Harry Potter and the Rescue from Realism:
A Novel Defense of Anti-Realism about Fictional Objects

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

Cathleen Muller, M.A., B.A.

Philosophy Graduate Program
The Ohio State University
2012

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Ben Caplan, Advisor
Professor William Taschek
Professor David Sanson
Abstract

In my dissertation, I defend anti-realism about fictional objects such as characters. I begin by defending realism about fictional objects against the charge that it is committed to metaphysically problematic objects, arguing that the realist can avoid said commitment by distinguishing the properties the character has in the fiction and the identity relations the character bears to other characters in the fiction from those it actually has or bears. I call these moves ‘contextualism’ and ‘externalism’, respectively. I then criticize the revised version of realism on the grounds that contextualism and externalism leave the realist with an unsatisfactory account of reference to fictional objects and arbitrariness in the counting of said objects. I also argue that the fictional objects to which the realist is committed lack properties essential to characters. In contrast, anti-realists do not face these worries, in large part due to the fact that they are never forced to make the contextualist or externalist move.
Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Linda Ludwig,

who brought characters to life.
Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many people for their helpful comments, support and advice throughout the dissertation-writing process.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee at The Ohio State University: my advisor Ben Caplan, for his continued enthusiasm and encouragement, and detailed comments on issues both great and small; David Sanson, for his breadth of philosophical vision and helpful feedback; and William Taschek for pushing me to develop the depth and clarity of my positive proposal. I have also benefited greatly from conversations with Robert Kraut, Timothy Schroeder and Craige Roberts.

I am grateful for the feedback of fellow graduate students Wesley Cray and Scott Brown of the Tasi Metaphysics Group, as well as that of members of the Dissertation Seminar, Philosophy 999A, in the spring quarters of 2007-2009, in particular Steven Brown, Tim Fuller, Dai Heide, Ryan Jordan, Alison Duncan Kerr, Lindsey Mason and Michael Miller. At Marist College, my colleagues Andrei Buckareff, James Snyder and Sara Streett have all provided helpful feedback and advice.
I would like to give a special thanks to my husband Henry John Pratt, my brother Otto Hans Muller and my father Otto Muller, for providing me with both philosophical and emotional support, as well as to Gloria and Oliver for their patience and encouragement.

Lastly, I would like to thank the attendees of the 2009 ASA Pacific Division Meeting, particularly Peter Alward, Gregory Currie, Peter Kivy and Carl Matheson, for their feedback regarding the aesthetics of fictional works and fictional characters, as well as the attendees of the 2009 UMass Graduate Conference in Metaphysics, particularly Sara Bernstein, Einar Duenger Bohn and Edward Ferrier, for feedback on the proposed metaphysics of realism about fictional objects.
Vita

2000 .................................................................................. B.A. English Literature,
Swarthmore College.
2004 .................................................................................. M.A. Philosophy,
Tufts University.
2004-2009 ........................................................................... Graduate Teaching Associate,
The Ohio State University.
2010-2011 ........................................................................... Adjunct Instructor,
Marist College.
2011-present ......................................................................... Teaching Associate,
Marist College.

Fields of Study

Major Field: Philosophy
Areas of Specialization: Metaphysics, Philosophy of Language
# Table of Contents

Abstract.......................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication.......................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledgements........................................................................................................... iv
Vita....................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Tables ....................................................................................................................... x

Chapters:

1. Overview ....................................................................................................................... 1
   0. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 1
   1. A Preliminary Defense of Realism .............................................................................. 3
   2. Problems for Realism ................................................................................................. 4
   3. A Defense of Anti-Realism ......................................................................................... 7
   4. Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 10

2. Refining Realism about Fictional Objects ................................................................. 12
   0. Introduction ................................................................................................................. 12
   1. Three Arguments for Realism about Fictional Objects ............................................. 14
      1.1 Apparent Quantification over Fictional Objects ..................................................... 14
      1.2 Parallels to Other Objects ...................................................................................... 17
      1.3 Apparent Reference to Fictional Objects ............................................................... 20
   2. Three Arguments against Realism about Fictional Objects ...................................... 21
      2.1 Negative Existentials and Occam’s Razor ............................................................. 21
      2.2 Commitment to Metaphysically Problematic Objects ............................................ 26
   3. Two Weak Replies to Everett’s Argument ................................................................. 31
      3.1 No Character ....................................................................................................... 31
      3.2 Wrong Interpretation ............................................................................................ 34
   4. A Stronger Reply ....................................................................................................... 39
      4.1 Contextualism ..................................................................................................... 39
      4.2 Externalism ......................................................................................................... 43
      4.3 Applying the View .............................................................................................. 46
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3. How Realists Refer: The Problem of Fixing Reference in CE Realism</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0. Introduction</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Types of Utterances</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 Types of Utterances and Typical Examples</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Additional Complexities</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Descriptivism</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 Using Internal Properties: Currie</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Using External Properties: van Inwagen</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Problems for Descriptivism</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1 Modality</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Ignorance and Error</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Circularity</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Varieties of Baptism</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1 Authorial Baptism: Braun</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 Foundation in the Text: Thomasson</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Stipulation</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1 The Proposal</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 The Truth-Value Worry, Continued</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3 The Creation Worry</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.4 The Plausibility Worry, Continued</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Conclusion</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4. Two Metaphysical Problems for CE Realism: Essential Properties and Arbitrariness</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0. Introduction</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Criticism of Contextualism</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 Two Weak Arguments against Contextualism</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Two Stronger Arguments: Conflict with Practices and Switching</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Intimacy with Purely Internal Properties</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 CE Realism: Salmon</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Possibilism: A Lewisian View</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Meinongianism: Parsons and Zalta</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. A Problem for Externalism: Arbitrariness</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1 The Arbitrariness Problem</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 A Proposed Solution: Schnieder and von Solodkoff</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Another Proposed Solution: Thomasson</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5: Pretense Theory: A Solution to the Problems Facing CE Realism ................................. 132

0. Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 132
1. Pretense Theory .................................................................................................................. 134
   1.1 Types of Anti-Realism ................................................................................................. 134
   1.2 A Preference for Pretense ......................................................................................... 137
   1.3 An Overview of Pretense Theory ............................................................................. 139
2. Classes with Intuition and Replies ..................................................................................... 143
   2.1 Denial of the Character’s Existence .......................................................................... 143
   2.2 Speakers are Not Pretending .................................................................................... 144
   2.3 Positive Evidence for Pretending ............................................................................. 148
3. Two Additional Worries for Pretense Theory ..................................................................... 149
   3.1 Theoretical Complexity ............................................................................................... 149
   3.2 What is the Imagination? ............................................................................................ 151
4. The Problem of Reference ................................................................................................. 155
   4.1 Reference in the Pretense .......................................................................................... 155
   4.2 A Realist Reply: Fixing ‘Kind K’ .............................................................................. 157
   4.3 Another Realist Reply: Identifying the Same Pretense ............................................. 159
5. Essential Properties ........................................................................................................... 162
   5.1 Keeping Characters Together ..................................................................................... 162
   5.2 Nonexistence ............................................................................................................... 164
6. Arbitrariness ....................................................................................................................... 167
   6.1 How Anti-Realists Avoid Arbitrariness ....................................................................... 167
   6.2 A Realist Reply: Arbitrariness in the Pretense ......................................................... 169
   6.3 The Wild Wild World of Fiction .................................................................................. 172

Works Cited ............................................................................................................................ 177
Appendix: List of Numbered Sentences .................................................................................. 197
List of Tables

Table 1: Types of Utterances Containing Names from Fiction........................................59
Chapter 1.

Overview

0. Introduction

When I began work on realism and anti-realism about fictional objects, I was struck by the experience of “losing oneself” in a work of fiction. During such an experience, fictional characters come to feel more real than one’s own acquaintances and friends; the story takes one’s focus and “real life” fades into the background; it might seem as though the fictional characters deserve more of one’s attention and sympathy than do one’s loved ones or oneself; and the return to reality can be jarring. This might happen while reading a novel, watching a movie or television show, playing a video game, watching a play, or even looking intently at a work of visual art. Writers and directors aim to create “compelling” characters, after all, and in turn the audience is compelled to care about them. All of this suggests and reinforces the sense that characters are real entities, i.e., that they exist in reality. Further support – indeed, some would say the primary support for realism about fictional objects – can be found in the work of literary theorists, many of whom devote their lives to studying a particular character, such as Hamlet, or a set of characters, such as the characters of Jane Austen’s novels. If these characters do not exist, it is unclear what is the object of this intellectual work.
On the opposing side, when we do manage to “pull ourselves out” of the fiction, we are generally willing to admit that the characters in question are not real; our focus on reality returns and the story fades into the background; and we realize that we and our loved ones deserve more attention and care than the characters of the fiction.\textsuperscript{1} Children who had believed in the reality of fictional characters gradually recognize that there is no Narnia, Oz or Hogwarts and that the characters depicted in the relevant fictions do not exist.\textsuperscript{2} Even literary theorists would likely allow that the characters they discuss do not exist in reality but only in a fiction. These experiences and intuitions provide support for anti-realism about fictional objects.

While some might take the debate over fictional objects to be trivial, it has had growing momentum in recent years and has existed in something like its current form since the work of Alexius Meinong at the turn of last century. The debate contains or is closely related to many other pressing questions in aesthetics, philosophy of language and metaphysics, regarding emotional response to fiction, learning from fiction, empty names, the limits of conceivability, category mistakes, identity and arbitrariness. I take this debate to have real-world implications as well: by examining the relationship between fiction and reality, we can gain a better understanding of such topics as “post-modern” fiction, the fictionalization of historical and contemporary events by politicians

\textsuperscript{1} Of course, this does not always occur. For example, a couple in Korea allowed their three-month-old child to die of starvation while playing a game in which they nurtured a virtual child. See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/southkorea/7376178/Korean-couple-let-baby-starve-to-death-while-caring-for-virtual-child.html, accessed August 29, 2011.

\textsuperscript{2} See Morison and Gardner 1978 and Corriveau et al. 2009 for support of this developmental claim. Although children of all ages have some facility sorting “real” and “pretend” figures, there is marked improvement as children grow older. However, see Sharon and Wooley 2004 for the argument that preschool-age children demonstrate a more nuanced understanding of this distinction when asked to attribute properties to the characters rather than merely sorting them into categories.
and the media, and the psychology of computer-gaming and virtual-reality. In the remainder of this chapter, I set out a brief summary of the arguments of this dissertation, which conclude in favor of anti-realism about fictional objects.\(^3\)

1. **A preliminary defense of realism**

I begin in Chapter 2 by considering the arguments commonly offered for and against realism. Realism is commonly defended by noting that both ordinary speakers and literary theorists appear to quantify over characters, characters seem similar in nature to other objects we count in our ontology, and both ordinary speakers and literary theorists seem to use the names of characters, as well as the general term ‘character’, referentially. It is commonly criticized for its difficulty accounting for the apparent truth of negative existentials such as

\[
(1) \quad \text{Harry Potter does not exist.}
\]

as well as its heavy ontological burden. I defend the realist against these common objections, and I find that the realist faces a far deeper challenge in the criticism that she is committed to metaphysically problematic objects.\(^4\)

The latter argument, in brief, is as follows:

(i) If we can construct fictions in which characters have contradictory properties or stand in indeterminate identity

---

\(^3\) Henceforth, I call this view ‘anti-realism’ and realism about fictional objects ‘realism’, where there is no possibility of confusion with other anti-realist or realist theories.

\(^4\) I focus on the formulation of this argument presented in Everett 2005, an argument first developed by Russell (1905a, 1905b). In both Russell 1905a and 1905b, he anticipates the objection raised by Everett’s “Dialethialand” in his criticism of Meinong, while in Russell 1905b, he anticipates the objection raised by “Frackworld” and perhaps “Asymmetryville” as well.
relations, then the realist is committed to objects that have contradictory properties or stand in indeterminate identity relations.

(ii) We can construct fictions in which characters have contradictory properties or stand in indeterminate identity relations.

(iii) Therefore, the realist is committed to objects that have contradictory properties or stand in indeterminate identity relations.

I consider the possibility of rejecting the second premise, but I argue that such a move does not ultimately succeed. I thus conclude Chapter 2 by arguing that the realist should reject the first premise, blocking the “export” of properties and identity relations from the fiction to reality. The realist can do this by adopting two positions: contextualism – the view that a character has most of its properties only according to the fiction – and externalism – the view that the character can be individuated purely in terms of facts external to the fiction.\(^5\)

2. Problems for realism

However, as I argue in Chapters III and IV, the move to contextualist-externalist (CE) realism yields several further problems for the realist. In Chapter 3, I consider a problem from the philosophy of language: how do we pick out a specific fictional object and use a name to refer to it? I first consider the descriptivist answer and argue that, in

\(^5\) These terms are borrowed from Fine 1982.
either of the versions available to the CE realist, it falls prey to the worries Kripke raises regarding descriptivism for historical proper names.

I then consider two varieties of the view that reference occurs via an initial baptism and a causal-historical chain: David Braun’s view that the author baptizes the character and Amie Thomasson’s view that the textual foundation allows for “quasi-indexical reference.” I argue that neither of these baptismal views suffices to pick out a particular object as the referent of the name from fiction, if the character lacks nearly all of the properties it is said to have in the fiction. I conclude that the realist should instead stipulate the referent or referents of names from fiction. For example, she might follow Frege in stipulating that all names from fiction refer to the number zero or extend that proposal so that each name refers to a different number. This solves the problem of reference, although the solution is quite artificial. The challenge for anti-realism is therefore this: can it provide a less artificial understanding of apparent reference to fictional objects? I argue in the final chapter that anti-realism has a natural reply to that challenge.

Before addressing that challenge, I turn in Chapter 4 to two metaphysical problems for the CE realist, the first of which follows from the contextualism of the view and the second of which follows from the externalism of the view. First, I argue that adopting contextualism commits the realist to an object that lacks properties that are essential to fictional characters. In defending this point, I argue that it is essential to a fictional character that it have some of its internal properties, i.e. properties attributed to it in the fiction that are not attributed to the character outside the fiction. However,
the contextualism of CE realism dictates that the character has none of these properties. Instead, it is only said to have these properties according to the story. Thus, I conclude that the objects proposed by the CE realist are not well suited to be characters and that we should thus question whether the objects of CE realism in general count as fictional objects.

In addition, the externalism of CE realism leaves the realist with a problem of arbitrariness. Although she need not commit to characters that stand in indeterminate identity relations, she must make an arbitrary choice in cases where there is indeterminate identity in the fiction. That is, she must say either that there are really two characters that are said in the fiction to be indeterminately identical to each other or that there is really only one character that is said in the fiction to be two objects that are indeterminately identical to each other. But there seems to be no justification for either choice, regarding certain fictions. In developing this worry, I consider Benjamin Schnieder and Tatjana von Solodkoff’s (2009) attempt to resolve the worry by relying on a default assumption about character identity and Thomasson’s (1999) attempt to downplay the worry by noting the similarity between fictional objects and other objects that seem to stand in indeterminate identity relations. I argue that neither of these approaches to the problem succeeds in alleviating the problem of arbitrariness for the CE realist.
3. A defense of anti-realism

In the final chapter, I focus on pretense theory as my prime example of anti-realism and argue that this view solves the problems that face realism. As I note throughout the chapter, this argument extends to other anti-realist views, such as fictionalism and presupposition-based accounts. After setting out a basic outline of pretense theory, I defend the view against some prominent criticisms: (i) the pretense theory cannot make sense of statements like

(2) There are many characters in the Harry Potter series.

(ii) literary theorists are not pretending, (iii) the theory is needlessly baroque and (iv) the theory lacks a theory of the imagination and is thus uninformative. In general, my argument in this section is intended to make explicit and offer further argument for some of the often ignored aspects of Kendall Walton’s pretense-theoretic view, though some of my arguments go beyond his original presentation as well.

In response to (i), I offer Walton’s suggestion that a focus on theoretical utterances such as (2) has led us to ignore the fundamental role of make-believe in our relation to fiction, whereas his theory begins from make-believe and works upward toward these theoretical utterances. Given the centrality of make-believe to our interaction with fiction, I argue, this is a sound starting point. In response to (ii), I note that Walton can understand literary theorists to be making utterances “as if” in pretense and that, furthermore, there are positive reasons to take literary theorists to actually be pretending. Regarding the baroque aspects of the view, I argue that it is far less complex than it appears at first and that, even if it is more complex than realism,
this is balanced by the view's comparatively sparse ontology. Lastly, in response to (iv), I argue that Walton's descriptions of children's games of make-believe are sufficient to supply a working account of the imagination. If the reader disagrees with my defense of pretense theory, such worries are best taken as points in favor of an alternative anti-realist view rather than a point in favor of realism. Regardless of the anti-realist view one adopts, I claim that it will be better able than realism to solve the problems raised in Chapters III and IV. Moreover, it can do so relatively simply, which I take to provide further support for the anti-realist approach.

Again, there are three problems for the CE realist: reference to fictional objects, the essential properties of fictional objects, and arbitrariness in counting fictional objects. The first thing to note regarding reference is that the problem is far less deep for the anti-realist than it is for the realist, because there are no objects to be picked out by names from fiction, on the anti-realist view. Moreover, the pretense theorist can explain the appearance of reference in utterances apparently about fictional objects, by arguing that reference occurs within the pretense. So, in the case of fictive utterances, i.e. utterances that are true according to the fiction, we pretend that reference occurs in whatever way it occurs in reality. For example, we might import Kripke's baptismal picture of reference into the fiction. Then, according to the game we play with the fiction, we refer to the character just as the other characters do – via an initial baptism and a causal-historical chain.

\[\text{In this brief summary, I gloss over a number of subtleties in Walton's presentation of pretense theory. For instance, he would not say that an utterance is } \text{true} \text{ in the fiction, but instead that it is } \text{fictional}. \text{ See Chapter 5 § 1.3 for a more detailed discussion.}\]
Meta-fictive utterances, i.e., utterances about the fiction from an external perspective, are treated the same way, by importing whichever theory of reference is correct. Thus, we might play a game in which the author creates and baptizes a character and this use is passed down through a causal-historical chain. Potential difficulties in picking out the character are unimportant, because the anti-realist does not take there to be a character; rather, we are simply pretending to refer. In cases where this fails to latch onto anything within our game, we can either pretend that we refer to something or that we do not. As Walton argues, there are no strict rules as to what we may or may not pretend in our unofficial games. Some unofficial games will be “natural” and others will not be, or there might be no rule saying what is authorized.

The anti-realist can resolve the problem of separating the fictional object from its essential properties in a similar way. After all, she is not committed to the existence of a fictional character that lacks the properties essential to it, because she is not committed to the existence of any fictional characters. Instead, the only “existence” that fictional characters can be said to have is the existence ascribed to them within a game of make-believe – either the authorized game we play when we talk about what is true in the fiction or the unofficial game we play when we talk about characters from a meta-fictive perspective. Within these games, fictional characters have all the properties they are said to have. Thus, the intimate relation between a fictional character and the properties ascribed to it in the fiction is preserved.

