is the correct one for sentences about fictional objects.

Furthermore, one who assents to (1) as originally stated may not assent to my offered analysis (1)'. Of course, there is sometimes a discrepancy between speaker meaning and semantic meaning, and it need not always be transparent to the speaker exactly what she is referring to. However, this waves away the problem too easily. For one thing, the mystery we want to explain is *that we utter and assent to these propositions*. It's not sufficient to offer a semantic analysis that's disconnected from our acts of utterance and assent.

It certainly is true that it is possible that Paul Atreides was born on Caladan, but that does not explain our assent. We do not say these things *because* they are possibly true, even if they are. We say them because we are expressing parts of our imaginative models built around *Dune* as prop. I cannot simply change the operator to "It's fictional that," because the notion of being fictional is exactly what I am trying to explain. Rather than conceiving

intrafictional claims as claims about possibilities, we ought to conceive of them as expressions of parts of imaginative models that we build as part of fictional practice. In fact, intrafictional claims are about possibilities precisely because they are expressions of imaginative models, a norm of which is that they aim at possibilities. *An expression of an imagining that represents possibilities is not the same thing as an assertion of a belief about possibilities.* We need have no beliefs about how fictions are related to possibilia at all in order to make imaginative utterances about fiction, the intentional objects of which are possibilia.

My preferred solution to the paradox, then, is to say that there is no paradox. We do not assent to intrafictional claims because we take them to be actually true propositions; we do not assert when we utter them. Instead, intrafictional claims are imaginative utterances of the kind I described in a previous section. Their terms refer to clusters of possible objects and states of affairs that are contextually restricted by the relevant work. These clusters of possible objects, or fictitious objects, are related to ficta by a picking-out relation. We can say that when we use a fictional name to refer to a cluster of possible objects, we predicate of those objects that they are candidates for the given fictum.

Extrafictional claims are assertions of our beliefs about ficta, the abstract artifacts that we usually call characters. The analysis of these is just as creationists like Thomasson offer. They are true assertions that correctly predicate properties of ficta. They do not conflict at all with intrafictional claims, because they are expressions of content from entirely different models. We can understand their relation to one another via the practice, so there is nothing mysterious about the intuition that there's some sense in which (1) and (2) are about the same thing. Nonexistence claims are also assertions, but they are assertions about fictitious objects rather than ficta. Because (3) is an assertion rather than an imaginative utterance, and hence expresses content from a different mental model, it does not conflict with (1), despite referring to the same cluster of possible objects. Because it is an assertion about a fictitious object rather than a fictum, it does not conflict with (2).

Our solution abandons the merely contextual and embraces ambiguity in the reference of terms. It has the advantage of explaining intrafictional claims as well as possibilism and

explaining extrafictional claims as well as creationism, with the drawbacks of neither. In fact, an analysis of nonexistence claims reveals a clear advantage of this dualism over monism. This is because *not every nonexistence claim will be assented to*. Whether we assent to nonexistence claims or not depends on which of the objects are referred to by the use of ‘Paul Atreides.’ Consider the following exchange:

A: Where are you off to?

B: I’m getting some spice coffee with Duncan Idaho.

A: But...Duncan Idaho doesn’t exist!

Now compare it with this exchange:

A: Where are you off to?

B: I’m going to finish up my analysis of Duncan Idaho for my book report.

A: But...Duncan Idaho doesn’t exist!

In one of these cases, A’s response is perfectly rational, and we readily assent to their denial of Duncan Idaho’s (actual) existence. In the other, A has misread the situation or is being willfully obtuse. The nonexistence claim in the first exchange is just like the nonexistence claims we have discussed. However, in the second interaction, B is likely to open up their copy of *Dune* and show A that they are wrong about their nonexistence claim. They were not correct in their assertion that Duncan Idaho does not exist, and B would be reasonable to refuse to assent to it. This is because in the second exchange, B is referring to the actual abstract artifact that is referred to in extrafictional claims. That we are sometimes discussing abstract objects and other times possibilia explains this quirk of everyday fictional discourse.

Such a solution may at first be controversial, but we can see how rejecting irrealist and monist assumptions gives us the cleanest solution with the best preservation of meaning. Creationists do very well with extrafictional claims because they are correct about their analysis, but the same analysis does not apply to intrafictional claims. Conversely, possibilists do very well with intrafictional claims because they are partially correct about *their* analysis. Both creationists and possibilists, I suggest, actually have the same solution to nonexistence claims. That they are thought to be different solutions is down to the

mistaken monist position. It is true that Paul Atreides does not actually exist as he is described in the fiction, because that Paul Atreides is a merely possible object. ‘Paul Atreides’ is, in fact, an ambiguous term, and it is the context that guides us to the correct reference in each individual use.

With a full account of fiction in place, one that takes into consideration the essential aspects of fiction – imagination and practice – dualism is not only not as radical as it first seems, but it is entirely reasonable, well-supported, and firmly rooted in previous literature in the philosophy of fiction. Best of all, it retains the meaning of our fictional utterances without the major revisions and unsatisfying compromises that have been previously accepted as unavoidable. It offers the most unified and least modified solution to the central paradox.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have developed a semantics and ontology that results from my view of fiction as an imagination-based social practice. I have argued that there is a unique speech act that I call an imaginative utterance, and that both the fictive acts and the assertions under the fictional intensional operator that appear in fictive utterance views are actually instances of imaginative speech acts. Imaginative utterances are expressions of content from an imaginative model that their utterers intend listeners to imagine. Because imaginative utterances are expressions of mental states whose intentional objects are possibilia, their referents are also possibilia. Some imaginative utterances are made in fictional discourse, and in these instances fictional names are often used. The same fictional name is ambiguous with regard to its reference. In imaginative utterances such as intrafictional claims, a fictional name refers to a cluster of possible objects that is restricted by the context of the act of imagining – these objects I call *fictitious objects*. The context is the practice of fiction generally, and the work being used as a prop for the imaginative model specifically. In a sense, we use the character name ‘Paul Atreides’ not only to predicate of the possible objects that they are called ‘Paul Atreides’ in each of their worlds, but to predicate of them that they are candidates for the subject of the fictional work *Dune*. In other words, they are picked out by an abstract artifact that is created by the same acts

that created the work; these ficta are brought into existence by the specification of a *role*, of which fictitious objects are the *value*. This dualist view of fictional objects not only emerges from an independently plausible view of fiction but has the best results when tested by the central paradox. Essentially, the acts of imagining that are central to fictional practice are responsible for the possibilist analysis of fictitious objects, while fiction's status as an entity-creating social practice is responsible for the creationist analysis of ficta.

## Conclusion

I have argued for a view of fiction as an imagination-based social practice, partially in pursuit of a correct ontology of fictional objects. My method in developing a fictional ontology is driven by a conviction that ontological theorizing about social practices ought not to proceed independently of overarching theories of the practices themselves. We cannot know about the ontological status or metaphysical nature of fictional objects until we know about the nature of fiction; otherwise, we literally don't know what we're talking about.

In the first chapter, I summarized and evaluated the major positions on both branches of the philosophy of fiction: from the purely ontological to the most well-developed action theory. For both types of position, I criticized them relative to how well they explain our practices of imagining, discourse, and categorization of works. In the case of purely ontological views, I found that none was able to adequately account for the meaning and truth value of each of the three types of fictional claim. I diagnosed this as a failure to conform to a strong version of the pragmatic constraint. In the case of action theories, I found that each type was plagued by counterexamples and that their application to non-linguistic fictions was at best uncertain. I diagnosed this as a failure to pinpoint the right kind of thing of which 'fictional' is non-derivatively a property; I argued that the fixation on propositions and utterances, not the use of imagination, is where standard theories go wrong. I suggested the central paradox as a test for ontological theories that emerge from action theories; their success in the test is measured by how well their predictions for the meaning and truth of three types of fictional claims accord with our imaginative and discursive practices.