Lastly, the pretense theorist can resolve the problem of arbitrariness simply by accepting indeterminacy. Because she is not committed to the existence of fictional
objects, her concern is only whether a certain move is authorized within a given game. In a story where it is indeterminate whether there is one character or two, the assertion that it is indeterminate whether there is one character or two is authorized. Indeed, as I argue, this seems closer to being correct than either the claim that there is one character or the claim that there are two. The commitment to indeterminacy in the game of pretense, which authorizes such an utterance, does not commit the pretense theorist to objects that stand in an indeterminate identity relation to each other, and thus he does not need to make the move to externalism that leads the realist to the problem of arbitrariness.

I close the chapter by considering the worry that the pretense theorist is still committed to making an arbitrary choice, because it will sometimes be arbitrary which game we ought to play with a given work. I argue that, while there is some ground for this worry, it is less serious than the arbitrariness that results from CE realism. Indeed, I propose that such arbitrariness might be a benefit of pretense theory rather than a worry, given the wide variety and flexibility in both fiction and our interaction with fiction. That is, we might want to leave several equally good options open, in choosing what game to play with a work of fiction.

4. Conclusion

I conclude from the preceding arguments that we ought to be anti-realists about fictional objects. To some extent, this conclusion is unsurprising. As children grow better at distinguishing fiction from reality, they come to recognize that Cinderella is
“just pretend,” that the character does not really exist, and that the actors at Disneyworld are simply that: actors pretending to be a merely fictional character.

Literary theorists, for their part, should feel comfortable with the idea that characters exist only within fictions and that this provides the basis for the ways that we seem to talk about them in literary theory. Moreover, even if these intuitive bases for anti-realism are found lacking, I have argued that realism can solve the problem of metaphysically problematic objects only at the cost of further significant problems for both reference to fictional objects and the metaphysics of such objects, while the anti-realist can resolve all of these problems elegantly. I thus conclude that anti-realism about fictional objects is the superior position.
Chapter 2.

Refining Realism about Fictional Objects

“As I say, sir, that which is a game of art for you is our sole reality.”

— The Father in Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

0. Introduction

In this chapter, I develop what I take to be the most viable form of realism about fictional objects. In §1, I present three of the most well-known and widely accepted arguments for realism about fictional objects: we appear to quantify over them, we accept objects in our ontology that are relevantly similar to fictional objects, and we appear to refer to them. In §2, I consider three criticisms of this realist position: we take negative existentials about fictional objects to be true, realism about fictional objects is ontologically profligate, and the realist is committed to metaphysically problematic objects. Of these, I find the third criticism, as developed by Anthony

---

7 The term currently in vogue for this position is ‘fictional realism’, due in large part to the reactionary effort prompted by Everett 2005, though one also finds it in Brock 2002, Kroon 2003, and Corazza and Whitsey 2003. I have found that the term sounds paradoxical to some, and it also risks confusion with discussion of realistic fictions in literary criticism. Goodman (2004) calls the realist a ‘fictionalist’, which yields much potential for confusion, for reasons that will become clearer in Chapter 5. Hanley (2003) uses the term ‘critical realism’, which I avoid because it connotes a realist view about all theoretical entities of literary criticism – novels, plots, genres and characters – and I mean to single out the view that the objects depicted in fictions – characters, fictional settings and fictional objects – are real. I thus adopt the term ‘realism about fictional objects’, following the tradition of van Inwagen (1977) and Howell (1979), though the former uses the term ‘entity’ rather than ‘object’.
Everett (2005), to be the most serious. As he argues, we can write stories according to which it is indeterminate whether the characters are identical, in which characters are both identical and distinct, and in which they stand in asymmetric identity relations to one another. In these fictions, the characters are metaphysically problematic objects.

Yet the realist is committed to the existence of the characters described in the fiction. It thus seems that a realist about fictional objects is committed to metaphysically problematic objects.

However, I argue, the realist can respond to this worry. In §3, I consider two potential responses that, though promising, do not ultimately succeed: the view that no character is created in stories such as Everett’s and the view that stories such as Everett’s should not be interpreted in such a way that the character instantiates problematic properties and relations according to the fiction. I believe that these responses fail, largely because they lack justification. Instead, as I argue in §4, the realist should respond by divorcing the properties that a character is said to have in the fiction from the properties it has outside the fiction and by individuating the character solely by means of the properties it has outside the fiction. I close in §5 by defending this refinement of the realist position against two criticisms that Everett develops.

---

8 Because Everett, Thomasson and others focus almost exclusively on fictional characters, I will occasionally use the term ‘character’ or ‘fictional character’ in place of ‘fictional object’. Nonetheless, my discussion is intended to be general. For an example of a metaphysically problematic object depicted in fiction, consider the box that is both “absolutely empty and has something inside it,” in Priest 1997: 575.
1. Three arguments for realism about fictional objects

1.1. Apparent quantification over fictional objects

Realism about fictional objects is the view that fictional objects – fictional characters like Harry Potter, fictional places like Hogwarts, and fictional artifacts like Harry’s magic wand – are in our ontology. This view is appealing for several reasons, primary among which is our apparent ontological commitment to such objects in our meta-fictive utterances, i.e. the utterances common in literary theory. For example, Iris Murdoch states in an interview

(3) Take an example from a novel I have just finished … there is a character who appears at intervals and it is never clear what the sex of the character is.

In an utterance such as this, the speaker appears to quantify over the character from an extra-fictional perspective.

This apparent quantification does not seem to be eliminable, in part because we appear to draw valid inferences from these quantified sentences, as in the following example from Peter van Inwagen (2003: 136):

(4) There is a fictional character who, for every novel, either appears in that novel or is a model for a character who does.

from which one can infer

(5) If no character appears in every novel, then some character is modeled on another character.

---

9 One should note that ordinary speakers also utter meta-fictive utterances, such as ‘Harry Potter is my favorite fictional character’, so they are not exclusive to literary theory. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, the other type of utterance I focus on is ‘fictive’, exemplified by ‘Harry Potter is a wizard’. The distinction parallels that found in Evans 1982: 365-366 between “non-conniving” and “conniving” uses of singular terms and should not be confused with Currie’s slightly different use of the same terms.

10 Bigsby 2003:104.
Van Inwagen (2003: 137) proposes that these sentences can be translated into the quantifier-variable idiom as follows:

\[(4') \exists x (x \text{ is a fictional character} \land \forall y \{y \text{ is a novel} \rightarrow [x \text{ appears in } y \lor \exists z (z \text{ is a fictional character} \land z \text{ appears in } y \land x \text{ is a model for } z)]\}).\]

and

\[(5') \sim \exists x [x \text{ is a fictional character} \land \forall y (y \text{ is a novel} \rightarrow x \text{ appears in } y)] \rightarrow \exists x \exists y (y \text{ is a model for } x).\]

As van Inwagen (2003: 137) argues, such a translation “does not seem to be … implausible or far-fetched.” Rather, it appears to be an accurate translation of (4) and (5). A formal consequence of (4') is

\[(6') \exists x (x \text{ is a fictional character}).\]

which can be translated into the informal idiom as

\[(6) \text{ There are fictional characters.}^{12}\]

If we accept W.V.O. Quine’s (1948) criterion of ontological commitment, then, van Inwagen concludes, we should be realists about fictional objects.

Two additional points should be made regarding this argument. First, as van Inwagen acknowledges, literary theory might have less claim to being true than the

---

11 Van Inwagen (2003: 137-138) notes that (4) might not be true but asserts that this is “not to the point.” Rather, “the two sentences were chosen to provide an example of a formal inference that was simple but nevertheless subtle enough that the utility of quantifier logic in demonstrating its validity was evident.” I follow van Inwagen in using these utterances for the same reason. Van Inwagen (2003: 138) also notes that there are many true sentences of literary criticism that allow the immediate deduction of (6).

12 Van Inwagen 2003: 137. One should note that it is possible to create paraphrases of (4) and (5) that do not require quantification over fictional characters, a possibility I discuss further in Chapter 5. However, this does not change the fact that the quantifier-variable translation presented by van Inwagen seems prima facie correct, which provides motivation for realism about fictional objects.
theories to which Quine thought we should defer in drawing ontological conclusions.\textsuperscript{13} After all, Quine (1948: 23) offered his criterion as a means of avoiding entities such as Pegasus – as a tool for those with “a taste for desert landscapes.” His criterion was intended to apply to our best theory of the world and thereby allow us to establish what must be included in our ontology.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, it goes against the grain of Quine’s criterion to use it to defend the existence of fictional objects. However, van Inwagen counters this worry by noting that we do take some utterances of literary theory to be straightforwardly true. Even if the reader finds (4) or (5) to be false, the truth of utterances such as (3) or (6) seems harder to deny. Yet both (3) and (6) straightforwardly express a commitment to fictional characters.

Second, this argument assumes that existential quantification is objectual rather than substitutional. The distinction, briefly, is as follows: on the objectual interpretation, (6) is true just in case fictional characters exist, while on the substitutional interpretation, (6) is true just in case there is a term that can be substituted for the variable that makes the resulting sentence true.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the defender of substitutional quantification concludes, one cannot draw an ontological conclusion on the basis of existential quantification alone. Van Inwagen (1981) replies that he cannot make sense

\textsuperscript{13} See Quine 1948: 36-37. Yagisawa (2001) argues that literary theory lacks a claim to truth, due to its interpretive nature.

\textsuperscript{14} While Quine considers phenomenalist, physicalist and mathematical theories as candidates for our best theory, taking it to be an open question which of these should be preferred, he does not take literary theory to be a contender. See Quine 1948: 36-37.

\textsuperscript{15} See Orenstein 1978 for a presentation of substitutional quantification. For an alternative proposal, see Hofweber 2000: 253, in which he proposes a distinction between “Quinean quantifiers,” to which one can add ‘who/that exists’ without change of meaning, and “non-Quinean quantifiers,” to which one cannot necessarily add such a phrase. He contrasts ‘Someone ate my sandwich’ with ‘Someone, namely Sherlock Holmes, is smarter than any real detective’ to make this case. See also Kripke 1976 for a defense of substitutional quantification, though he does not believe that substitutional quantification allows us to avoid ontological commitment in natural language.
of what substitutional quantification means. As he puts it, ‘there is a term such that …’
has an objectual reading; if it is not read objectually, he does not know what else it
could mean.\textsuperscript{16}

For the sake of argument, I grant the realist both that some meta-fictive
utterances are among those we count as true and that, if these utterances are translated
directly into the quantifier-variable idiom, the quantification is objectual. As we will see,
this does not yet decide the matter; the utterances might be counted as true because
they pragmatically convey other propositions, and the latter propositions might lack a
quantificational structure altogether or quantify over other things, such as acts of
pretense. Nonetheless, the apparent quantification in meta-fictive utterances such as
(3)-(6) provides \textit{prima facie} evidence for the realist’s position.

1.2 Parallels to other objects

Another argument for realism about fictional objects, developed by Amie Thomasson
(1999: 13), draws on the similarity between fictional objects, on the one hand, and
novels, marriages, contracts, religions and other social institutions, on the other. All of
these entities depend on intentional acts for their creation, and they all depend on
concrete entities or memories for their persistence, she argues.\textsuperscript{17} She concludes that,

\textsuperscript{17} See Thomasson 1999: 35-36. While one could maintain that mental states (including memories) are
concrete, this subtlety need not concern us here.
because they are all examples of “abstract artifacts,” with the same dependence on both real objects and mental states, they should all have the same ontological status.¹⁸

Literary works such as novels and plays seem to provide the closest parallel to fictional objects. We appear to accept literary works, not merely the copies or memories of such works, in our ontology.¹⁹ If we accept these entities, then we seem to accept that the author can create an abstract object, which is then dependent on concrete copies or memories, as well as a competent readership, for its persistence. Yet why should we allow that the author can create the novel and not the characters depicted in the novel? Both novels and characters raise the question of how they can be created by their authors if they are in some sense brought about out of sentence strings that exist prior to the author’s writing.²⁰ Moreover, the roles that they play in human experience seem similar and intimately related. Thus, the realist concludes that we ought to count fictional objects in our ontology if we count these literary works.²¹

Richard (2003: 2) responds to this argument by objecting that we can understand a novel as belonging to a familiar ontological category, such as a template or set of instructions for “engaging … in a series of interconnected speech acts.” Likewise, we

¹⁸ Thomasson (1999: 117-122) takes dependence relations to be particularly important, because she believes that we should reject the traditional categories, such as abstract and concrete, in favor of ontological categories based on these dependence relations.
¹⁹ See Currie 1991 for a defense of the view that the work is distinct from the text and Goodman and Elgin 1988 for the opposing view. One of Thomasson’s (1999: 36) arguments for the distinction between work and text is that the work is dependent on some copy or other of the text (or a memory of it) but not on any particular copy. However, the same might be said for the text-type, as opposed to the text-token, so this point is not decisive. A more decisive question in the debate is whether two authors can bring about the same work, as Borges (1939) presents ironically in “Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote.” Goodman and Elgin argue that it is possible, while Currie argues that it is not.
²⁰ I discuss the problems of creation in more detail in Chapter 3 §5.3.
²¹ The same parallels could be drawn between fictional objects in visual media, such as film and visual art, and the visual media themselves. I focus on literature here, because I find these examples clearest. However, I believe that any plausible theory of fictional objects should extend to visual art as well.
can understand marriages and contracts as “complex relational states of affairs” and religions as complex social practices.\textsuperscript{22} In contrast, a fictional object appears to be \textit{sui generis}, in that it cannot be understood as “a state, an event, a practice, a rule, [or] a set of directions”; in short, it cannot be understood as any familiar sort of object. Richard’s justification for this is that, if the character were to be reduced to such a familiar sort of object, one could write a fiction containing both the character and the familiar sort as distinct objects.\textsuperscript{23} For instance, one could write a fiction about a portly butler named ‘John’ who sat down to read a template for imagining a portly butler named ‘John’.

Thus, the character and the template cannot be identical, and the same argument can be raised for each “humdrum” sort that one identifies with a fictional object. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, a similar line of criticism is developed by van Inwagen (2003: 154), who argues that there is no reason to believe that cultural artifacts such as marriages come into existence, because “it is much more plausible to say that in such cases ‘all that happens’ is that things already in existence acquire new properties or come to stand in new relations.”\textsuperscript{24} Despite these objections, the parallel between fictional objects and other more generally accepted objects provides at least \textit{prima facie} support for realism about fictional objects.

\textsuperscript{22} Richard 2003: 1.
\textsuperscript{23} Richard 2003: 1-4. While I find this to be an interesting objection, I believe it can be deflated by noting that the distinction between the character and the template, state, event, etc., might hold only according to the fiction. Outside the fiction, they could be identical. This point will become clearer after the discussion of externalism in §4.2 below.
\textsuperscript{24} However, van Inwagen (1977: 302-303) agrees with Thomasson that novels, chapters, and other “theoretical entities of literary criticism” exist.
1.3 Apparent reference to fictional objects

Lastly, realism about fictional objects finds support in arguments for direct reference in the philosophy of language. If we are convinced of direct reference and of the need to treat meta-fictive utterances uniformly with other utterances, then there must be something to which names from fiction directly refer when they are used in meta-fictive utterances that are taken to be true. For example, consider

(7) Harry Potter is my favorite character.

or

(8) [T]he second section is dedicated entirely to the development of Harry Potter as the central heroic character of both the novels and the films.

Realism about fictional objects emerges as a solution to the puzzle of identifying the referents of such names. However, as I argue below, these referents lack the properties we commonly associate with them, given what I take to be the strongest realist response to the challenge that she is committed to metaphysically problematic objects.

---

25 See for example Kaplan 1989.
26 Berndt and Steveker 2011: 3.
2. Three arguments against realism about fictional objects

2.1 Negative existentials and Occam’s razor

Despite the arguments offered above in favor of realism about fictional objects, many have found the view objectionable. One challenge that has been offered but that does not seem decisive is that both ordinary speakers and literary theorists sincerely assert

(1) Harry Potter does not exist.\(^\text{28}\)

In considering how much weight we should give to this point, one should note that intuitions about fiction often conflict.\(^\text{29}\) For example, ordinary speakers and literary theorists also sincerely assert

(9) There is a fictional character named ‘Harry Potter’.\(^\text{30}\)

Because our ordinary utterances about fictional objects thus seem to be inconsistent with one another, it is unlikely that any unified theory can accommodate the range of utterances about fiction without paraphrase. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that speakers sincerely assert both (1) and (9), because both realists and anti-realists must make sense of this data in their theories.\(^\text{31}\)

If you are unconvinced by this quick response, further responses to the problem of negative existentials are available to the realist. I find the strongest of these to be the

\(^{28}\) See Walton 2003, Everett 2007 for examples of this criticism.
\(^{29}\) For a nice presentation of this point, see Braun 2005: 612-613.
\(^{30}\) The idiomatic shift from ‘x exists’ to ‘there is an x’ is worth noting, because it might be taken to support the suggestion raised in §1.1 that the existential quantifier is substitutional and thus does not carry ontological import. Nonetheless, I take (1) and (9) to support the suggestion that speaker intuitions about fictional characters might not be fully coherent and cannot necessarily be taken at face value.
\(^{31}\) Everett (2007) takes it to be especially problematic for the realist that speakers also assert

(i) Harry Potter is a fictional character and therefore does not exist.

In such an utterance, the name does “double duty” and thus it seems that it must refer to the fictional object in the claim that it does not exist. However, I believe that Predelli’s pragmatic account, presented below, works equally well for (1) and Everett’s proposed utterance.
pragmatic account offered by Stephano Predelli (2002). For example, it seems stronger than Salmon’s account, according to which an utterance of a negative existential such as (1) pragmatically communicates the proposition expressed by the sentence

\[(1') \text{ No one is both Harry Potter and sufficiently like that.}\]

where ‘like that’ picks out the properties the character is said to have in the fiction.\(^\text{33}\)

One problem with this proposal is that it yields implausible conclusions regarding fictionalized accounts of real people. As Predelli argues, a viewer who was under the misapprehension that Forman’s Amadeus was wholly fictional might assert

\[(10) \text{ Mozart did not exist.}\]

If we adopt Salmon’s pragmatic understanding of such an utterance, and the reasonable hypothesis that many of the properties attributed to Mozart in that movie were not those Mozart in fact had, we find that he is committed to the truth of (10), because he would take it to pragmatically assert

\[(10') \text{ No one is both Mozart and sufficiently like that.}\]

However, (10) is false.\(^\text{34}\)

---

\(^{32}\) Ultimately, however, I do not accept Predelli’s account, because I defend anti-realism about fictional objects. Nonetheless, I present it here to demonstrate that realism cannot be refuted solely on the grounds that speakers appear to utter negative existentials about fictional objects.