Having rejected a focus on propositions and semantic analyses to discover the nature of fictional objects, I turned to the imagination for insight and concluded that imagination is a faculty of mental modeling that normatively represents possibilities. To arrive at the view that imagination builds multiple representational models, I started by enumerating the important features of the imagination that any theory must accommodate and explain. This

included a feature that has received less attention than the others: that imaginative content is separated into ‘worlds.’ I evaluated four of the major types of cognitive theory of imagination – metarepresentational, simulationist, single code, and multiple modeling – and found that only a view of multiple models that functions similarly to single code (or boxological) theories could account for all the features. I then reviewed evidence from the literature on both imagination and epistemology that suggests an intimate connection between the imagination and possibility. Since it’s clear that our modal knowledge from imagination is fallible and that we are capable of having genuine imaginings of impossible things, I suggested that modeling possibilities is a norm of imagination in the same way that veridicality, or modeling actuality, is a norm of belief. As the intentional objects of belief are actual objects, the intentional objects of imagination are possibilities.

In Chapter 3, I laid out my positive account of the practice of fiction. I argued that the necessary and sufficient conditions for fiction are not the conditions for being a certain type of utterance or proposition, but that they are the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a particular social practice. I concluded that fiction is a social practice consisting in acts of imagining that secures agreement through implicit principles, has an aesthetic fixed external aim, and achieves its aim through the creation of abstract artifacts, particularly fictional works. I reiterated my criticisms of other accounts and argued that the reasonable midpoint between accepting some very unintuitive categorization results from fictive utterance views and throwing out conceptual analysis of fiction altogether was to conceive of fictionality as a property of a practice first and of works, propositions, and utterances derivatively.

I suggested a model for artifact-creating practices – that I designate ‘institutions’ – that made considerable use of an analogy, and disanalogies, with games. Though their structure of activities, agreement, and aims is similar, there are three major differences: while games maintain agreement through exhaustive constitutive rules, institutions maintain agreement by other means, such as implicit principles; while games have fixed internal aims and fluid external aims, institutions have fixed external aims and fluid internal aims; finally, while games can define things like moves and defenses, institutions create abstract artifacts like



works, words, and laws. Applying this analysis to fiction, I argued that fiction's essential activities were social imaginings rather than utterances. Fiction maintains collaboration in the form of conformity between individual imaginative models fixed by works. I argued that the fixed external aim is aesthetic and provided some options for how the aim could be further characterized. Finally, I offered an analysis of fictional works as abstract artifacts using Thomasson's ontological categories.

Having learned what I could from the imagination and developed a view of fiction as a social practice, I returned to fictional discourse and fictional objects. I argued for a dualist view, according to which fictional objects are two different types of object, that I called 'fictitious objects' and 'ficta.' Fictitious objects are a special case of imaginary intentional object, while ficta are a type of abstract artifact. Mirroring other views, I began with an analysis of a special type of utterance. In standard views, fictive utterances are conceived as a special kind of fiction-making speech act. Intrafictional claims that are made by those who do not tell the story are conceived as assertions under a fictional intensional operator. I argued that these are actually the same kind of speech act: an imaginative utterance. I defined imaginative utterances as expressions of the content of an imaginative model that the utterer intends listeners to imagine. Since the intentional objects of imaginings are *possibilia*, the referents of the names and terms used to express them are also *possibilia*.

I argued that ficta come into being when creators make fictional works and are associated with certain descriptions or roles. These descriptions guide our imaginings. When we make intrafictional claims, they are a special type of imaginative utterance in which the context that fixes the referents is determined by the work and the associated *fictum*. We can talk about the same thing when we talk about the Paul Atreides of my imagination and the Paul Atreides of your imagination. This is because when we use the name 'Paul Atreides,' we not only predicate of those possible people that they are called 'Paul Atreides' in their world, but that they are candidates for the *fictum*. This intimate relation of the *fictum* picking out or guiding our imaginings of the fictitious object explains why we call them by the same name while tacitly acknowledging the difference in their nature. This could be

conceived as an error theory, an explanation for why we make the ‘mistake’ of referring to different objects with the same name. However, I do not think this ambiguity is a mistake at all; rather it is a feature of an imaginative practice that makes use of props.