\(^{33}\) Salmon 1998: 304. Van Inwagen (1977: 308, n.11) makes a similar claim when he writes, of someone who utters ‘Pickwick does not exist’, “he would probably be expressing the proposition that there is no such man as Pickwick, or, more precisely, the proposition that nothing has all the properties ascribed to Pickwick [i.e., that he is held in Pickwick Papers to have]” (emphases in original). Adams et al. (1997: 145) also make a similar proposal, suggesting that the utterance pragmatically conveys that “no one appropriately related to Doyle (i.e., that Doyle had in mind in the right way) satisfies these descriptions,” where ‘these descriptions’ are the set of descriptions from the Holmes stories that are “associated with the name ‘Holmes’.”

\(^{34}\) Moreover, Salmon’s proposed solution seems ad hoc, without clear parallels in other cases. See Predelli 2002: 269-270 for more on this concern.
In contrast, Predelli takes negative existentials about fictional objects to convey a pragmatic implication that is found in many other cases, namely the implication that the object is not found in the contextually relevant group.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, Predelli argues, when we take

\begin{enumerate}[(1)]
  \item Harry Potter does not exist.
\end{enumerate}

\begin{enumerate}[(1)]
  \item There is no point in searching all the apartments in Baker Street, looking for stacks of cocaine. Holmes does not exist.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{enumerate}

and

\begin{enumerate}[(11)]
  \item It is doubtful that Moriarty is at all interested in the dark tales of popular gothic literature. Perhaps, he would be attracted by the refined profile of Fitzgerald's Gatsby, were that literary character available to him. Paradoxically, his favorite literary character would be the character of Holmes, that contradictory synthesis of
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{35} Predelli's view is similar to that defended in Thomasson 2007. Thomasson (2007: 110-125, 180-182) argues that, when we utter an existence claim about an object, we are asserting that the object in question satisfies the relevant "frame-level" application conditions for the more general kind. More generally, we must consider the application conditions that are associated with the appropriate kind of object when evaluating the truth of a sentence in which that object is referred to, because it is only by noting whether the object satisfies the application conditions that we can establish whether reference has been secured. She defends a related though more limited position in Thomasson 1999, where she argues that the existential quantifier is restricted, along the same lines as Parsons 1982: 336 and Salmon's view, discussed above. For example, she takes the utterance 'King Lear does not exist' to pragmatically convey the proposition 'There is no (real) person who is King Lear'.

\textsuperscript{36} Predelli motivates this move via a parallel argument drawn from Reimer 1998: 98. (I present Predelli's adaptation of Reimer's example rather than the original here, because the adaptation is simpler.) Concerning a department picnic, one might take the utterance 'No professor talked to any student' to be true, even if a professor in another country talked to a student, or a professor at the picnic spoke with a professor who was also enrolled in a class. The pragmatics of the utterance demand that we consider only the contextually relevant groups in evaluating the utterance. In this case, we should consider the professors and (non-professor) students attending the picnic. Interestingly, Reimer argues against this understanding of negative existentials in Reimer 2001, adopting a presupposition-based view instead.

\textsuperscript{37} Predelli 2002: 269, number (8) in the original.
cold rationality and decadent qualities. But, of course, Holmes does not exist.38

The first instance of ‘Holmes does not exist’ is judged to be true because Holmes is not a member of the group of people who are addicted to cocaine, outside the Holmes stories, and the second instance is judged to be true because Holmes is not a character, according to the Holmes stories. Similar pragmatic implications can be found in other utterances about fiction, Predelli notes, which strengthens the claim that this is not an ad hoc interpretation of one type of utterance.39

The pragmatic approach to negative existentials is not without its critics. Everett’s (2007) objection, though not directed at Predelli in particular, is relevant here. He asserts that “we typically judge utterances of fictional negative existentials to be true independently of what we know about the contexts in which they are uttered” and concludes that “these implicatures would have to be generalized rather than particularized.”40 As we have seen, Predelli denies exactly this premise, arguing that our judgment of negative existentials apparently about fictional objects depends entirely on the context in which the negative existential is uttered. Given our differing responses

38 Predelli 2002: 270, number (9) in the original. If the reader takes issue with the suggestion that Moriarty would have enjoyed Gatsby, a character created after the Holmes stories were written, one might consider instead Mr. Brownlow of Oliver Twist.
39 As an example, Predelli suggests the following:
   (ii) According to the CIA, law enforcement in England has been infiltrated by communist spies. Detailed information is being collected on the private life of everyone who has ever worked for Scotland Yard, including private collaborators! Why, even Holmes is of interest to the director of the Agency!
   Although (iii) Why, even Holmes is of interest to the director of the Agency! might be true on its own, in the context of this utterance, one finds it to be confused, Predelli argues, because Holmes is not “a candidate for the role of communist spy.” That is, he cannot be in the contextually relevant group. Thus, Predelli (2002: 271-272) concludes, the solution he offers for negative existentials can be applied more generally.
to Predelli’s two examples, I find that the burden of proof is on Everett to show that our evaluation of negative existentials is independent of context.

Everett attempts to discharge that burden in his criticism of Thomasson’s similar proposal, where he suggests the following scenario:

suppose that I introduce the name ‘ψ’ to refer to Conan Doyle but you think that it refers to one of his fictional characters and you use ‘ψ’ in predicative statements with the intention of referring to that fictional character. If [Thomasson’s view] were correct, it would be appropriate for me to correct you by uttering ‘ψ does not exist’ and in making such an utterance I would count as having said something true. However surely the opposite is the case.41

This argument can be adapted into a criticism of Predelli because, if Predelli’s account were correct, then the mistaken speaker would take fictional characters to be the relevant group for evaluating the truth of ‘ψ exists’, and ‘ψ does not exist’ would convey the truth that the referent of ‘ψ’, in this case Conan Doyle, is not a member of this group. But, Everett asserts, ‘ψ does not exist’ is surely false.

However, I do not think Everett is correct to assume that ‘Conan Doyle does not exist’ is “surely” false. Consider the following contexts, using ‘Conan Doyle’ as a name for Conan Doyle:

(13) I think the most compelling mystery is A Study in Scarlet, where Holmes determines who is Conan Doyle’s killer. Hold on. I mean Enoch Drebber’s killer – Conan Doyle doesn’t exist.

41 Everett 2007: 75.
I just can’t wait until we get to the Holmes story where Holmes finally meets Conan Doyle. After all, they both live in London and Conan Doyle exists, right?

In these contexts, it seems more felicitous to me to say that Conan Doyle does not exist than that he does. I conclude that the burden of proof remains on Everett to show that positive and negative existentials are independent of context.42

A second common criticism of realism is that it violates Occam’s Razor by multiplying entities beyond necessity.43 In making this argument, anti-realists argue that the apparent commitments can be avoided by paraphrasing utterances that appear to commit the speaker to fictional objects. However, the realist can respond to the argument from ontological parsimony by arguing that realism achieves a greater theoretical simplicity, or elegance, by postulating fictional objects.44 Whether the latter point holds true remains to be seen, but it is in any case an open question whether the ontological simplicity of anti-realism is counterbalanced by a relative theoretical simplicity in realism.

2.2. Commitment to metaphysically problematic objects

I thus take it that the realist can respond to the problem of negative existentials and the objection from simplicity. However, a serious criticism remains: that realism is

42 As I mentioned earlier, if the reader does not share my intuitions, then this is simply one more strike against the realist.
44 Quine (1948: 36) argues that different varieties of simplicity – ontological and conceptual – might both have merit. See also Sober 2002:14, who puts the distinction in terms of “semantic” versus “syntactic” simplicity, and Gauch 2003: 270, who uses ‘ontological parsimony’ and ‘epistemological parsimony’ to draw the same distinction.
committed to metaphysically problematic objects, a criticism recently raised by Anthony Everett (2005). Russell (1905b) leveled a similar charge against Meinong (1904) at the turn of the 20th century. In developing this challenge, Everett presents the following two claims as platitudes:

(P1) If the world of a story concerns a and if a is not a real thing, then a is a fictional character.

(P2) If [the world of] a story concerns a and b, and if a and b are not real things, then a and b are identical in the world of the story iff the fictional character of a is identical to the fictional character of b.  

These so-called platitudes are meant to establish which characters there are in a story, based on what the world of the story concerns. Henceforth I will use ‘it is true in the fiction that x exists’ and ‘the world of the story concerns x’ interchangeably, with the caveat that truth in fiction need not be a variety of truth. Everett (2005: 627) claims that these platitudes are “so fundamental” to our idea of fictional characters that any theory that did not make them true would not count as a theory of fictional characters.

---

45 Everett 2005: 627.
46 I use the terms ‘story’ and ‘fiction’ interchangeably, but I do not mean to limit my argument to verbal fictions or to fictions with a narrative form suggested by the term ‘story’. While many of my examples are narrative, verbal fictions, my discussion extends to other fictions as well.
47 Our methods for determining what is “true in a story” are complex, as I discuss in §3.2 below.
48 While I argue against these platitudes below, I take seriously Everett’s more general concern about what “counts” as a theory of fictional objects. I return to this concern in Chapter 4.
Everett then presents three stories in which it seems true that there are metaphysically indeterminate characters or characters that flout logical laws. The stories are as follows:

_Frackworld._ No one was absolutely sure whether Frick and Frack were really the same person or not. Some said that they were definitely two different people. True, they looked very much alike, but they had been seen in different places at the same time. Others claimed that such cases were merely an elaborate hoax and that Frick had been seen changing his clothes and wig to, as it were, become Frack. All that I can say for certain is that there were some very odd similarities between Frick and Frack but also some striking differences.

_Dialethialand._ When she arrived in Dialethialand, Jane met Jules and Jim. This confused Jane since Jules and Jim both were, and were not, distinct people. And this made it hard to know how to interact with them. For example, since Jules both was and was not Jim, if Jim came to tea, Jules both would and wouldn’t come too. This made it hard for Jane to determine how many biscuits to serve. Then Jane realized what to do. She needed both to buy and not to buy extra biscuits whenever Jim came. After that everything was better.

_Asymmetryville._ As soon as he got up in the morning, Cicero knew that something was wrong. It was not that he was distinct from Tully. On the contrary, just as always he was identical to Tully. It was rather that while he was identical to Tully, Tully was distinct from him. In other words, some time during the night (he could not tell exactly when) the symmetry of identity failed. This had some rather annoying consequences. When Cicero got paid Tully could spend the money but not vice versa. Tully got fat off the food Cicero ate and gave up dining himself. And Tully was praised for Cicero’s denunciation of Catiline although he himself had slept through the whole affair. It was enough to test Cicero’s Stoicism to the limits. Then something happened that changed everything. Cicero’s political enemies who knew that Cicero was Tully mistook Tully for Cicero and murdered him. At first it seemed as if Tully had died. But then Cicero realized that since he was alive and

---

49 Priest (1997: 580-581) takes this possibility to demonstrate that we should revise our understanding of logical laws. While this is one solution open to the realist, it is quite extreme, and I do not give it further space here.
50 Everett 2005: 629.
he was Tully, Tully was alive too. Tully was understandably grateful and reformed his ways. After that Cicero and Tully lived together happily.\footnote{Everett 2005: 634.}

I focus primarily on Frackworld in my discussion, as I believe that the proper realist response to this story can be extended to the other two stories as well. Applying (P1) and (P2) to Frackworld, Everett concludes that the realist about fictional objects is committed to the existence of objects such that it is indeterminate whether they are identical. This argument turns on the inference in (P2), which \textit{``exports''} identity relations from the fiction to reality. Because, according to the story, it is indeterminate whether Frick and Frack are identical, it is indeterminate whether the fictional character Frick is identical to the fictional character Frack.\footnote{In a similar vein, Everett notes that there are fictions in which it is indeterminate whether an object exists, such as the Slynx in Tolstaya 2003. While this problem is distinct from the problem posed by Frackworld, I believe that the realist can make a similar response to it, as I discuss in note 92.}

Such a commitment is problematic because indeterminate objects are impossible, as Gareth Evans is taken to have demonstrated in the following argument: Suppose that it is indeterminate whether \( a \) is \( b \). Then \( b \) would have the property \textit{being indeterminately identical} to \( a \), which would be a property that \( b \) has that \( a \) lacks. So, by Leibniz’s Law, \( a \neq b \), which is determinate. Hence a contradiction follows from the assumption that it is indeterminate whether \( a \) is \( b \), and so this assumption is false.\footnote{Everett 2005: 629, citing Evans 1978: 208. As Lewis (1988) notes in his discussion of Evans, this claim should not be understood as a demonstration that there cannot be true vague identity sentences, for Evans would have taken the existence of such sentences for granted. Thus, the argument should be understood as demonstrating the impossibility of vague \textit{objects}. There are replies to Evans’s argument as well, for example Parsons 1987, 2000.} The other two stories likewise generate problematic objects when (P1) and (P2) are applied to them. That is, if the realist accepts these platitudes, she must accept Jules and Jim as fictional
characters that both are and are not identical to each other and Cicero and Tully as
fictional characters that stand in an asymmetric identity relation. Everett concludes
from this that the realist about fictional objects is committed to metaphysically
problematic objects. Not only that, but realism about fictional objects makes such
objects “uncomfortably easy to come by,” Everett (2005: 633) argues, because we can
create indeterminate objects and objects that violate the laws of logic just by writing the
right sort of stories.

Everett’s criticism is intended to be general, including the Meinongian view of
fictional objects within its scope. According to Meinongians such as Terence Parsons,
fictional characters have all the properties attributed to them in the fiction as well as the
properties attributed to them outside the fiction. So, for instance, Harry Potter has
the properties being a boy, being a wizard, being concrete, being created by J.K. Rowling,
being fictional, and so on. Such a Meinongian view is thus straightforwardly vulnerable to
Everett’s argument, because on this view fictional objects have all of the properties
attributed to them in the story, including the metaphysically problematic properties
attributed to them in Everett’s stories. Meinong’s (1906) response to the similar worry
posed by Russell (1905b) was to accept the consequence that nonexistent objects can
have contradictory properties and to argue that our concerns about contradictory
objects are concerns only for existent objects. However, such a reply relies on a

---

55 See Parsons 1980. In contrast, Meinongians such as Zalta (2003) argue that nonexistent objects are
related to their properties in two distinct ways – via encoding and exemplifying. I discuss these details
further in Chapter 4 §2.3.
commitment to an ontology of nonexistent objects, which is not an option for the realists with whom I am concerned.

3. Two weak replies to Everett’s argument

3.1. No character

In reply to this criticism, the realist might either bracket off problematic fictions and argue that these fictions do not contain fictional objects or argue that it is not true in the fiction that the characters instantiate problematic properties and relations. I believe that both of these replies fail, but it is illustrative to see why this is so.

There are a number of ways that the first strategy could be carried out. For example, the realist might argue that it is exactly because stories such as Frackworld pose problems for the identities of characters that we should not be realists about those characters. For example, the realist might assert that, if identity facts are not contradicted in the story, then they can be exported from the fiction to reality, and the same goes for distinctness facts. On the other hand, if identity facts are contradicted or there are no identity or distinctness facts, then there are no characters. Along similar lines, the realist might argue that there are no characters in Frackworld because it is impossible to have singular thoughts about the character or characters. As I discuss in

56 This suggestion is due to Jussi Haukioja. Note that, while fictional works often fail to explicitly mention the identity or distinctness of the fictional objects they contain, it can still be true that, according to the fiction, \( x = y \) or \( x \neq y \). For example, the “giant of a man” on Harry’s doorstep, in Rowling 1997: 46, is identical to Hagrid, even though this is never explicitly stated. Because it is never contradicted, the identity fact would be exportable on Haukioja’s proposal. Similarly, Fred and George Weasley are distinct characters, though again, the distinctness is never explicitly stated. Because this is never contradicted, the distinctness fact is exportable. For more on the exporting of identity and distinctness facts, see my discussion of Schnieder and von Solodkoff in Chapter 4 §3.2.
Chapter 3, David Braun uses the singular thoughts of the author to establish when a character is created; these singular thoughts generate a character as their object. Arguably, the author had no singular thoughts about Frick or Frack in writing *Frackworld*, and so no character is created in this story.

However, the anti-realist might question the realist’s denial of characters in Everett’s fictions. First, consider the pro-realism arguments from §1 of this chapter. We seem to quantify over characters when we ask, “Are there one or two characters in *Frackworld*?” and to refer to Frick and Frack when we ask, “Are Frick and Frack identical?” Thus, whatever strength the arguments from quantification and reference have in general seems to be present in these specific cases as well. Second, is it really the case that we can have no singular thoughts about Frick and Frack? If we can meaningfully ask whether Frick and Frack are the same person in the story, as Everett does, then it seems that we do have singular thoughts about them.\(^{57}\) Third, it seems that we can understand Everett’s stories and draw reasonable conclusions about what the characters ought to do, which suggests that there are genuine characters in the fiction. As Graham Priest (1997: 579-580) argues, in defense of his problematic story “Sylvan’s Box,” “there is a determinate plot: not everything happens in the story; and people act in intelligible ways, even when the inconsistent is involved.”

Everett (2005: 634) develops the third point by first arguing that, if the realist wants to deny that the problem stories contain fictional characters, she must deny that these stories describe fictional worlds:

\(^{57}\) Anti-realists such as Everett argue that these apparent singular thoughts occur only within the pretense and are not directed toward real objects.
the No Character response requires the fictional realist to deny that [problem stories] describe fictional worlds that contain people. Now in so far as [problem stories] describe fictional worlds, those worlds certainly appear to contain people. So I think that if the fictional realist is to maintain the No Character response, she had better argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, [problem stories] do not succeed in describing fictional worlds in the first place.  

Thus Everett argues that, to the extent that these stories describe fictional worlds, the worlds contain people, which commits the realist to the respective fictional objects. So one can bracket off these fictions only by arguing that they do not describe fictional worlds. Some theorists make precisely this move. For example, Kathleen Stock (2003) argues that we are unable to imagine the purported fictional worlds but instead imagine propositions that are possible. If her argument is correct, it suggests that the stories in question do not “succeed in describing fictional worlds,” for example, if one’s criteria for success require imaginability.  

Everett responds to the contention that worlds like Frackworld are unimaginable by arguing that there are many fictional worlds, such as those described by Dr. Who and The House at Pooh Corner, that are difficult to imagine in detail. For example, it is hard to imagine how Dr. Who travels through time in a London police phone box or whether talking stuffed animals have mouths with tongues and teeth. Indeed, the scenarios depicted in these stories seem also to be impossible, yet we nonetheless count the worlds of these stories as fictional worlds. Everett (2005: 636) argues that

---

58 I use ‘problem stories’ as a general term for Everett’s fictions as well as Priest’s story and other stories that contain contradictions or problematic identity relations. Although Everett refers only to Dialethialand and Asymmetryville in this passage, I believe his argument applies more widely.  

59 Stock 2003: 118-121. But see Gendler 2000 for an argument that conceptual impossibility does not preclude imaginability.  

60 Gendler (2000: 70) offers a similar reply.
we should draw a similar conclusion about his problem stories: the reader is able to “imaginatively engag[e] with those stories” and “imagin[e] those worlds to be real.”

Given these arguments, it seems that the realist has little justification for the claim that problem stories do not contain characters or depict fictional worlds.

3.2. Wrong interpretation

Alternatively, the realist might criticize Everett’s interpretation of his stories, arguing that we ought to interpret them in such a way that the characters do not have metaphysically problematic properties or identity relations. David Lewis’s interpretive framework provides a helpful starting point for understanding interpretation of fiction. On his view, a sentence $\phi$ is true in the fiction iff the worlds where the fiction is told as known fact and $\phi$ is true are closer than the worlds where the fiction is told as known fact and $\phi$ is false. Lewis offers a number of different sets of possible worlds that could be considered “close,” any of which might be reasonable for a given story. We might consider

(a) the worlds that are closest to the actual world,
(b) the worlds that are closest to the world we collectively believe to be actual, or

---

61 He also supports his view by noting that we can imagine impossible states of affairs to “see what follows from them, or in the course of a reductio proof that no such state of affairs can obtain,” and some people seem capable of believing “things that are logically incoherent or inconsistent,” which suggests that they are conceivable.

62 Lewis 1978: 42. Although Lewis adopts modal realism to consider the relative closeness of worlds, one can take possible worlds to be “ersatz” worlds and nonetheless rely on closeness. See Stalnaker 2003.
(c) the worlds that are closest to the world collectively believed by both the author and her readers to be actual at the time the story was written.\textsuperscript{63}

On this model, we can use our knowledge about the actual world to interpret fiction. For example, take interpretive model (a) and the Holmes stories. A sentence such as

(15) Holmes is a human being,

will be true in the fiction, because those worlds where the Holmes stories are told as known fact and this sentence is true are closer to our own than worlds where they are told as known fact and the sentence is not true, such as worlds where Holmes is a talking horse or an alien. One notes as well that worlds in which

(16a) Holmes has 10,000 hairs on his head.

is true and the story is told as known fact are no closer to or further from the actual world than worlds where

(16b) Holmes has 10,001 hairs on his head.

is true and the story is told as known fact. Lewis concludes from this that it is not true in the fiction that Holmes has 10,000 hairs nor is it true that he has 10,001: this allows him to make sense of the incompleteness of fictions.

Using Lewis's interpretive model, the realist could argue that the closest worlds where Frackworld is told as known fact are those at which the narrator lacks knowledge about the identity of Frick and Frack. Hence, we cannot infer from the fiction that there are two people, that there is only one, or that they are indeterminately identical. Instead, all we can infer is that the narrator, along with the rest of the population of the

\textsuperscript{63} See Lewis 1978: 42-45. For Lewis, we collectively believe \( x \) iff I believe \( x \), I believe that you believe \( x \), you believe that I believe that you believe \( x \), and so on.
fiction, lacks knowledge about the world he describes, specifically knowledge about whether Frick and Frack are identical.

This seems like the correct opening move from the realist, but I believe that Everett can parry it with a story that more explicitly states the indeterminacy, such as the following:

_It’s a Frick/Frack World_ No one was absolutely sure whether Frick and Frack were really the same person or not. This is because, unbeknownst to the local populace, it was indeterminate whether or not they were identical. This led to some mix-ups when attendance was taken in grade school, but once he/they entered the business world, Frick/Frack found that it was actually to his/their advantage. There’s a lot you can get away with when it’s indeterminate whether you are one or two people.

This story more closely parallels the fictions of *Dialethialand* and *Asymmetryville*, in that it explicitly states the metaphysically problematic trait.

However, making the fiction explicit in its statement of metaphysically problematic traits yields a different avenue of reply for the realist, which is to argue that the narrator knows about the world but is unreliable. Lewis is not committed to the claim that every story “told as known fact” is _true_ at the world it purports to describe, for the narrator is subject to the same scrutiny as someone reporting a story “as known fact” at the actual world. In both cases, the reader might have reason to reject what the narrator or reporter claims to be known fact as a biased or otherwise inaccurate depiction of what is true at the relevant world. Along these lines, the realist might argue that the narrators of problem stories are unreliable, precisely because they make

---

64 This is why Lewis introduces the idea that the story is told as known fact, rather than picking out those worlds where what is said in the story is true.
65 Lewis 1978: 40, n. 7.
claims about what is true in the fiction that could not possibly be true. Both in everyday life and in interpreting fiction, rampant contradictions and claims about impossible objects tend to suggest that the speaker is a madman. Another way to understand this point is that worlds at which the narrator reports truths, in describing logical and metaphysical impossibilities, would be further from the actual world than worlds where the narrator’s report was the raving of a madman.

If one interprets problem stories like this, however, it seems to lead to the conclusion that it can never be true in the fiction that impossibilities occur. This would have the effect of deeming the narrators of many science fiction and fantasy tales to be unreliable, which clashes dramatically with our intuitions about what is true in these fictions. Instead, we accept that it can be true in certain fictions that there are contradictions, indeterminate objects, and other metaphysically problematic elements, rather than assuming that the narrator must be unreliable.

A remaining realist reply concerns considerations of genre. As Andrea Bonomi and Sandro Zucchi (2003: 113-114) argue in their development of Lewis’s view,

In evaluating what is true in a fiction, we should only take into account those worlds maximally close to the author’s overt belief worlds in which the explicit content of the fiction is realized in accord with the conventions of the genre to which the fiction belongs.

When we read a fantasy story, for example, the genre establishes that we consider the closest worlds where dragons, unicorns, and so on actually exist, thus realizing the

---

66 Lewis discusses this worry in Lewis 1983b.
67 Emphasis in original. “Overt belief worlds” are a variation on collective belief worlds: they are “the set of worlds that represent the overt beliefs of the author relative to the community.” See Bonomi and Zucchi 2003: 112. I do not discuss this detail further here. Lewis (1983b: 274-276) does not develop a specific principle to account for genre, putting genre considerations in the more general terms of “intra-fictional carry-over” and games of make-believe.
content of the fiction in accordance with the genre.\textsuperscript{68} On the other hand, when we read a realistic novel, we consider the closest worlds at which talk of dragons, etc. is the raving of a madman.\textsuperscript{69} We might similarly take logically and metaphysically problematic stories and treat them as a genre of their own, perhaps as a genre of philosophical thought experiments or a genre of “problem stories.”\textsuperscript{70} The realist could then argue that the conventions for interpreting this genre are different from the conventions for interpreting non-problematic stories, a result of which is that such fictions do not depict metaphysically problematic characters.\textsuperscript{71}

However, this brings us back to the reply offered in §3.1. It simply seems incorrect to say that the problem stories do not depict metaphysically problematic characters, even if we set aside these stories as a separate genre. This move seems especially faulty if these problematic characters are central to establishing the genre in the first place. Thus, the realist seems to be stuck with an interpretation on which the problem stories depict fictional worlds, and it is true in them that metaphysically

\textsuperscript{68} I use the phrase ‘closest worlds’ rather than ‘worlds closest to the author’s overt belief world’ to leave open the choice of (a) through (c), plus Bonomi and Zucchi’s suggestion that we consider the author’s overt belief world. I find the interpretive choice among these options to be interesting, but it is not my focus here.

\textsuperscript{69} How genre is established is a complex question that I do not have room to address here. It strikes me that a coherentist strategy could be used, on which the explicit content of the fiction and assertions made outside the fiction help establish the fiction’s genre, which in turn guides our interpretation of both the content of the fiction and assertions made outside the fiction, even to the extent of guiding our interpretation of the utterances that first helped establish the genre. Given considerations of space, I leave this discussion for future work. For some work on genre, see Walton 1970, Currie 1986, and Kraut 1991.

\textsuperscript{70} Fine (1982: 134) calls such stories ‘logico-philosophical fantasies’.

\textsuperscript{71} While this might seem to get the genre wrong, one could defend this sort of interpretation based on the suggestion that the laws of logic are suspended within the fiction, and hence that the characters are not problematic within them, much as the laws of nature are suspended in fantasy novels, and hence flying witches and fire-breathing dragons are not problematic within them. Since I ultimately argue against such an interpretive strategy, I do not devote further space to defending it here.
problematic objects exist. This does not mean that anti-realism carries the day, however. In the following section, I propose a better avenue of reply for the realist.

4. A stronger reply

4.1 Contextualism

I believe that the realist ought to respond to the problem stories by dissociating the character, i.e. the object that the realist is committed to, from the properties and relations – including identity and distinctness – it is said to instantiate in the story.\(^72\) As I argue in §4.3, this allows the realist to avoid the problematic commitments discussed above. The main idea is straightforward enough; although fictional objects might have contradictory properties or indeterminate identities in the fiction, their properties and identities can be consistent and determinate outside the fiction. Following Fine (1982), I call the two components of this move ‘contextualism’ and ‘externalism’, and I use the term ‘CE realism’ to refer to the realist position that is both contextualist and externalist.\(^73\)

\(^72\) As I discuss below, this distinction is developed in van Inwagen 1977 and has its roots in the work of Meinong’s student Ernst Mally. See Poli 1998 for an insightful discussion of Mally and Zalta 1983 for a modern-day development of Mally’s view.

\(^73\) Where there is no chance of confusion, I simply use the term ‘realism’. Fine (1982: 97) also discusses the distinction between Platonists and empiricists about fictional objects. The former hold that fictional objects are eternal and exist independent of human activity, the latter that they are contingent products of human endeavor. This distinction does not bear directly on the problems I am trying to resolve, though I turn briefly to the issue of creatability in Chapter 3. As Fine (1982: 98) argues, these three distinctions are logically independent and can each be combined with the others to yield eight positions in total, all of which are coherent, but some of which are “more natural” than others.
In this section, I focus on contextualism, i.e.,

**Contextualism:** The properties a character is said to have in the fiction are, for the most part, had by that character only in the appropriate stories (the “context”).

According to the contextualist, the character Harry Potter does not literally have the property *being a boy wizard*. Rather, it has that property only in the *Harry Potter* stories. This position is in contrast to

**Literalism:** A character literally has all of the properties attributed to it in the appropriate stories.

According to the literalist, Harry Potter literally has the property *being a boy wizard*.

Van Inwagen is a prominent defender of contextualism, arguing that characters can be related to properties in two distinct ways. When he first introduces the contextualist position, he uses the term ‘ascription’ to designate “a certain intimate relation,” which he takes to be primitive, that holds between the character and the properties attributed to it in the fiction.

---

74 See Fine 1982: 97. I say ‘for the most part’ because a fictional character might have the properties *existing*, *being thought of*, or *being the referent of ‘Harry’* both in the fiction and outside the fiction. Also, in some post-modern fictions, for example, the fictional object has the property *being a fictional character* both in the fiction and outside of it.

75 See Fine 1982: 97. It might appear that the idea of ‘appropriate story’ is doing much of the work here. However, this is a distinction that every theorist of fiction needs, to separate stories that establish what is true of the character according to the fiction from those that do not. For instance, one might consider all of the Holmes stories written by Doyle to be one combined fiction, while not including Michael Chabon’s (2004) novel *The Final Solution: A Story of Detection*. In literary theory, the “appropriate stories” are commonly called the “canon.” The details of distinguishing canonical from non-canonical works are subtle and complex and I set them aside for now, as I believe that we have a sufficient working grasp of the distinction.

76 Thus, for example, Parsons’s Meinongian theory, discussed briefly in §2.2, is literalist.

77 Van Inwagen 1977: 49. He compares the relation between a fictional object and the properties it holds to the relation between a man and the properties attributed to his body according to Cartesian dualism. Both are intimate relations yet not relations of *having* the properties in question.
term ‘ascription’ in favor of ‘holding’ to emphasize the primitive nature of this relation. He argues that holding can only be illustrated by examples, e.g. the character Harry Potter holds the properties being a wizard and having a scar. In contrast, it has the properties being a theoretical entity of literary criticism and being a character of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*.

Support for such a distinction can be found in fictions about real people, such as the following story about me. I exist and instantiate the properties of being five-foot-four and a professor at Marist College. However, in the following fiction, I am six feet tall and an actress:

*The Muller’s Tale:* One morning Cathleen Muller woke up. She felt strange and a little weak in the knees. When she stood up, she realized that she had grown eight inches overnight! She was six feet tall! From her new perspective, she realized that she was sick of philosophy, so she gave it up and became a famous Hollywood actress.

Am I now both five-foot-four and six feet tall? Am I both a professor of philosophy and a famous actress? No. I am still a five-foot-four professor. However, according to *The Muller’s Tale*, I have the properties being six-foot tall and being an actress. Just as I have

---

78 See van Inwagen 1983: 75.
79 See van Inwagen 1983: 75. Van Inwagen (1977: 307, n. 8) also believes that we should refer to characters using personal pronouns, such as ‘he’ for Harry Potter, given the conventional rules for talking about fiction. I find that adherence to this convention confuses matters, since the character literally has no gender outside of the fiction. So I use the pronoun ‘it’ to refer to fictional objects in discussing CE realism.
80 One might worry that the story is not about me but instead is about a fictional character and that the name ‘Cathleen Muller’ thus fails to refer to me in the story. For example, Frege (1897: 142, from Beaney 1997: 230) writes, “Even the proper names in the drama, though they correspond to names of historical persons, are mock proper names; they are not meant to be taken seriously in the work.” Kroon 1994 also poses a problem for taking names in fiction to refer to real people. Van Inwagen (1977: 306, n. 6) also asserts that in certain instances a name could designate a creature of fiction that is distinct from the historical figure. However see Kripke ms., van Inwagen 1977: 306, Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 121, and Martinich and Stroll 2007: 16-17 for arguments that real people can be referred to in fiction.
different properties in reality than I have according to the story, so a fictional object can have different properties in reality than it has according to the story.

While *The Muller’s Tale* might help motivate the view that characters can have different properties in the story than they have in reality, it also motivates a potential worry about contextualism, namely that on this view fictional objects are no different from real objects referred to in fiction, because every character has extratextual existence. Such a claim runs against the intuition that Harry Potter and I have a different ontological status, namely Harry is *fictional* and I am not.

I believe the realist should bite the bullet on this point. However, a few comments can be offered in reply. The first is to note that it is often difficult to tell where a depiction of a real person ends and a fictional character begins, for example in fictionalized histories or memoirs. This suggests that we should not expect a strict division between the two. Second, we generally do not find it to be strange when a fiction depicts a historical figure interacting with a fictional character. Lastly, the realist can easily explain why we tend to feel that fictional characters have a different ontological status than a historical figure like Napoleon, by noting that historical figures have properties such as *being human*, while fictional characters merely *hold* such properties. In general, while both have the property *existing*, they have very few other properties in common.

---

81 One might call this the worry that there are no “purely fictional” characters. This phrase is found in Macdonald and Scriven 1954, Routley 1979, Castañeda 1979, and Salmon 1998, among others.

82 For a detailed argument for the claim that the border between history and fiction is vague, see Martinich and Stroll 2007: 11-18.

83 Though there are complications involved in this interaction. See Parsons 1980: 59-60 for an attempt to distinguish between the relations Holmes bears to real people and the relations they bear to Holmes.
4.2 Externalism

Along with contextualism, I believe that the realist should adopt externalism, namely

**Externalism:** A character can be individuated “purely in terms of its external properties, in terms of those features that are external to the contexts in which it appears.”\(^8^4\)

In presenting this view, I follow Fine in using the term ‘internal properties’ to describe properties attributed to the character in the fiction and ‘external properties’ to describe properties attributed to the character outside the fiction. According to the externalist, we can individuate Harry Potter using only the character’s external properties, such as “his name or perhaps in terms of [the author’s] first inkling of him,” as Fine suggests.\(^8^5\)

This position is in contrast to

**Internalism:** A character can be individuated purely in terms of the properties it has within the contexts in which it appears, i.e. the appropriate stories.\(^8^6\)

According to the internalist, we can individuate the character Harry Potter using only the character’s internal properties such as being a boy wizard who grew up on Privet Drive.

One consequence of externalism, Fine notes, is that fictional objects could stand in any possible identity and distinctness relation, outside the fiction, even if their identity or distinctness seems clearly determined by the properties attributed to them within

---

\(^8^4\) Fine 1982: 97.

\(^8^5\) Fine 1982: 98. I devote further attention to the idea that a character can be individuated by the author’s “first inkling” in my discussion of Braun 2005 in Chapter 3.

\(^8^6\) Fine 1982: 97. Another way to understand this distinction is that, according to externalism, “it is as if our only access to the object was through the real world, and not through the various worlds of its contexts” while according to internalism, “it is as if our only access to the object was through the worlds created by those contexts.” Fine 1982: 197-198, emphasis added.
the fiction. That is, while the internal properties of the characters might be sufficient to establish whether they are identical or distinct in the fiction, they are not sufficient to establish whether the characters are identical or distinct outside the fiction. As Fine (1982: 135) puts it,

Indeed, it seems to me to be generally true ... that whatever the pure content of the native objects $x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots, x_n$, it should be compatible with all of the relationships of identity and distinctness that may hold among those objects \ldots. It may be, for example, that a story with the same content as the Sherlock Holmes story should be about a single extraordinary individual with the combined properties of both Holmes and Watson, even to the point of being both identical and distinct from itself. If this is right then questions of internal and external identity are completely independent of each other.87

Thus, Fine asserts, there could be many fictions with the same pure content, yet one might be such that all the native objects are identical outside the fiction, one such that they are all distinct, one such that the first two names refer to the same object and the rest of the objects are distinct, and so on. The external identity and distinctness relations that hold among fictional objects must thus be determined by the external properties of these objects, such as the author’s intentions.

Fine’s suggestion that the author’s intentions determine the identity and distinctness of fictional objects is controversial, given the criticisms of intentionalism raised by Roland Barthes (1977) and others. However, while the debate between

---

87 Emphasis in original. By ‘native objects’, Fine means the characters that are introduced in the story. See Fine 1982: 101. By ‘the pure content of the native objects’, Fine means roughly the properties that the native objects have according to the story. Put more precisely, given the [set of sentences true in a story], the syntactic analogues of the contents of an object may be obtained by replacing any number of occurrences of names for the object with a single variable; the content of the object will then consist of the properties expressed by the resulting formulas.