I then tested my view with the central paradox. Again, the central paradox is a test of how well an ontological view fits with facts about the practice. I rejected the view that we should treat each claim in the paradox as a true proposition that we would assert as a belief. Instead, I conceived of each claim as a particular type of utterance about a particular type of object. On my analysis, intrafictional claims are imaginative utterances about fictitious objects. Extrafictional claims are straightforwardly true assertions about the ficta. Nonexistence claims are assertions about the fictitious object. The ambiguity of fictional names together with imaginative utterances dissolves the paradox; there is no inconsistency in this analysis, and there are no category mistakes.

There are several advantages to the kind of view that I’ve developed. First, it’s comprehensive in the sense that it incorporates the actions central to fiction, its aesthetic dimension, and its semantics and ontology. Second, it draws the boundaries of fiction in a more consistent and intuitive way than other views. It not only allows us to clearly differentiate between fictional works and historical works that contain imaginative narratives, but it also allows us to clearly differentiate between the genuinely fictional and the philosophical, mathematical, religious, and therapeutic. That is, it clearly differentiates fiction from other practices that use imagination but are not fictional. It is also not exclusive of any form of media or genre. It does not implausibly limit fiction to the literary canon or to linguistic fictions like novels or short stories. Fictional works need not be reducible to any kind of utterance or communication, even in principle. My view straightforwardly accommodates fictional films, paintings, sculptures, cartoons, plays, dances, and operas.

Due to both the large scope and limited space, there are many fascinating puzzles and important features of fiction that I was not able to mention or engage with fully. There are many aspects of fiction that I could touch on only briefly, but that call out for much fuller

treatment. I think the view offered here has the potential to say something interesting and illuminating about these topics that I could only mention in passing during this initial development of my view, such as imaginative resistance, truth in fiction, modal claims about fictions and fictional characters, fan fiction, fictional worlds, the construction of fictional works and characters, and impossible fictions. Though this dissertation is a broad survey of views on many matters and deep engagement with a few primary sources, there is much opportunity for future work that digs deeper into the rich literature on each individual puzzle internal to fiction.

I think this view also has the potential to open other avenues of exploration that are not internal to the puzzles of the practice. Of particular interest to me is the idea that fiction, by its function as a shared source of aesthetically valuable imaginative experiences, could be a social good. I'm interested in the part fiction plays in social cohesion and community fellowship, particularly in relation to its aesthetic character. It seems to me that community-building rituals and rites of passage such as funerals, weddings, parades, and so on have an indispensably aesthetic character. I wonder how much of the expectation that fiction will be morally good – an expectation so strong that we may consider moral defects to be automatically aesthetic defects – is related to its nature as an aesthetic social practice.

These questions all offer interesting opportunities for further work on how this big picture of fiction is to be filled out internally, and how it as a whole practice relates to its practitioners, other practices, and the culture at large. However, in this dissertation I have more modest aims. I have tried to show that both the ontological branch and the action theory branch of the philosophy of fiction suffer from the lack of a single trunk. I have offered the beginnings of a structural view of fiction, according to which fiction is a social practice of acts of imagining that maintains agreement through implicit principles, has an aesthetic fixed external aim, and achieves its aim through the creation of works. I have argued that, because fiction is a practice of imagining and imagination models possibilities, some of its objects are possible objects. I have further argued that, because fiction is an entity-creating social practice, some of its objects are abstract artifacts. The practice

accounts for the intimate relation between these objects, and this dualist theory passes the central paradox test with the highest grade relative to other ontologies.