See Fine 1982: 112. It is also important to note that ‘have’ and ‘hold’ in the above quote are used differently here than in van Inwagen 2003.
intentionalists and anti-intentionalists is by no means settled, recent work suggests that it need not be carried out in polarizing terms and that there may be room for a middle ground.\textsuperscript{88} For example, Paisley Livingston (2008: 155) proposes a “moderate intentionalism” on which the author’s intentions play a restricted role, i.e.,

the actual maker(s)’ attitudes and doings are responsible for some of a work’s content, and as such are a legitimate target of interpretive claims; more specifically, knowledge of some, but not all intentions is necessary to some, but not all valuable interpretive insights because such intentions are sometimes constitutive of the work’s features or content.\textsuperscript{89}

In other words, “when intentions are compatible with the text, they can be constitutive of the work’s implicit meanings,” much as intentions, when compatible with the utterance, play a role in the correct interpretation of everyday conversation.\textsuperscript{90}

Alternatively, one might appeal to our shared conventions or the time and date of the character’s creation to establish when characters are identical and when they are

\textsuperscript{88} Roland Barthes (1977) attacked only “extreme” intentionalism – the view that the author’s intentions alone determine the work’s meaning. Such a view has the problematic consequences that, (1) if a text is generally interpreted differently than the author intended, this is a misinterpretation, (2) if new authorial intentions come to light, readers and critics are obligated to change their interpretation of the text, and (3) we have to accept interpretations of the text that are in conflict with both the text and our common practices of interpretation, if this is what the author intended. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Barthes argued that the text must stand alone and that proper interpretation of its meaning must be considered in isolation from the author’s intended meaning. See Livingston 2008: 151-153 for an overview of this debate.

\textsuperscript{89} Emphasis in original. Carroll (2000) defends a similar view. The primary competitor to the view seems to be hypothetical intentionalism, defended by Levinson (1996), on which, roughly, we are to use the principle of charity and hypothesize that the author had whatever intentions yield the more interesting and satisfying interpretive results. I see limitations to both approaches, but for the purposes of this dissertation I assume that some sort of intermediate intentionalist position is plausible.

\textsuperscript{90} See Livingston 2008: 155. In drawing out this theory, Livingston appeals to Grice’s (1989) maxims of conversational implicature. See Stecker 2003 and García-Carpintero 2007 for similar appeals to Grice for interpretation of fiction. Martinich and Stroll 2007 also rely on Grice, though they extend the view by adding “suspending” as a distinct way that conversational maxims can go unfulfilled.
4.3. Applying the view

The move to contextualism and externalism allows the realist to avoid the challenges raised by problem stories. Contextualism allows the realist to distinguish the properties the character has according to the fiction from those it actually has. If fictional objects merely hold many of the properties they are said to have in the fiction, without actually having them, the realist can argue that they merely hold inconsistent properties and do not have these properties. This does not change the interpretation of the fiction, which concerns the properties that the fictional object holds. It simply distinguishes these properties from the properties that the fictional object has. Thus, while the fictional objects of Dialethialand have contradictory properties according to the fiction, they need not have contradictory properties outside the fiction. That is, the realist can say that Jules holds the properties being identical to Jim and being distinct from Jim, while Jim holds the properties being identical to Jules and being distinct from Jules, but neither character has those contradictory properties outside the fiction.

Externalism, for its part, allows the realist to distinguish the identity and distinctness of characters according to the fiction from their identity and distinctness outside the fiction. Whatever external considerations are used to determine whether

---

91 In Chapter 4, I devote further discussion to the possibility that such conventions can establish character identity. For now, I primarily wish to establish that the properties and identity relations of the characters can come apart from those ascribed to them in the relevant fiction.
characters are identical outside the fiction, this external identity or distinctness can be separated from the identity or distinctness of the characters in the fiction. Thus, it can be indeterminate, according to a fiction such as *It’s a Frick/Frack World*, whether the fictional objects are identical or distinct, without it being indeterminate, outside the fiction, whether the fictional objects are identical or distinct. That is, the fictional realist could claim either that there is one character that holds the property being an x and a y such that it is indeterminate whether x=y or that there are two characters that stand in the relation being indeterminately identical with each other.\(^{92}\) Lastly, regarding *Asymmetryville*, the realist can say that there is one character that holds the property being an x and a y such that x = y and y ≠ x or that there are two characters, Cicero and Tully, such that Cicero holds the property being identical to Tully and Tully holds the property being distinct from Cicero, or Cicero is said to stand in the identity relation to Tully while Tully is not said to stand in the identity relation to Cicero. The astute reader might note at this point that it is not clear what could justify asserting one of the two options over the other, in each of these cases. I return to this problem in Chapter 4. For now, my aim is only to make the case that the CE realist need not be committed to objects that are indeterminately identical.

At this point, it seems that the realist has reason to reject Everett’s second purported platitude:

\(^{92}\) Similarly, the realist can respond to the problem posed by Tolstaya 2003 by asserting that the Slynx is a character that holds the property indeterminately existing without being committed to an object with indeterminate existence.
(P2) If a story concerns \( a \) and \( b \), and if \( a \) and \( b \) are not real things, then \( a \) and \( b \) are identical in the world of the story iff the fictional character of \( a \) is identical to the fictional character of \( b \).

The reason to reject (P2) is that, according to externalism, the identity and distinctness of fictional objects “in the world of the story” can come apart from their identity and distinctness outside the story.

5. Everett’s objections to CE realism

5.1. Mixed utterances

Everett does not accept the proposed move to CE realism. He first denies contextualism as follows:

[Contextualism] depends upon our making an obscure and unexplicated distinction between two sorts of predication … where intuitively there seem[s] no such distinction. It postulates an ambiguity in [utterances about fiction] where intuitively there seems to be no such ambiguity.\(^{93}\)

Everett defends the claim that there is no ambiguity by offering two pieces of evidence. The first is that we commonly utter sentences that mix these two types of predication, such as the following:

(17) Some nineteenth-century fictional characters dote on their mothers more than any eighteenth-century character does.

(18) Conan Doyle’s most famous character, Sherlock Holmes, saves the life of Queen Victoria.\(^{94}\)

These sentences are mixed in that they attribute to the respective fictional characters both the property being a fictional character and properties such as doting on one’s mother

\(^{93}\) Everett 2005: 644.

\(^{94}\) Everett 2005: 643. These are, respectively, (6a) and (6b) in Everett’s numbering.
or saving the life of the Queen. Everett claims that we should take these mixed sentences to be literally true and that this reveals that characters are related to their properties in only one way.95

However, the CE realist can deny that such sentences are literally true, paraphrasing the utterances as follows:

(17') Some nineteenth-century fictional characters are said (in their respective fictions) to dote on their mothers, and this doting exceeds the amount any eighteenth-century fictional character is said (in its fiction) to dote on its mother

and

(18') Conan Doyle’s most famous character, Sherlock Holmes, is such that, according to the relevant fiction, it saves the life of Queen Victoria.96

If (17') and (18') are acceptable paraphrases, as they seem to be, then (17) and (18) do not impugn CE realism.

Everett has a reply to such an argument, however. He argues that, if we consider (17) and (18) to be loose uses of language, then sentences such as

95 Everett (2005: 644-645, n. 27) also criticizes the Meinongian claim that there are two types of properties by arguing, first, that Meinongians such as Parsons have wrongly claimed that fictional objects have the nuclear properties ascribed to them in the text and that they should instead say that a king in a story, rather than having the nuclear property being a king, has only the extranuclear property being a king. He then attacks this position for attributing different properties to real people and fictional characters. This objection seems misplaced, because the purported identity between the properties had by fictional characters and those had by real people is one way in which this Meinongian position succeeds by Everett’s lights. It is only because he first changes the position to make it vulnerable to his criticism that his criticism appears to succeed.

96 It is tempting to say ‘according to the fiction of The Italian Secretary’ in place of ‘according to the relevant fiction’. However, someone might know only that Holmes is depicted as saving the Queen’s life in some fiction or other, so we should be careful not to bring too much into the paraphrase.
(3) Take an example from a novel I have just finished … there is a character who appears at intervals and it is never clear what the sex of the character is. should be taken to be “loose” as well, which would remove much of the motivation for realism. In reply, the realist can argue that this type of paraphrase is not available for sentence (3), because it is not true according to the fiction that a character “appears at intervals.” While a different type of paraphrase might be available for (3), such a paraphrase must appeal to additional theoretical machinery beyond that used in (17’) and (18’). Thus, “loose talk” is a viable realist response to (17) and (18), and these utterances fail to provide an objection to the view that characters are related to properties in two distinct ways.

5.2. Conjunction reduction

Everett’s second argument against the CE realist relies on the “conjunction-reduction test” for ambiguity:\(^\text{98}\)

(19) Both Oedipus and Freud were devoted to their mothers. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.\(^\text{99}\)

\(^{97}\) The fictionalist will not have to appeal to much additional theoretical machinery, however, as he takes sentences such as (4) to be implicitly prefixed by ‘according to the realist theory’. But the realist can reply to this that, while her prefix strategy turns on the reasonable assumption that a speaker would have the fiction implicitly in mind when discussing its characters, the fictionalist strategy turns on the less reasonable assumption that the speaker has the realist theory implicitly in mind when uttering (4).

\(^{98}\) This test was originally proposed in Zwicky and Sadock 1975. An example of failure is the infelicity of a conjunction such as ‘Vampires have bats’ and ‘The Red Sox have bats’ in ‘Both vampires and the Red Sox have bats’. The reason for the lack of felicity is that there is ambiguity in the word ‘bat’.

50
Of this utterance, he writes, “I think it is natural to regard [(19)] as true but the first sentence in [(19)] seems to predicate exactly the same property in exactly the same way of both Oedipus and Freud.”100 There are two ways to understand Everett’s argument. On the one hand, he might be arguing that (19) is well-formed and thus that there is no ambiguity between the ‘was’ in ‘Oedipus was devoted to his mother’ and the ‘was’ in ‘Freud was devoted to his mother’. The lack of ambiguity is illustrated by the felicity of the conjunction in ‘Both Oedipus and Freud were devoted to their mothers’.

Alternatively, Everett might be arguing that, in (19), there is no difference between the mother-devotion predicated of Oedipus and the mother-devotion predicated of Freud or in the way they are predicated.

Regardless of how we interpret Everett’s example, the realist can again interpret the utterance as an example of loose speech. Strictly speaking, Oedipus was not devoted to his mother; he had the property being devoted to his mother only according to the story.101 Thus, ‘was’ is not ambiguous on the realist’s view. In general, the CE realist can paraphrase (19) as follows:

(19’) Freud was devoted to his mother and, according to the fiction, Oedipus was devoted to his mother. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

---

99 Everett 2005: 644. This is sentence (7) in the original.
100 Everett 2005: 644.
101 Admittedly, there is an odd shift in tense, here, for we normally think of fictional characters as continuing to have the properties attributed to them in the fiction, while historical figures are said to have had the property when they were alive. I gloss over this issue, keeping the discussion in the past tense, as Everett presents it.
The realist can thus allow that the same property is predicated of both Freud and Oedipus and that ‘was’ is unambiguous, but argue that being devoted to his mother is predicated of Freud in reality, while it is predicated of Oedipus only in the relevant fiction. To my mind, (19’) seems to be merely a more accurate spelling out of (19), not a radical reinterpretation.

A potential problem for (19’) is that, if this is really what we mean by (19), the second sentence would be superfluous. That is, if we have already specified that Oedipus is mother-devoted only according to the fiction, we would have no reason to further indicate that it is a fictional character. The realist could reply, however, that the second sentence makes explicit the looseness intended by the first and also serves to rule out the possibility that Oedipus is a real person depicted in a fiction. Thus, the realist can deny that (19) demonstrates that the same property is predicated in exactly the same way of both the character and the historical figure.

One might worry that the realist has only appeared to dodge this bullet because of my shift away from a view on which fictional objects can either have or hold a property, i.e. a “two types of predication” view, to a view on which fictional objects either have a property in reality or have a property in the fiction, i.e. a “fictional operator” view. Perhaps only the former falls prey to Everett’s worry. However, I

---

102 The claim that ‘was’ is unambiguous in Everett’s utterance is only available to realists who use an “according to the fiction” operator. As I discuss at the end of this section, realists who maintain instead that there are two types of predication, i.e. having and holding, seem committed to an ambiguity in ‘was’.

103 As further support for (19’) as a spelling out of what is said loosely by (19), one notes that a parallel paraphrase is not available for ‘Both vampires and the Red Sox have bats’, discussed in note 98. Thus, this paraphrase strategy does not overgenerate.

104 It seems especially superfluous prefaced with ‘but’, because this suggests that new, contrasting information is being offered.

105 Indeed, it seems likely that one would utter the second sentence only if one believed that the hearer did not know that the first sentence was uttered loosely.
believe that the realist can offer the same general reply proposed in (19') while sticking to the having vs. holding distinction. She would say, that is, that (19) is loose speech, and that we should understand it instead as

(19") Freud had the property being devoted to his mother and Oedipus held the property being devoted to his mother. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

The reason that the predication appears to be the same, and that the conjunction reduction appears to go through, is that we often use ‘x is y’ to mean both ‘x has the property y’ and either ‘x has the property y according to the fiction’ or ‘x holds the property y’. It is because of this common usage that it seems as though we can attribute the same property in the same way to both Oedipus and Freud. However, the realist would argue, this is not a precise way of speaking.

Some might find an appeal to “loose talk” generally unattractive. However, as will become clear in Chapter V, the anti-realist must appeal to it as well to avoid apparent commitment to fictional objects. So this unattractiveness does not itself provide a criticism of realism. Thus, the realist can reply to Everett’s objections to the view that there are two types of predication. And, with two types of predication available, problem stories do not pose an immediate worry for the realist about fictional objects. She can explain away the apparent commitment to metaphysically problematic objects by distinguishing the properties that a character has according to the story from the properties the character genuinely has and by individuating fictional objects via external properties rather than internal properties.
Unfortunately, however, making this move leads to several further problems for the realist: (a) it is not clear how reference is fixed on the CE realist picture, (b) CE realism denies characters the properties that are essential to them, and (c) the realist is committed to arbitrariness in counting fictional objects. As I argue in the remaining three chapters, these are serious problems for CE realism, problems that are resolved by, or do not even arise for, the anti-realist pretense theorist.
Chapter 3.

How Realists Refer: The Problem of Fixing Reference in CE Realism

There lived a redheaded man who had no eyes or ears. He didn’t have hair either, so he was called a redhead arbitrarily. He couldn’t talk because he had no mouth. He had no nose either. He didn’t even have arms or legs. He had no stomach, he had no back, he had no spine, and he had no innards at all. He didn’t have anything. So we don’t even know who we’re talking about. It’s better that we don’t talk about him any more.

-- Daniil Ivanovich Kharms
[trans. Matvei Yankelevich]

0. Introduction

As I noted at the end of Chapter 2, although the move to CE realism allows the realist to avoid the challenge posed by Everett, it creates several further difficulties for the realist. In this chapter, I focus on the question of reference in CE realism. For the sake of argument, in this chapter I grant the realist that names from fiction have referents, which – given CE realism – lack most of the properties attributed to them in the fiction but have the properties attributed to them outside the fiction. I then ask how reference to such fictional objects is fixed.

To explore this question, I consider the most prominent theories of reference for historical proper names and apply them to names from fiction. The main contenders are the Frege-Russell model, on which reference is fixed by description, and the Kripkean model, on which reference is fixed by an initial baptism and then passed along
through a causal-historical chain. As a side-note, Kripke (1972b: 79-80) allows that there might be exceptional cases in which the baptizer initially fixes the referent of a name via description, such as Leverrier’s use of ‘Neptune’ to pick out whatever body was causing the perturbations of the other planets’ orbits or the police using the name ‘Jack the Ripper’ to pick out whoever carried out the infamous murders. In both cases, there was no way to observe the object or person, and thus it could not be baptized on the basis of ostention. However, Kripke (1972b: 80) argues that this does not occur “in many or most cases.” More importantly, even in cases such as Neptune, one can ask whether we, the ordinary speakers, rely on a description to determine the reference of the term or whether we rely instead on a causal-historical chain linking back to an initial baptism. Much of my concern in this chapter, particularly in deflating the descriptivist position, is to argue that if CE realism is true, we should not understand ordinary speakers as using descriptions to fix reference to the fictional object, but instead as relying on a causal-historical chain back to an initial baptism. In the discussion of this baptismal act, I turn to the question of how the baptizer secures reference to the fictional object and consider the possibility that she secures reference by means of a description.

Some might doubt whether it is even worth exploring the view that we fix reference to fictional objects via description, given Kripke’s well-known criticisms of this approach.

---

106 As a side-note, Russell (1905a: 492-493) held the descriptivist view only for names of people, places, etc., which he did not take to be genuine proper names. Genuine proper names, such as the name of a sense-datum known by acquaintance, are not shorthand for descriptions on his view but rather refer directly. Also, while it is generally held that Frege believed proper names to have both referents and descriptive senses, this point is controversial as well. See Thau and Caplan 2001 for discussion of this point. In speaking of Russell’s and Frege’s views as picking out one broad type of strategy, I follow Kripke 1972b: 27.
proposal for historical proper names. However, there are reasons to consider descriptivism as a particularly viable candidate when considering names from fiction; *prima facie*, fictional objects seem to depend on descriptions for their existence and properties more than historical figures do. For example, while Napoleon had certain properties regardless of what anyone says about him, Harry Potter seems to exist only through the descriptions of him in the relevant fictions and thus to have no properties that go beyond these fictions. It is also less clear how a Kripkean “baptism” could occur for fictional objects than for historical objects.\(^{107}\) And, while it is relatively clear that the reference of ‘Napoleon’ has been passed on through a causal-historical chain, the reference of ‘Harry Potter’ seems fully contained within the *Harry Potter* series. Thus, one might argue that no causal-historical chain is necessary. Due to these unique aspects of names from fiction, it is plausible that our reference to these objects is fixed by the descriptions in the relevant fictional works. However, I argue in §3 that a descriptivist account of names from fiction ultimately falls prey to the same worries Kripke raised for a descriptivist account of historical proper names.

Moreover, Kripke’s model might be a more viable option for reference to fictional objects than it first appears. If we assume CE realism about fictional objects, then there is an object available to be baptized. The question, then, is how the baptism occurs. In §4, I consider two options: Braun’s suggestion that the author baptizes the character in writing the fiction and Thomasson’s suggestion that the text provides a

\(^{107}\) Indeed, van Inwagen (1977: 307) asserts, “Normally, an object gets a proper name by being dubbed or baptized. But no one ever dubbed or baptized the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit* ‘Mrs. Gamp’.”
foundation for the baptism of the character, which can then be carried out by the author or the readers. While Braun and Thomasson can both make sense of the baptism of characters in a great number of cases, I argue that there are certain cases in which reference cannot be secured through an initial act of baptism. Nonetheless, I argue that the Kripkean picture is preferable to the descriptivist view.