## Bibliography

- Aristotle. *On Poetics*. Translated by Seth Benardete and Michael Davis. South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2002.
- Bach, Kent. "The Predicate View of Proper Names." *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 11 (Oct. 2015): 772.
- Berto, Francesco. "Modal Meinongianism and Fiction: The Best of Three Worlds." *Philosophical Studies: A Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 152, no. 3 (Feb. 2011): 314.
- . "Modal Meinongianism for Fictional Objects," *Metaphysica* 9, no. 2 (Oct. 2008): 205-218.
- Blumson, Ben. "Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (Sep. 2015): 46-57.
- Bourne, Craig and Emily Caddick Bourne. "Personification without Impossible Content." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 58, no.2 (April 2018): 168.
- . *Time in Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Brock, Stuart. "Fictionalism about Fictional Characters." *Nous* 36, no. 1 (2002): 1-21.
- . "The Creationist Fiction: The Case against Creationism about Fictional Characters." *Philosophical Review* 119, no. 3 (2010): 337-64.
- Caplan, Ben. "Creatures of Fiction, Myth, and Imagination." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (October 2004): 331-37.
- Carroll, Noël. "On Kendall Walton's Mimesis as Make-Believe." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51, no. 2 (1991): 383-387.
- . *The Philosophy of Horror, Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Crittenden, Charles. *Unreality: The Metaphysics of Fictional Objects*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Currie, Gregory. *An Ontology of Art*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989.
- . *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge

- University Press, 1995.
- . “Imagination and Simulation: Aesthetics Meets Cognitive Science.” In *Mental Simulation: Evaluations and Applications*. Edited by Martin Davies and Tony Stone. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- . “Pretense, Pretending and Metarepresenting.” *Mind & Language* 13, no.1 (1998): 35-55.
- . *The Nature of Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- . “Standing in the Last Ditch: On the Communicative Intentions of Fiction Makers.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 72, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 351-363.
- Currie, Gregory and Ian Ravenscroft. *Recreative Minds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- D’Alessandro, William. “Explicitism About Truth in Fiction.” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 56, no. 1 (Jan. 2016): 53-65.
- Davidson, Donald. “Actions, Reasons and Causes.” *The Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 23 (Nov. 1963): 685-700.
- Davies, David. *Aesthetics and Literature*. London: Continuum, 2007.
- . *Art as Performance*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.
- . “Artistic Intentions and the Ontology of Art.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39, no. 2 (April 1999): 148-162.
- . “Fiction” In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. Edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. London: Routledge, 2013. 330-339.
- . “Fictional Truth and Fictional Authors.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, no. 1 (Jan 1996): 43-55.
- . “The Primacy of Practice in the Ontology of Art.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 67, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 159-171.
- . “Works, Texts, and Contexts.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (Sep 1991): 331-335.
- Descartes, René. “Meditations on First Philosophy.” In *The Philosophical Works of*

- Descartes*. Translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911.
- Evans, Gareth, and John McDowell. *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Everett, Anthony. "Against Fictional Realism." *Journal of Philosophy* 102, no. 12 (2005): 624-49.
- . "Pretense, Existence, and Fictional Objects." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, no. 1 (2007): 56-80.
- Fara, Delia Graff. "Names are Predicates." *The Philosophical Review* 124, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 65.
- Fine, Kit. "The Problem of Non-existents." *Topoi* 1, no. 1-2 (1982): 97-140.
- Friend, Stacie. "Believing in Stories." In *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*. Edited by Gregory Currie, Matthew Kieran, and Aaron Meskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 227-48.
- . "Fiction as a Genre." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 112 (2012): 179-209.
- . "Fictional Characters." *Philosophy Compass* 2, no. 2 (2007): 141-56.
- . "Fictive Utterance and Imagining II." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, *Supplementary Volumes* 85, (2011): 163-180.
- . "The Real Foundation of Fictional Worlds." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95, no. 1 (2017): 29-42.
- Gaut, Berys. *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- . *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . "Creativity and Imagination" In *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*. Edited by Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 148-173.
- Goldman, Alvin I. "Interpretation Psychologized." *Mind & Language* 4, no. 3 (1989): 161-185.
- . "Imagination and Simulation in Audience Responses to Fiction." In *The*

- Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretense, Possibility, and Fiction*, edited by Shaun Nichols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 41-56.
- Gordon, Robert M. "Folk Psychology as Simulation." *Mind & Language* 1, no. 2 (1986): 158-171.
- Grice, Paul. "Meaning." *The Philosophical Review* 66, no. 3 (July 1957): 377-88.
- Hanley, Richard. "As Good as it Gets: Lewis on Truth in Fiction." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 1 (March 2004): 112-128
- Harris, Paul L. *The Work of the Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by Sir Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Iseminger, Gary. "The Aesthetic State of Mind." In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art*. Edited by Matthew Kieran. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. 98-112.
- Jarrold, Chris, Peter Carruthers, Peter K. Smith and Jill Boucher. "Pretend Play: Is It Metarepresentational?" *Mind & Language* 9, no. 4 (1994): 445-468.
- John, Eileen. "Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 4 (Autumn, 1998): 331-348.
- Kieran, Matthew. *Revealing Art*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Kripke, Saul A. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- . *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Kroon, Frederick. "Make-Believe and Fictional Reference." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 2 (1994): 207-14.
- . "A Problem about Make-Believe." *Philosophical Studies* 75, no. 3 (1994): 201-29.
- Lamarque, Peter. *Fictional Points of View*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- . "On Not Expecting Too Much from Narrative." *Mind and Language* 19, no. 4 (Sep. 2004): 393-408.
- . *Work and Object*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.



- Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Leslie, Alan M. "Pretending and Believing: Issues in the Theory of ToMM." *Cognition* 50 (1994): 211-238.
- . "Pretense and Representation." *Psychological Review* 94, no. 4 (1987): 412-426.
- Levinson, Jerrold. *Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- . "What a Musical Work Is." *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 1 (Jan 1980): 5-28.
- Lewis, Clarence Irving. *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*. La Salle: Open Court Publishing, 1946.
- Lewis, David. "Truth in Fiction." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1978): 37-46.
- Lyons, John. "Descartes and the Modern Imagination." *Philosophy and Literature*, no. 2 (1999): 302-312.
- MacDonald, Margaret. "Art and Imagination." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series 53, (1952-53): 205-226.
- Matravers, Derek. *Fiction and Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Meinong, Alexius. "The Theory of Objects." Translated by Isaac Levi, D. B. Terrell, and Roderick M. Chisholm. In *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*. Edited by Roderick M. Chisholm. Glencoe: Free Press, 1960.
- Meskin, Aaron and Jonathan M. Weinberg. "Emotions, Fiction, and Cognitive Architecture." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 18-34.
- Morawetz, Thomas. "The Concept of a Practice." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 24, no. 4 (July 1973): 209-226.
- Motoarcă, Ioan-Radu. "A Bad Theory of Truth in Fiction." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 57, no. 4 (Oct. 2017): 379-387.
- Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435-450.

- Nichols, Shaun. "Imagining and Believing: The Promise of a Single Code." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 129-139.
- Nichols, Shaun and Stephen Stich. "A Cognitive Theory of Pretense." *Cognition* 74, no. 2 (February 2000): 115-147.
- Nichols, Shaun, Stephen Stich, Alan Leslie, and David Klein. "Varieties of Off-Line Simulation." In *Theories of Theories of Mind*. Edited by Peter Carruthers and Peter K. Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 39-74.
- Nolan, Daniel. "Personification and Impossible Fictions." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 1 (Feb. 2015): 57-69
- Novitz, David. *Knowledge, Fiction & Imagination*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Parsons, Terrence. "A Meinongian Analysis of Fictional Objects." *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 1, no. 1 (1975): 73-86.
- . "Are There Nonexistent Objects?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (October 1982): 365-71.
- . *Nonexistent Objects*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.
- Peirce, C. E. *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1931.
- Perner, Josef. *Understanding the Representational Mind*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.
- Preston, Beth. "Philosophical Theories of Artifact Function." In *Philosophy of Technology and Engineering Sciences*. Edited by Anthonie Meijers. Amsterdam: Elsevier B.V., 2009. 213-233.
- Prinz, Jesse. "Emotion and Aesthetic Value." In *The Aesthetic Mind: Philosophy and Psychology*. Edited by Elisabeth Schellekens and Peter Goldie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 71-88.
- Putnam, Hillary. "Meaning and Reference." *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 19 (Nov. 1973): 699-711.