I conclude from this discussion that neither descriptivism nor Kripke’s causal-historical model provides a fully adequate account of how reference to fictional objects is fixed in CE realism. However, as I discuss in §5, there is a third option available to the CE realist, namely to understand reference in terms of a stipulated referent, which then serves as an object for our de re thoughts and propositional attitudes. Because of the move to CE realism, that is, nothing about the fiction selects a particular object to which a name from fiction refers. Instead, we can use any object as a placeholder, as this object will have properties such as being human or being a wizard only according to the fiction. After defending this position, I respond to three objections on behalf of the CE realist: (i) the view gets the truth-values of our utterances about fiction wrong, (ii) the stipulated object is not created by an author, and (iii) the stipulated object is not a phenomenologically plausible candidate to be a fictional object. In the final chapter, I argue that there is a deeper problem for the placeholder proposal: it does not do any additional explanatory work beyond that done by pretended reference.

---

108 I take Frege to be the progenitor of this view for so-called “empty names.” See §5 of this chapter for further discussion of this point.
1. Types of utterances

1.1. Types of utterance and typical examples

Before we begin discussing names from fiction, we should be clear about the types of utterances that contain such names. I present the variety of utterances here, in an ascending order of abstraction:

Table 1. Types of Utterances Containing Names from Fiction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Typical Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Authorial        | Fiction-making                                        | “Harry heard something creak outside.” 

110

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fictive&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</th>
<th>Imaginative participation</th>
<th>“Look out behind you, Harry!”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fictive&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>True according to the fiction</td>
<td>“Harry Potter is brave.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>Comparison of the fiction with other fictions</td>
<td>“Harry Potter is smarter than Nancy Drew.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>Comparison of the fiction with the real world</td>
<td>“Harry Potter had a harder childhood than many of his readers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-fictive&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>Critical perspective on the fiction&lt;sup&gt;111&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>“Harry Potter is a symbol of youthful innocence.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

109 I list authorial utterances as a separate type because, while true in the fiction and possibly written within a state of imaginative participation, such utterances cannot be mistaken and thus differ from fictive utterances.
110 Rowling 1997: 45.
111 Currie (1990) uses the term ‘meta-fictive’ for fictive<sub>2</sub> utterances and ‘transfictive’ for both comparative and meta-fictive, utterances. My terms map more closely onto Salmon’s (1998: 295) distinction between object-fictional and meta-fictional sentences.
| Meta-fictive$_2$ | Talk about the metaphysics of the character | “Harry Potter is an abstract artifact.” |

In referring to fictive utterances without the subscript below, I am referring to fictive$_2$ utterances, while in referring to meta-fictive utterances without the subscript, I am referring to meta-fictive$_1$ utterances.$^{112}$ I refer to comparative utterances without a subscript only where the distinction between the two types of comparative utterance is irrelevant.

I focus on the utterance rather than the sentence, because the same sentence could be used to make different types of utterance. For example, regarding Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, an utterance of

$^{(20)}$ The Father is not contained in any fictional work.

would be a true fictive$_2$ utterance, because it is true in Pirandello’s fiction that the character is seeking an author to put him into a work. But an utterance of (20) would be a false meta-fictive$_1$ utterance, because the Father is a character in Pirandello’s work. The type of utterance can shift depending on the intentions of the speaker, the context or the presuppositions of the audience.

$^{112}$ For the most part, I ignore fictive$_1$ utterances, because they are widely acknowledged to be uttered merely as a way of engaging with the fiction and to have no truth-value, whereas fictive$_2$ utterances at least *prima facie* seem true. However, the similarity between fictive$_1$ and fictive$_2$ utterances will be relevant in the defense of pretense theory in Chapter 5. I ignore meta-fictive$_2$ utterances because I am trying to capture reference in the utterances used as evidence for realism, whereas meta-fictive$_2$ utterances occur as part of the realist (or anti-realist) theory.
1.2. Additional complexities

A speaker can make explicit the move from a fictive utterance to a meta-fictive utterance by adding 'according to the fiction', which shifts the relevant context from within the fiction to outside the fiction. In most cases, once the speaker adds this explicit prefix, the utterance is no longer true according to the fiction, and thus it is no longer a fictive utterance. For example, consider an utterance of

(21) Harry Potter is a wizard.

A speaker uttering (21) would say something true according to _Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone_. However, an utterance of

(22) According to _Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone_, Harry Potter is a wizard.

would be false according to _Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone_, because, according to the fiction, there is no fictional work _Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone_ according to which Harry Potter is a wizard.\(^{113}\) Some might claim that adding an explicit prefix should not shift the level of utterance, because the fictive utterance is already implicitly prefixed by 'according to the fiction'.\(^{114}\) After all, if such an utterance is not implicitly prefixed, it is unclear why we would judge it to be true. However, it seems to me that, when the speaker explicitly states the prefix, making overt the fact that she is discussing

\(^{113}\) In contrast, it is true according to Calvino’s (1979) _If on a winter’s night a traveler_ that there is a fiction called ‘If on a winter’s night a traveler’.

\(^{114}\) See Currie 1990: 57-58 for such a claim.
what is true according to the fiction, she is doing something different than when she makes a fictive₂ utterance.\textsuperscript{115}

Another point to note, regarding levels of utterance, is that multiple levels of utterance can be combined into a single “mixed” utterance, as in an utterance of the sentence Everett proposes:

(18) Conan Doyle’s most famous character, Sherlock Holmes, saves the life of Queen Victoria.\textsuperscript{116}

An utterance of (18) combines a meta-fictive₁ utterance about Doyle’s most famous character with a fictive₂ utterance about saving the life of the Queen. Similarly, in comparative utterances, the speaker seems to consider the character simultaneously from both inside and outside the fiction. In the examples provided in Table 1, for example, neither Nancy Drew nor the readers are part of the fiction of the Harry Potter novels, which suggests that the truth of the utterance must be evaluated from outside the fiction.\textsuperscript{117} Yet Harry Potter has the properties of being smart and having a deprived childhood only according to the fiction, which suggests that the truth of the utterance must be evaluated from inside the fiction.\textsuperscript{118}

In general, realists take both fictive₁ and fictive₂ utterances to be uttered in pretense and only meta-fictive₁ and meta-fictive₂ utterances to be genuinely true. As we

\textsuperscript{115} See Walton 1990: 420 for a similar argument. I would not, however, go so far as Martinich and Stroll (2007: 25), who claim that utterances such as (21) exhibit a type of \textit{truth} when unprefixed. Instead, I ultimately follow Walton in arguing that such utterances pragmatically convey propositions that are distinct from what is uttered, which explains why we tend to judge them to be true. See Walton 1990: 396-401.

\textsuperscript{116} Everett 2005: 643. This is sentence (6b) in Everett’s numbering.

\textsuperscript{117} Not all fictions are as simplistic as the Harry Potter novels. Some explicitly include comparisons across fictions or refer to the reader. In these cases, comparative utterances are also fictive₂ utterances.

\textsuperscript{118} One conclusion that could be drawn from this observation is that both mixed and comparative utterances display elements of pretense. I discuss this possibility in Chapter 5.
saw in the previous chapter, they then take meta-fictive utterances to provide evidence for CE realism. One way to understand this is that, in fictive utterances, the name ‘Harry Potter’ refers to a boy wizard, while in meta-fictive utterances, the name ‘Harry Potter’ refers to a fictional character.\textsuperscript{119} Since it is primarily meta-fictive utterances that CE realists use to defend their position, I focus on these utterances in this chapter.\textsuperscript{120}

\section{2. Descriptivism}

\subsection{2.1. Using internal properties: Currie}

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, there are broadly two ways that reference to fictional objects in meta-fictive utterances might be fixed: either (i) descriptively or (ii) via an initial baptism.\textsuperscript{121} In this section and the next, I explore the descriptivist option. Given the CE realist’s contextualism, there are two sets of descriptions she might appeal to: a description of the properties the character is said to have in the fiction or a description of the properties the character has outside the fiction. I label these ‘internal descriptivism’ and ‘external descriptivism’, respectively.

**Internal Descriptivism:** Ordinary speakers fix the reference of a name from fiction using the description, or cluster of descriptions, that the fictional object satisfies according to the appropriate fiction.

\textsuperscript{119} This is only a rough approximation of the CE realist view. As we will see, realists such as Salmon argue that the name refers to the fictional character in all types of utterances.

\textsuperscript{120} As I note below, Thomasson (1999) does not rely exclusively on meta-fictive utterances in developing her view of reference to fictional objects, so she is an exception to the rule.

\textsuperscript{121} My primary concern is how the reference is fixed, not how the meaning of the name is given. However, Currie holds the view that the description both gives the meaning and fixes the reference of the name, and in §3, I apply Kripke’s modal argument to this view.
Gregory Currie (1990) provides a good example of an internal descriptivist view, although he goes beyond it by asserting that the description gives the meaning of the name in some utterances. He begins by arguing that the content of a fictional work can be represented by a Ramsified sentence with quantifiers that have “the whole story” in their scope. When we read a fiction, Currie (1990: 150) argues,

We make believe that there is a particular $n$-tuple of individuals who do these things and about whom we are learning, even when the story (explicit content plus background) does not exclude the possibility that there is another $n$-tuple of individuals who do the same things.

Furthermore, on Currie’s view, we make believe that there is a fictional narrator who reports the events described.

Though names do not have content in authorial or fictive utterances, on Currie’s (1990: 158-159) view, they do have content in fictive and prefixed fictive utterances. For example, the name in a sentence such as (21) or (22) “functions as an abbreviated definite description,” drawn from the relevant Ramsified sentence. Thus, if ‘$x_1$’ is the variable that replaces ‘Harry Potter’ in the Ramsified sentence, then the name would denote, “in each world, the person, if there is one, who is the first member

122 Wolterstorff (1980) also has an internal descriptivist view. He argues that characters are person-kinds that are maximal in the work. For more on his theory, see §5.3 of this chapter.
123 Currie 1990: 154. The “whole story” can be a single work or multiple works. See Currie 1990: 176-177.
124 The addition of a “fictional narrator” is a subtlety that Currie introduces to solve certain problems regarding truth in fiction, but this detail need not concern us here. It is due to this additional “character” that Currie refers to an ‘$n+1$-tuple’ rather than an ‘$n$-tuple’. For more on whether we ought to postulate a fictional narrator, see Alward 2007 and Kania 2007.
125 Currie takes fictive utterances to be implicitly prefixed by an ‘according to the fiction’ operator, but I do not, for the reasons offered above. I thus use the phrase ‘prefixed fictive’ utterances to pick out that specific type of meta-fictive utterance, such as (22) According to Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, Harry Potter is a wizard.
126 Currie 1990: 160.
of the unique $n+1$-tuple of things that satisfies the conditions of the story.\textsuperscript{127} Currie asserts that ordinary readers fix the reference of a name from fiction such as ‘Harry Potter’ by using descriptions such as ‘the boy wizard with a lightning-bolt-shaped scar’. However, a “perfectly informed, retentive, and rational reader” would mean by ‘Harry Potter’ the definite description given by “the unique $n+1$-tuple of things that satisfies the conditions of the story” and, presumably, would fix the reference of the name using this description.\textsuperscript{128} Thus, Currie holds both that a description provides the content of the name and that it fixes the name’s reference.

It is interesting to note that, in comparative and meta-fictive utterances, Currie holds that the name refers to a role, where a role is a (partial) function from worlds to individuals.\textsuperscript{129} Returning to the Harry Potter example above, Currie (1990: 172) would say that “the (partial) function picks out [Harry Potter] in each world where somebody is [Harry Potter], and the value of this function for a world-argument is the individual, if there is one,” who is the first member of the unique $n+1$-tuple of things that satisfies the conditions of the story.\textsuperscript{130} This is a significantly different view from the descriptivism proposed for fictive\textsubscript{2} utterances, because it takes the name to be a rigid designator, picking out the Harry Potter role in every world, much as ‘the presidency of the U.S’ picks out the U.S. president role.\textsuperscript{131} For my purposes, I focus on Currie’s view of the

\textsuperscript{127} Currie 1990: 160.
\textsuperscript{128} Currie 1990: 159. In this discussion, I use ‘Harry Potter’ rather than Currie’s ‘Holmes’ to streamline the examples.
\textsuperscript{129} Currie 1990: 172. Note that I am here using ‘meta-fictive’ in my own sense of the term.
\textsuperscript{130} Currie (1990: 173) takes these roles to be “theoretical entities of literary criticism” that can satisfy van Inwagen’s (1977: 299-308) argument for CE realism.
\textsuperscript{131} See Currie 1990: 174 for this parallel.
reference to characters in fictive utterances, because it is here that his view is most clearly descriptivist.\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{2.2. Using external properties: van Inwagen}

Van Inwagen also uses a descriptivist model, though he appeals to a description of the character’s external properties rather than of its internal properties to fix the reference of the name from fiction. Thus, he holds

\textit{External Descriptivism}: Ordinary speakers fix the reference of a name from fiction using the description, or cluster of descriptions, that the fictional object actually satisfies, outside the fiction.

Or as van Inwagen (1977: 307) puts it,

\textit{If we are to have a satisfactory theory of how it is that we manage to refer to particular creatures of fiction, this theory will have to treat such descriptions as “the main satiric villainess” as the primary means of reference to these objects, and proper names as a secondary (though more common) means of reference.}\textsuperscript{133}

On his account, then, our ability to use names from fiction depends on our having already fixed the reference of the name via a description. I take \textit{being the main satiric villainess} to be an external property because the character is not a main character, satiric, or a villainess according to the fiction \textit{Martin Chuzzlewit}. Although they might depend on internal properties, these are all literary properties that Mrs. Gamp has only when considered from outside the fiction.

\textsuperscript{132}I note in passing that the shift to roles, in comparative and meta-fictive utterances, threatens the unity of Currie’s proposal. However, as my object in this chapter is to critique descriptivism more broadly, I do not dwell on this worry.

\textsuperscript{133}Emphases in the original.
The external descriptivist might also appeal to a description of properties connected to the character’s creation to fix the reference of the name, though this is somewhat more difficult. The original work and the author of the character, though usually determinate, are not sufficiently specific; if we were to use a description of these properties to fix the reference of the name, all the names in the same work by the same author would refer to the same object. On the other hand, while the exact time and date of the character’s creation might suffice to pick it out, it can be indeterminate exactly when a character is created.\footnote{See David Braun 2005: 611 for a discussion of this potential indeterminacy. I discuss Braun’s view in §4.1 of this chapter.}

3. Problems for descriptivism

3.1. Modality

I believe that both internal and external descriptivism are susceptible to the criticisms that Kripke (1972b) raises against descriptivism about historical proper names, most significantly the arguments from ignorance and error.\footnote{The following presentation is what I take to be the canonical interpretation of Kripke's (1972b) arguments on these points. For a variant on this interpretation, see Reimer 2009.} In addition, Currie’s view that the internal description provides the meaning of the name falls prey to the argument from modality.\footnote{Kripke (1972b: 24, 156-157) develops a modal argument against the possible existence of unicorns, arguing that one cannot say, of the many distinct hypothetical species of unicorn, which of these would have been the unicorns of myth. This is a different modal argument from the one I raise here, which is an extension of his modal argument regarding descriptivism for historical proper names.} I consider the latter argument briefly and then move on to the more pressing concern of undermining internal and external descriptivism, which concern the description as the means ordinary speakers use to fix the reference of the name.
**Modality**: Suppose we take the description ‘the Greek philosopher who tutored Alexander’ to provide the meaning of the name ‘Aristotle’. Then the name ‘Aristotle’ would not refer to the same man, had he become a potato farmer instead of a Greek philosopher. Yet, intuitively, it does refer to the same man.\(^{137}\)

This challenge applies to Currie’s claim that the internal description provides the content of a name from fiction. It raises the question whether ‘Atticus Finch’ would refer to the same character, if *To Kill a Mockingbird* had been changed such that, according to it, Atticus Finch decides not to defend Tom Robinson.\(^{138}\) My intuition is that the name would refer to the same character, because we can sensibly assert the following counterfactual:

\[(23) \text{ Atticus Finch would not have been as famous a character, had the fiction been such that, according to it, Finch chooses not to defend Tom Robinson.}\]

In uttering (23), we seem to hold the character fixed yet consider a different description than the one the character actually satisfies in the fiction. Thus, it seems that a description of the properties attributed to the character in the fiction does not provide the content of the name.

This Kripkean criticism is not universally accepted, however. For example, in Currie’s (2008: 54) discussion of work and text, he criticizes the practice of using a

\(^{137}\) See Kripke 1972b: 61, 75. A closely related point is that ‘Aristotle was the Greek philosopher who tutored Alexander’ is a necessary truth on the descriptivist view. Reimer (2009) describes this as “the problem of unwanted necessity.”

\(^{138}\) I temporarily shift my focus from *Harry Potter* to *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the following three examples, because the lesser-known book makes it easier to see the problems of ignorance and error.
counterfactual utterance such as (23) as a justification for adopting a theoretical position. Adapting his argument for this case, one might worry that we could just as easily assert

\[(23') \quad \text{If a character had been created that was depicted as having all the properties of Atticus Finch but lacking } \text{defends Tom Robinson, this} \]

\[(\text{distinct) character would have been less famous than the actual Atticus Finch character.}]^{139}\]

Identifying either (23) or (23') as what we mean when discussing other possibilities depends on the background theory, Currie (2008: 53-54) argues, so (23) cannot be used to support a particular theory.^{140} Although he is discussing theories about the identity of literary work and text, the point seems to apply as well to theories about the meaning of names from fiction. Such an argument casts the proposed extension of Kripke's argument from modality into doubt.^{141}

---

^{139} Wolterstorff (1980:148) adopts this position toward the character, for example. On his view, the properties the character is said to have in the work are essential to it, so that any change in property would yield a different character.

^{140} Parsons (1980: 187) expresses a similar ambivalence about these two ways of speaking counterfactually, and Matheson and Caplan (2008: 497-498) defend a related point, followed by an argument for skepticism concerning the role of de re modality in individuating artworks.

^{141} The same argument and doubts can be raised regarding the view that a description of the character's external properties provides the meaning of the name. So, for example, the Kripkean might argue that we can assert

\[(iv) \quad \text{Atticus Finch would have been a more engaging character, had he been the narrator of the fiction.} \]

but the doubter could argue that one could just as well say

\[(v) \quad \text{If a character had had the same properties as Atticus Finch except that he was the narrator of the fiction, this character would have been more engaging than Atticus Finch.} \]
3.2. Ignorance and error

However, my concern in this chapter is the view that descriptions, either internal or external, fix the reference of names from fiction, rather than the view that they provide the meaning of the names. Thus, I am more concerned with Kripke’s arguments from ignorance and error, which directly target the former view.

**Ignorance:** We are often ignorant about the correct description of an individual, yet we use the individual's name correctly. For example, a speaker might say, “Einstein was a smart man” and refer to Einstein, despite lacking any knowledge of a description that picks out Einstein.¹⁴²

Such a worry applies in the case of names from fiction as well. For example, a high school student might claim that Atticus Finch is a character in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, knowing nothing about the properties attributed to Atticus Finch in the fiction. Moreover, this same student might lack any knowledge of external properties that would be sufficient to pick out Atticus Finch – the external property *being a character in To Kill a Mockingbird* is not sufficient, because this would pick out any of the characters in the fiction. Nonetheless, he could successfully refer to the character. This demonstrates that one can refer to a fictional object without knowledge of a description that fixes the reference of the name.

Kripke (1972b: 84) also criticizes the descriptivist based on the possibility of error, more specifically, the possibility that the description commonly associated with the name might not pick out the referent of the name.

¹⁴² See Kripke 1972b: 81.
Error: We might associate a description with a name that does not pick out the referent of the name. For example, 'proved the incompleteness of arithmetic' is the description associated with ‘Gödel’. Yet it is possible that a man named ‘Schmidt’ in fact proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. Nonetheless the name ‘Gödel’ would still refer to Gödel, not to Schmidt.

To extend this to names from fiction, imagine a story with an unreliable narrator, which makes it difficult to interpret what is true in the fiction. In such a case, there could be widespread error about what is true in the story. For instance, suppose that there were hints in *To Kill a Mockingbird* that the narrator Scout was not to be trusted, which only astute readers would notice. The ordinary speaker might then take Atticus to have the internal property *being honorable* according to the fiction, when in fact he has the internal property *being dishonorable* according to the fiction and the character Bob Ewell has the internal property *being honorable*. Thus, the description of internal properties that speakers associate with a name from fiction might not pick out the referent of the name from fiction. And the same is true for external properties. For instance, most speakers believe that Atticus Finch has the external property *being based on Harper Lee’s father* and might use this property to fix reference to the character. But suppose that the character Atticus Finch actually has the external property *being based on Nick*

---

143 I develop this hypothetical example rather than an actual case of an unreliable narrator because the latter might leave room for debate as to what is the correct interpretation, whereas my artificial example stipulates that many readers are in error, much as Kripke does in his original example concerning ‘Gödel’.
Velillari, a friend of Lee’s.\footnote{144} Even in this case, speakers who were ignorant of this fact could use the name to successfully refer to the character.\footnote{145}

3.3. Circularity

One way to try to resolve the problem of error is to change the relevant description to ‘the individual to which these properties are commonly attributed’. For example, we might say, “By ‘Gödel’, I shall mean the man to whom the incompleteness of arithmetic is commonly attributed.”\footnote{146} This solves the problem of error because, even if speakers are commonly mistaken about Gödel’s attributes, they nonetheless refer to him by using the description ‘proved the incompleteness of arithmetic’. However, as Kripke argues, a description using the “commonly attributed” properties is circular and hence cannot establish the referent of the name. In effect, by making this change one would be saying only “we attribute this achievement to the man to whom we attribute it,” which would leave us with no independent way of picking out the individual to attribute properties to him.\footnote{147} Along similar lines, consider my hypothetical variant of To Kill a Mockingbird. The

\footnote{144} The latter claim can be found on Wikipedia, “Atticus Finch, character,” accessed July 20, 2011. Though no citations were offered, the truth or falsity of the claim is irrelevant to my example, as I am simply offering it as an alternative possibility.

\footnote{145} Pautz (2008: 153-154) argues that there is a significant difference between fictional characters and historical characters precisely because she believes that, if one associates incorrect descriptions with the character, one is not referring to the same character as someone who associates correct descriptions with it. I believe her intuition, on this point, is driven by her assumption that “there is no unique individual to secure coreference in the case of divergence.” Pautz 2008: 154. Given that I am assuming that there is a fictional object for the purposes of this discussion, I do not address this worry further in this chapter.

\footnote{146} Kripke 1972b: 89.

\footnote{147} Kripke 1972b: 89. Earlier, Kripke (1972b: 68-70) notes a circularity in Kneale’s (1962) proposal that we refer to Socrates using the description ‘the individual called ‘Socrates’.’ Such a description would also be circular in the case of fictional objects; e.g., it would be circular to refer to Holmes using the description ‘the individual called ‘Holmes’.”
internal descriptivist could say “‘Atticus Finch’ refers to the fictional object to which we commonly attribute the internal property being honorable in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” But to do so would be to say only that the property is attributed to whichever object we commonly attribute it to, without any independent means of picking out this object.\(^{148}\)

I conclude from the above arguments that the CE realist should not take the reference of the character’s name to be fixed by descriptions of either internal or external properties and hence that she should consider an initial dubbing or baptism to understand how the reference of names from fiction is fixed. In defending his descriptivist proposal, van Inwagen rejects without argument the possibility that someone “dubbed or baptized the main satiric villainess of *Martin Chuzzlewit* ‘Mrs. Gamp’.”\(^{149}\) But how implausible is this suggestion? In the following two sections, I consider proposals for how such a dubbing or baptism could take place.

4. Varieties of baptism

4.1 Authorial baptism: Braun

As noted above, while the Kripkean account of reference seems highly plausible in the case of historical figures, it is less clear how the baptism is carried out in the case of fictional objects.\(^{150}\) An obvious starting point is to take the author’s act of writing the

---

\(^{148}\) The same argument can be made for external descriptivism, if we consider the suggestion that ‘Atticus Finch’ picks out the fictional object to which we commonly attribute the external property being based on Harper Lee’s father. Again, we would be saying only that we attribute this property to whichever object we commonly attribute it to, without an independent means of picking out that object.


\(^{150}\) Kripke himself did not address this question, stating in his 1973 lectures only that ordinary language eventually supplies a referent for names from fiction. As Thomasson (1999: 46) notes, he never expanded on this suggestion, so we can only conjecture as to his settled view.
text as the “baptismal ceremony.” On the simplest version of this view, in writing a fictional work, the author creates the characters and simultaneously baptizes them.\textsuperscript{151} Such a view seems overly simplistic, however, given the varied ways in which authors can create fictions.\textsuperscript{152}

David Braun (2005: 610) acknowledges this variety, arguing that whether or not an author’s inscription refers to a character depends on the degree to which the author has “singular thoughts and intentions about that thing.” Taking Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes as his example, he suggests that there are at least four possibilities for the author’s process:

B1. He might “have singular thoughts and intentions about the character” and have this particular character “‘in mind’ as he wrote the stories.”

B2. He might start writing the story “with the non-singular intention that he pretend to refer to something with the name ‘Holmes’.”

B3. He might “begin writing his first story with the non-singular thoughts and intentions described above, but gradually [start] to have singular thoughts and intentions regarding the character as he wrote more of his story.”

B4. He might “have mixed intentions from the very beginning.” That is, he might have non-singular intentions to use ‘Holmes’ to pretend to refer, but also take himself to be writing about the character Holmes.\textsuperscript{153}

Braun (2005: 611) also points out that the author’s later reflections on the characters, after writing the fiction, might introduce “further equivocation or indeterminacy in the reference and content of his inscriptions of the name.” Because of this, there might be

\textsuperscript{151}I discuss the creation of abstracta in more detail in §5.3.
\textsuperscript{152}For example, an author might begin writing by developing a plot and using generic character templates from which the final characters emerge gradually.
\textsuperscript{153}These four possibilities are drawn from Braun 2005: 610-611.
“no determinate fact of the matter whether his later inscriptions of ‘Holmes’ refer to
the character or fail to refer.” This is not to say that the character is an
indeterminate object; rather, it is just indeterminate whether the author’s later
inscriptions refer to the character or not. For Braun, it is only when the author has
singular thoughts and intentions about a character that the name from fiction refers to
that character.

While Braun’s view is an improvement on the simple view, there is still a gap in
the theory: how does the author pick out a particular character to baptize it? The only
indication of how a particular object is picked out to be baptized is found in (B1). As
Braun (2005: 610) writes

Suppose that as he sat down to write his first story [the author] said to
himself “I shall soon create a fictional character, which I hereby dub
‘Holmes’, and I shall write a bunch of sentences about that character, and
pretend to assert various propositions about it.” He would then have
had some abstract fictional character “in mind” as he wrote the stories.
His inscriptions of ‘Holmes’ would have referred to that character.

(B1) suggests that the character is picked out as the object of the author’s singular
thought and is then dubbed, but this only pushes the problem one step back. How does
the author pick out a particular fictional object as the object of his singular thought?
After all, he does not have perceptual contact with the fictional object, nor is there a
description available to pick it out, except perhaps ‘the fictional character I shall soon
create’. One might also worry that the thought “I shall soon create a fictional
character” is not a case of singular thought about a particular object, but rather a
general thought about fictional characters. Consider as a parallel example, “I shall soon

---

154 Braun 2005: 611.
purchase a sloop, which I hereby dub ‘Sloopy,’” which seems to be a generic thought about sloops. Given this, it is also not clear that the dubbing is successful. How, after all, is one character singled out to be dubbed?

This worry becomes even more troubling when we consider the possibility that the author might create twins, or create two characters as a pair, which would have the consequence that there is no single character that the author is “about to create.” At the point when the author is about to create the character, there are no internal descriptions to distinguish the characters, because the fiction has not yet been written. And, if two characters are created simultaneously, we cannot use the exact time and date of the characters’ creation to distinguish them. One should also note that interpreting a case of simultaneous creation of characters to be an instance of (B2)-(B4) both misdescribes the case, because the author might simultaneously have singular thoughts about two characters he is about to create, and fails to solve the problem. If we first introduce non-singular thoughts, the problem of how the author comes to have singular thoughts about a character arises concerning a later step of the writing process.

4.2. Foundation in the text: Thomasson

Thomasson (1999: 47) provides an alternative picture of baptism of fictional objects, which relies on the idea of a “textual foundation” for the character and a “quasi-indexical reference” to it:

\(^{155}\) Similarly, we might worry that the author did not form singular thoughts or intentions about the character or characters of Frackworld.
Although there can be no direct pointing at a fictional character on the other side of the room, the textual foundation of the character serves as the means whereby a quasi-indexical reference to the character can be made by means of which that very fictional object can be baptized by author or readers. Something counting as a baptismal ceremony can be performed by means of writing the words of the text or it can be merely recorded in the text, or (if the character is named later, for example by readers), it can remain unrecorded in the text.

Thomasson makes several suggestions here:

- the “textual foundation” of the character allows us to make a “quasi-indexical” reference to the character.
- the quasi-indexical reference to a given character provides the means by which that very character is baptized.
- a “baptismal ceremony” can be performed (a) by writing the words of the text, (b) by being recorded in the text, or (c) by a later naming of a character whose name is unrecorded in the text.

She notes that, as in Kripke’s original account, the idea of baptism is to be understood “loosely and metaphorically.” In a later passage, she adds that the naming of a character can occur at any stage in the writing process, which is similar to Braun’s proposal in B3.157

To understand what Thomasson means by “textual foundation,” we should note that she holds that the fictional object is dependent on the literary work, which in turn

---

156 Thomasson 1999: 48. In more detail, baptism is “part of a general picture under which a name is applied to a individual somehow publicly and in which the name is then passed along in communicative chains that refer back rigidly to this individual.” See Thomasson 1999: 48.

157 Thomasson 1999: 48-49.
depends on both a “copy or memory of it” and a “competent readership.” This suggests that the “textual foundation” of the character is ultimately a copy or memory of the work. More specifically, it is a copy or memory of that part of the work that contains a single name, a uniquely identifying description or a unifiable pattern “of behavior, of dress, of speech, or of the descriptions associated with [the character].” Such a name, description or pattern then serves as the means for quasi-indexical reference in a variety of ways.

In the simplest case, the author names the character in the text in which it appears and then

the textual use of the name of a fictional character in the context of a description in a work of fiction serves as a kind of indexical reference to the character founded on those very words of that very narrative.

In other words, by using a name in fiction, the author provides the “textual foundation” for referring to the character that is named by it. One way we might understand this is as a case of “deferred reference,” i.e. demonstrating one thing to refer to another, where “the latter is related in some way to the former.” For example, we might refer to a person by indicating a picture in which he is depicted and saying ‘him’. Likewise, on Thomasson’s (1999: 47) view, we can refer to a character by referring to “the textual use of the name of [the] fictional character in the context of a description of the work.”

However, as Kaplan (1989: 582) has argued, deferred ostention seems to require a

158 Thomasson 1999: 36. The latter relation of dependence is generic, according to Thomasson, which means, e.g., that there is no particular copy or memory that must exist for the work to exist, but only some copy or memory or other.
159 See Thomasson 1999: 49 for this list of possibilities.
160 Thomasson 1999: 47.
161 See Reimer 1996: 136 for a description of this phenomenon.
“directing intention” to secure reference. This suggests that Thomasson ultimately faces the same problems as Braun, regarding how the author or reader forms a singular intention about a particular fictional object. That is to say, the baptizer would need to have an intention to refer to a particular character, and it is not clear how the textual foundation establishes which object one is referring to. However, Thomasson could respond to this worry that all one needs in deferred reference is a general intention to refer to “whomever is depicted in the picture” and similarly that the baptizer in Thomasson’s view needs only a general intention to refer to “whichever character is named (or described) in the story.” However, such a move relies on the assumption that we can “get a fix” on the character using the text, and it is not clear that we can always do this.

Consider, for example, the more complex case of reader baptism. To illustrate this, Thomasson (1999: 49) discusses the first half of Stephen Fry’s (1991) *The Liar*, in which the italicized portions refer to characters only via their clothing, which changes from scene to scene, so that the reader can “unify these characters” only by noting patterns in style of dress.\(^{162}\) In such a case, she argues, “the naming process may come later, by a sort of consensus among readers and critics rather than by stipulation of the author.”\(^{163}\) Thus, the textual foundation allows readers and critics to reach consensus

---

\(^{162}\) As a side note, I find this interpretation of *The Liar* to be lacking. Though the description of the characters via their clothing leaves the reader with the puzzle of figuring out which character is which, it hardly seems that it is up to the reader to “unify” a given character. Instead, I would say that Fry has baptized the relevant characters but uses the description of their clothing as the only means of referring to them in the early part of the novel. At the end of the novel, details about the characters’ clothing are associated with names, allowing the reader to connect the name to the prior descriptions of outfits. However, this does not rule out the possibility of reader baptism in a different work.

\(^{163}\) Thomasson 1999: 49.
about “the character they mean,” which in turn allows them to baptize the character.\textsuperscript{164} In this more complex case, the question of what enables the reader to develop the singular intention to refer to a particular character has even more force.

Thomasson might suggest at this juncture that a description of the character’s internal properties establishes the singular intention needed for the textual foundation to secure reference to the character. After all, she does not claim that reference to a character precedes the text but rather that the text provides the means by which quasi-indexical reference is possible. She also takes the character to be individuated by its internal properties, which supports the suggestion that these internal properties are integral to fixing reference on her view.\textsuperscript{165} However, the view that the internal description helps us establish a singular intention to refer to a particular character is vulnerable to the worries raised in §3.2 for internal descriptions as reference fixers, namely the problems of ignorance and error. Alternatively, if we try to introduce reader consensus into the description in a way that avoids these problems, for example by saying that the name refers to whatever object readers have reached consensus on, we run into the problem of circularity discussed in §3.3.

The difficulties in securing reference based on the textual foundation is particularly clear in cases such as Daniel Handler’s Adverbs, in which the author’s intention seems to be to create multiple characters with the same name, which cannot be identified from chapter to chapter. As Handler (2006: 194) writes, toward the end of the novel,

\textsuperscript{164} Thomasson 1999: 49.
\textsuperscript{165} See Thomasson 1999: 63.
There’s no sense in keeping track of what everyone is doing … you’re likely to confuse them, as so many people in this book have the same names. You can’t follow all the Joes, or all the Davids and Andreas. You can’t follow Adam or Allison or Keith, up to Seattle or down to San Francisco or across—three thousand miles, as the bird flies—to New York City, and anyway they don’t matter.

Thus, Handler’s intention is to create a fiction in which the textual foundation is not sufficient for baptism, either by the author or by reader consensus. Such a case seems to explicitly eliminate Thomasson’s suggestion as a possibility for how reference is secured. Nonetheless, it seems incorrect to say that there are no characters in Handler’s story, for the same reasons offered in Chapter 2 §3.1: we seem able to imagine what goes on in the fiction, and the people act in intelligible ways according to the fiction. The question, then, is how we can possibly refer to them. If no character has been baptized by the author and the textual foundation is not sufficient for quasi-indexical reference, how should we understand reference to characters?

5. Stipulation

5.1. The proposal

I have considered whether descriptions, the singular thoughts of the author or the “textual foundation” can fix reference to fictional objects, and each of these options has been found lacking. The CE realist thus seems stuck with objects to which he cannot refer. Hence, one argument for realism, i.e. that it solves the problem of apparent reference to fictional objects, seems to be unsound.

166 Of course, one could take an anti-intentionalist stance and argue that Handler is wrong and that, e.g., there is a single David character in the work. However, given Thomasson’s other claims about the dependencies of characters on the text and on the acts of the author, such a move seems inconsistent with her view.
However, there is still a way for the CE realist to make sense of reference to fictional objects: stipulation. There are a number of ways stipulation can be understood. For example, the realist might follow Frege (1892: 41) in proposing that such names refer to the number zero:

> even [in mathematical analysis] combinations of symbols can occur that seem to stand for \([\text{bedeuten}]\) something but (at least so far) are \(\text{bedeuntungslos},\) e.g., divergent infinite series. This can be avoided, e.g., by means of the special stipulation that divergent infinite series shall stand for \([\text{bedeuten}]\) the number 0.\(^1\)

Here, Frege suggests that we can make our language complete by assigning a referent to all otherwise non-referring names or phrases. This response is available to the realist about fictional objects as well, yielding the following proposal:\(^2\)

**Single-Referent Stipulation (SRS):** All names from fiction refer to a single, arbitrarily chosen, referent, such as the number zero.

Such a view is made plausible due to the CE realist’s claim that the object does not have the properties attributed to it in the fiction but has them only according to the fiction.

This version of the stipulation view is vulnerable to two related criticisms. First, theorists such as Brock (2002: 2) reject Frege’s proposal as a realist option, simply on the grounds that realism about fictional objects requires “an abundance of fictional characters,” and hence that a proposal that stipulates a single referent cannot “capture

---

\(^1\) Elsewhere, Frege (1893: I §11) proposes that empty names and definite descriptions refer to the null set.

\(^2\) It should be noted, however, that adopting Frege’s view to support realism about fictional objects is in tension with Frege’s claim that fiction is not meant to be taken seriously and that names in fiction have sense but lack \(\text{Bedeutung}.\) For instance, Frege (1892: 33) takes names from fiction such as ‘Holmes’ to have only sense, noting that it is a “matter of no concern” whether the name has a \(\text{Bedeutung};\) “so long as we accept the poem as a work of art.” This is because, to the extent that we understand the poem as art, we are not concerned with the truth-value of its sentences. He later suggests that ‘Holmes’ is not a proper name but only a “mock proper name” and that, more broadly, fiction contains only “mock thoughts.” See Frege 1979: 141-142.
this richness and diversity of the realist’s ontology.” Moreover, one might worry that the view yields incorrect truth-values for fictive and meta-fictive utterances. If we take all names from fiction to refer to the number 0, ‘Holmes = Watson’ will have the same truth-value as ‘Holmes = Holmes’, namely, true. This suggests that, assuming direct reference, ‘According to the story, Holmes = Watson’ will have the same truth value as ‘According to the fiction, Holmes = Holmes’.