- Rawls, John. "Two Concepts of Rules." *The Philosophical Review* 64, no. 1 (Jan. 1955): 3-32.
- Richmond, Alasdair. "Time-Travel Fictions and Philosophy." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Oct 2001): 305-318.
- Rudner, Richard. "The Ontological Status of the Esthetic Object." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 10, no. 3 (Mar 1950): 380-388.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1919.
- Salmon, Nathan. "Nonexistence." *Noûs* 32, no. 3 (Sep 1998): 277-319.
- Sauchelli, Andrea. "Fictional Objects, Non-existence, and the Principle of Characterization." *Philosophical Studies* 159, no. 1 (May 2012): 139-46.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *A Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehave. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.
- Schroeder, Timothy and Carl Matheson. "Imagination and Emotion." In *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretense, Possibility, and Fiction*. Edited by Shaun Nichols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 19-36.
- Scruton, Roger. *Art and Imagination*. London: Methuen & Co., 1974.
- Searle, John R. *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- . *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Skolnick, Deena and Paul Bloom. "The Intuitive Cosmology of Fictional Worlds." In *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretense, Possibility, and Fiction*. Edited by Shaun Nichols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 73-85.
- Stock, Kathleen. *Only Imagine: Fiction, Interpretation, and Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Stokes, Dustin. "Art and Modal Knowledge." In *Knowing Art: Essays in Epistemology and Aesthetics*. Edited by Dominic Lopes and Matthew Kieran. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007. 67-81.

- Thomasson, Amie L. *Fiction and Metaphysics*. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- . “Fictional Entities.” In *A Companion to Metaphysics*, Second edition, edited by Jaegwon Kim, Ernest Sosa and Gary Rosenkrantz, 10-18. Blackwell, 2009.
- . “The Ontology of Art and Knowledge in Aesthetics.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 221-229.
- Van Inwagen, Peter. “Creatures of Fiction.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (October 1977): 299-308.
- . “Pretense and Paraphrase.” In *The Reasons of Art: Artworks and the Transformations of Philosophy*, edited by Peter McCormick, 414-22. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985.
- Voltolini, Alberto. “How Fictional Works are Related to Fictional Entities.” *Dialectica* 57, no. 2 (2003): 225-238.
- . *How Ficta Follow Fiction: A Syncretistic Account of Fictional Entities*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006.
- Walton, Kendall L. “Categories of Art.” *The Philosophical Review* 79, no. 3 (1970): 334-367.
- . *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- . “Spelunking, Simulation, and Slime: On Being Moved by Fiction.” In *Emotion and the Arts*. Edited by Mette Hjort and Sue Lavers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 37-49.
- Weinberg, Jonathan M. “Configuring the Cognitive Imagination.” In *New Waves in Aesthetics*. Edited by Katherine Thomas-Jones and Kathleen Stock. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 203-223.
- Wetzel, Linda. “Types and Tokens.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward M. Zalta (Fall 2018), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/types-tokens>>.
- Wildman, Nathan and Christian Folde. “Fiction Unlimited.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 75, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 73-80.

- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Edited by G. H. von Wright, R. Rhees, and G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- Wollheim, Richard. *Art and Its Objects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Works and Worlds of Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.
- . "Artists in the Shadows: Review of Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51, no. 2 (1991): 407-411.
- Yablo, Stephen. "Abstract Objects: A Case Study." *Philosophical Issues* 12, no. 1 (2002): 220-40.
- . "Is Conceivability a Guide to Possibility?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, no. 1 (March 1993): 1-42.
- Yagisawa, Takashi. "Against Creationism in Fiction." *Nous* 35, no. S15 (2001): 153-72.
- . *Worlds and Individuals, Possible and Otherwise*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Zalta, Edward N. "The Road Between Pretense Theory and Abstract Object Theory." In *Empty Names, Fiction, and the Puzzles of Non-Existence*, edited by Anthony Everett and Thomas Hofweber, 117-147. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2000.