I believe the CE realist does not need to take the second worry very seriously. After all, the identity and distinctness of the characters in the fiction can come apart from the identity and distinctness of the characters outside the fiction. Thus, the realist need not hold that, if Holmes = Watson, then according to the fiction, Holmes = Watson. Regarding the first worry, it does not seem to me that the CE realist needs to have a “rich and diverse” ontology. The only reason one might be pulled that way, as I see it, is that one might simply have the strong intuition that not all fictional objects are identical. After all, it is from an external perspective that Mrs. Gamp is the main villainess of Martin Chuzzlewit, yet from that same external perspective, Mrs. Gamp would be identical to the heroic protagonist of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone. This clash with intuition might simply be too deep for some people to accept.

For the CE realist who finds SRS unpalatable, there is an alternative way to resolve this issue: the realist can argue that, instead of referring to a single number,
names from fiction each refer to a distinct number.\textsuperscript{169} This yields a new stipulation proposal:

\textbf{Multiple-referent stipulation (MRS):} Each independent use of a name in fiction refers to a distinct, arbitrarily chosen, referent.\textsuperscript{170}

One might argue that such a proposal is just as obscure as the baptism proposals offered in previous sections, in that it is unclear how one particular number is picked out as the referent of a name or which object a name refers to. The former question is resolved by the nature of stipulation. A particular object is picked out by stipulation alone, with no further justification of this reference; it is a brute semantic fact. As for the question of \textit{which} object is picked out, it seems that we lack any justification for saying that it is one particular number rather than another. However, the realist could follow Wylie Breckenridge and Ofra Magidor (forthcoming) in arguing that this is merely an epistemic problem and that our lack of knowledge about which object is the referent does not affect the strength of MRS.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{169} It is not clear that the natural numbers will be sufficient here, if we can create aleph-3 characters by writing a story that asserts, “Once upon a time, there were aleph-3 people.” One way to reply to this worry is to reject the claim that this sort of description is sufficient to pick out distinct characters and that it should instead be interpreted as being about a group or crowd. However, this becomes less convincing if we add, “… and they were all named ‘Bob’ and somewhat bored with life.” It now seems that we have aleph-3 Bobs suffering from ennui. This problem can be made more challenging by introducing further set theory into the fiction. This can be understood either as an argument for SRS over MRS or as an argument for anti-realism over realism. Thanks to David Sanson for this suggestion.

\textsuperscript{170} For this proposal to be fully fleshed out, the realist would have to make sense of what counts as an “independent use of a name.” I address this question further in my discussion of arbitrariness in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{171} Breckenridge and Magidor argue further that their stipulation proposal for, e.g., the referent of ‘n’ in phrases such as ‘let \( n \) be an arbitrary number’ provides a better explanation of our practices of logical inference than the alternatives. Similarly, the CE realist could argue that MRS provides a better explanation of how reference to fictional objects is fixed than the alternatives.
Nonetheless, MRS faces several further worries, which I consider in the remainder of this chapter: (i) it yields an incorrect truth-value for some sentences, (ii) it does not allow that characters are created by the author, and (iii) it is phenomenologically implausible. I believe that the CE realist can respond to these three objections. However, I argue in the following chapter that we should reject CE realism even so, because the sorts of objects proposed as referents are not the right sort of things to be fictional objects.

5.2. The truth-value worry, continued

First, the defender of stipulation must address the concern that both

\[(24) \quad 5 - 5 = \text{Holmes}\]

and

\[(25) \quad \text{Holmes} = x, \text{where } x \text{ is an arbitrarily chosen number}\]

seem to be false. This suggests that, contrary to the discussion above, the name ‘Holmes’ does not refer to the number zero or any arbitrarily chosen number. While Frege resolves this by taking names from fiction to be uttered unseriously and thus not to refer, this interpretive strategy would not serve the CE realist, who takes these names to refer.\footnote{See Frege 1892: 33, 1897: 141-142, as well as note 168 for more discussion of this point.}

One way out of this worry would be to stipulate a plenitude of sui generis fictional objects to which names from fiction are stipulated to refer, as follows:
Multiple-referent stipulation$: Each independent use of a name in fiction refers to a distinct, arbitrarily chosen, fictional object.

This view is similar to both Braun’s (2005) description of authorial baptism discussed above and Harry Deutsch’s (1991) proposal that the author stipulates that a name is to refer to a particular fictional object out of a plenitude of such objects. However, there is an important difference between this proposal and each of these views. Braun suggests that it is the author’s intention that determines which object the name refers to, while on MRS$_F$, the name refers to a particular fictional object by stipulation alone. Deutsch, for his part, holds that the author stipulates that the character is an object that has a particular set of properties, while the CE realist would hold that the fictional object does not have the properties it is said to have in the story. Thus, on the MRS$_F$ proposal, the object is arbitrarily stipulated to be the referent of the name, not chosen based on any further factors, be they the author’s intentions, the properties the character has according to the fiction, or, for that matter, a textual foundation.

However, the arbitrary nature of MRS$_F$ suggests a new worry for the CE realist: how do we distinguish one fictional object from another, if not by using authorial intentions, the properties ascribed to character, or some other aspect of the text? The CE realist could instead stipulate that the name refers to “some fictional object or other,” but this assignment of values seems incapable of distinguishing between utterances of ‘Holmes = Holmes’ and ‘Holmes = Watson’, outside the text, or explaining the different truth-values we assign to these utterances.
I would say that, instead of going this route, the CE realist should bite the bullet regarding the truth-value worry mentioned at the beginning of this section. That is, if she adopts a stipulation view on which ‘Holmes’ refers to a particular number, then she would say that there is some mathematical equation for which it is true that the answer is ‘Holmes’. The reason this seems *prima facie* incorrect is that we have a strong tendency to export the properties attributed to the character in the fiction and attribute them to the referent outside the fiction. Thus, we take Holmes to be a pipe-smoking detective, *not* a number. However, the contextualism of CE realism has the express purpose of blocking such an export. Thus, the CE realist can and, I believe, should adopt MRS and argue that the referent is stipulated to be a number, which is then said to have certain properties according to the fiction.\(^{173}\)

### 5.3. The creation worry

A second problem for the stipulation proposal is that the CE realist maintains that a fictional object *has* some properties, such as *being created by its author*. However, if the CE realist adopts the stipulation proposal, then the fictional object lacks this property, because it is not created by the author of the relevant fictional work.\(^{174}\) Thus, fictional

\(^{173}\) Given the arbitrary nature of this stipulation, I do not have much stake in the object being a *number* per se. I chose this sort of object only because there are an infinite number of them and thus the counting worries seem at least slightly less serious than they are for any concrete set of objects, though see note 169 for some worries regarding cardinality.

\(^{174}\) A parallel worry, over the creation of musical works, has been much discussed in the literature. For a defense of the claim that musical works are created, see Caplan and Matheson 2004, who argue further that musical works are created concreta in Caplan and Matheson 2006, 2008. For an argument that they are created by being indicated types or historical types (respectively), see Levinson 1980, 1991; Rohrbaugh 2003. For a defense of the view that musical works are eternal types and hence cannot be created, see Wolterstorff 1980; Kivy 1983, 1987; Dodd 2000, 2002. One can also find criticisms of the latter view in Rohrbaugh 2003. A related debate is whether more than one composer can create the
objects would not be “man-made artifacts created by fiction writers,” as Salmon (1998: 293) describes it, nor dependent “on the creative acts of [their] author or authors,” as Thomasson (1999: 35) asserts. Conversely, if fictional objects require an intentional act by an author or authors “in order to come into existence,” then numbers are not good candidates to be fictional objects.175

The CE realist might respond by denying that fictional objects are created. Van Inwagen (2003: 154), for instance, argues that the author creates only a manuscript, not a character or even a novel.176 He criticizes Thomasson’s use of cultural and institutional “entities” such as marriages and contracts to defend the existence of created abstracta, arguing that these are examples of existing things coming to have new properties or stand in new relations rather than examples of new things “coming into existence.”177 He concludes that it is “not a philosophical datum” that “many cultural and institutional entities can be brought into existence merely by being represented as existing” and thus that Thomasson offers no good reason to believe that abstract artifacts are possible, much less that fictional objects are examples of this type of object.178

---

175 Thomasson 1999: 31-32. One should note that this worry does not hinge on the assumption that numbers are eternal objects. Even if one believes that they are contingent, the worry holds, because the activity that brings them into existence is not the intentional act of the author.
176 However, he allows that characters and novels might supervene on the manuscript. In an earlier work, he attributes the property having been created by Dickens to Mrs. Gamp and pejoratively likens the creativity of the author on the discovery-based model of fictional objects to the “creativity” of a flower-arranger. See van Inwagen 1977: 305, 308.
This prompts van Inwagen to suggest that Thomasson would have a stronger argument if she compared fictional objects to abstracta such as sets, because a set is an abstract object that can be brought into existence by bringing its members into existence.\textsuperscript{179} However, were she to claim that fictional objects are sets of linguistic items, van Inwagen worries, she would be committed to very different objects from the abstract artifacts she defends.\textsuperscript{180} Instead, they would be much closer to the type of objects defended by Wolterstorff (1980), who takes characters to be “certain kinds of persons,” roughly, sets of characteristics.\textsuperscript{181} These “person-kinds” are eternal objects that are selected by their author or authors for consideration in the work.\textsuperscript{182} Consideration of Wolterstorff’s view leads to the second response the CE realist can offer.

The second response to the creation worry is to reinterpret how we understand ‘creation’ and the author’s creativity. Wolterstorff (1980: 144) understands the author’s creativity as follows:

\begin{quote}
From the infinitude of person-kinds the author selects one. His creativity lies in the freshness, the imaginativeness, the originality, of his selection, rather than in his bringing into existence what did not before exist.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{quote}

As a defender of a similar view, Deutsch (1991) argues that we should reinterpret the word ‘create’ to include this sort of selecting or stipulating. He argues that “to be in a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[180]{See van Inwagen 2003: 154.}
\footnotetext[181]{One should note that van Inwagen (2003: 155) is not defending Wolterstorff’s view, for he finds this view to be “unintuitive in many respects.” His conclusion, after criticizing both Wolterstorff and Thomasson, is that “the question of the metaphysics of these objects … is very far from having been given a decisive answer.”}
\footnotetext[182]{Wolterstorff 1980: 144-145.}
\footnotetext[183]{Wolterstorff 1980: 145, emphasis in original.}
\end{footnotes}
position to create a thing is to be in a position to stipulate, rather than to merely describe what the thing is like.” For example, while there exist characters named ‘Harry Potter’ that are blond accountants or miserly tyrants, Rowling stipulated that we should consider the character named ‘Harry Potter’ that is a black-haired wizard. To return to MRS, we might interpret ‘creation’ as ‘making it the case that the stipulated referent is said to have these particular properties in the fiction’. Thus, the author’s act is not that of creating an abstract object or selecting a person-kind but is instead that of describing the stipulated referent in a particular way.

If it is plausible to understand creation as stipulation, then the creation worry clearly does not rule out the stipulation proposal. Some might argue that stipulation is too different from our intuitive sense of creation to count as a creative act. But one should note that the anti-realist is likewise committed to the view that the author does not bring a new character into existence in writing a fiction. Rather, on many anti-realist views, the author asks us to imagine that a scenario is true, i.e. to make believe that there are people who do certain things, with no referents attached to the names.

5.4. The plausibility worry

The last significant worry, as I see it, is that the proposed objects are not phenomenologically plausible. After all, it does not seem to ordinary speakers or literary theorists that they are talking about numbers when they talk about characters. Instead, they seem to take names from fiction to refer to objects of a particular type.

---

184 Deutsch 1991: 211.
185 See for example Walton 1990: 385-419.
such as the *sui generis* “objects of literary criticism” that van Inwagen (1977) proposes, on a par with novels, settings, dramatic arcs, etc.\(^\text{186}\) It would be difficult, if not impossible, to convince speakers that they are in fact referring to numbers. Thus, one might worry that there is little or no phenomenological plausibility to the view that such objects are the referents of names from fiction.

There is a fairly standard reply to this sort of plausibility objection, which is available to the CE realist as well. Namely, the realist is simply trying to understand the underlying phenomena and provide a theory of it, which might or might not be a theory that ordinary speakers or even literary theorists would recognize as true. In this way, realism about fictional objects is comparable to the theory of particle physics. While ordinary speakers might find it implausible that common objects such as desks and chairs are composed largely of empty space containing miniscule particles that are constantly in motion, this nonetheless accurately describes the truth about the referents of expressions in their language.

A related point is that speakers frequently have faulty beliefs about the referents of the names they use, so it should be no surprise if this occurs in the case of names from fiction as well. Even literary theorists might have only a rough metaphysics of characters, for example, that they are imaginary people who inhabit a fictional realm, and there might be no way to map such an intuitive notion into a philosophically respectable theory of the underlying reality.\(^\text{187}\) Thus, it seems likely that any respectable

\(^{186}\) See also Kripke ms., 1972a, Salmon 1998, Thomasson 1999 for the suggestion that we refer to objects of a special type when we use a name from fiction.

\(^{187}\) Crittenden (1966, 1991) attempts to do justice to these imprecise intuitions, but the resulting theory is, to my mind, equally imprecise and difficult to parse.
theory of fictional objects will conflict with our phenomenology to some degree, and so the phenomenological implausibility of MRS is not a deciding factor against it.

6. Conclusion

Thus, it seems that the best the CE realist can do, to solve the problem of reference to fictional objects, is to stipulate referents for each name from fiction. Such a solution is not wholly satisfying, however. As Russell (1905b: 484) put it, regarding Frege's solution to the problem of empty names, “The procedure [of assigning a purely conventional denotation], while it may not lead to actual logical error, is plainly artificial, and does not give an exact analysis of the matter.” So, even if MRS allows CE realists to take names in fiction to refer, it remains an artificial solution. Along these same lines, it seems as though all of the substantial work is being done by something other than the object, so it is not clear that ontological commitment is necessary.

Moreover, two further worries follow from CE realism, which are brought out vividly by the adoption of MRS. First, the contextualism of the view seems to require that the referents of names from fiction lack properties that are essential to fictional objects. Second, as I noted in Chapter 2, the externalism of the view leaves the CE realist with a problematic arbitrariness regarding whether the names ‘Frick’ and ‘Frack’ name two characters or one, in cases such as It’s a Frick/Frack World. Taking all names from fiction to pick out a single referent could solve this problem, but SRS has problems of its own, as discussed in §5.1 of this chapter. Thus, I argue that, even if MRS allows us to make sense of reference in CE realism, it yields further problems for the view.
Chapter 4.

Two Metaphysical Problems for CE Realism:

Essential Properties and Arbitrariness

0. Introduction

In Chapter 2, I argued that the best response the realist can offer to the criticism that she is committed to metaphysically problematic objects is to say that the fictional object need not have the properties or stand in the identity relations attributed to it in the fiction. That is, the realist should be a contextualist about which properties the fictional object has and an externalist about how the fictional object is individuated.\(^{188}\) In Chapter 3, I explored the challenge of referring to fictional objects on the CE realist view. I concluded that the best that the CE realist can do is to adopt MRS and stipulate that character names refer to objects such as numbers. However, as I noted at the end of the previous chapter, such a solution seems somewhat artificial, which leaves the anti-realist with the challenge of offering a less artificial solution.

\(^{188}\) One might argue that characters need not be individuated by their properties but might instead be discrete entities due only to a bare haecceities or essences, where these are not properties of the fictional objects. Alternatively, if one adopts SRS as proposed in Chapter 3, characters might not actually be individual objects at all, but might all be the number 0, in reality. Although I use the phrase “externalist about how the fictional object is individuated” throughout the dissertation, I primarily mean by this that the fictional object’s identity to and distinctness from other fictional objects is not determined by the identity relations attributed to it in the text. Instead, the identity relations it bears to other objects is determined by something external to the text, which, I suppose, could be simply a brute fact. In general, however, I steer away from the latter suggestion, since this implies that these facts could exist but be in principle unknowable, which strikes me as unintuitive.
In this chapter, I turn to two metaphysical problems for CE realism. First, the contextualism of CE realism disconnects the fictional object from nearly all of its internal properties and, I argue, it is essential to the character that it have some of its internal properties. Thus, I conclude that the objects of CE realism are not good candidates to be fictional objects. As a quick side-note, I say “nearly all” rather than “all” because some of a character’s internal properties, such as being thought about by someone, will be had by the character in reality as well. It is thus worthwhile to introduce a new term:

**Purely internal property:** A property is purely internal if it is attributed to the character in the fiction and is not (coincidentally) had by the character outside the fiction. Harry Potter’s internal property being a wizard is an example of a purely internal property.

I can now state my worry as follows: it is essential to the character that it have some of its purely internal properties. One might also put this point as a conditional, namely, if characters exist, they must have some of their purely internal properties. Because the CE realist divorces these properties from the character, the objects she posits are not fictional characters. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to the externalism of CE realism, arguing that it commits the realist to arbitrariness in counting fictional objects. In defending this claim, I respond to a recent attempt to resolve this arbitrariness as well.

---

189 These problems are especially vivid if the CE realist adopts a stipulation view of reference, but they are not contingent on this choice, so I set the question of reference to one side and focus instead on the metaphysical issues that stem directly from CE realism.

190 For much of this chapter, I focus on fictional characters, because I believe that the problem comes across most clearly in this case. However, my argument extends to other fictional objects, such as Hogwarts.
as to Thomasson’s argument that it is no worse than other sorts of arbitrariness in our ontology.

1. Criticism of contextualism

1.1. Two weak arguments against contextualism

As I argue in the next section, I believe that we have good reason to think that it is essential to the character that it have some of its purely internal properties and that contextualism is thus flawed. Before turning to the good arguments, I set aside two arguments that, I take it, do not justify this claim.

One such argument is that these are generally the properties we care about. When we discuss Harry Potter, we are not usually interested in the character’s author, the date and time of its apparent creation, or other external properties. Instead, we care about the character’s purely internal properties.\footnote{191} This explains why we ordinarily use the pronouns ‘he’ or ‘she’ rather than ‘it’ when talking about characters.\footnote{192} Purely internal properties also seem to both explain and justify how we imagine and respond emotionally to characters.\footnote{193} If a character lacks these purely internal properties, then the attention we devote to these properties in our thought and talk about characters seems to be misplaced. However, the realist has a ready reply to such an argument,

\footnote{191 In copyright debates over the identity of two characters in distinct fictions, for instance, internal properties can play a prominent role. For example, see Nancy Kathleen Stouffer’s lawsuit against J. K. Rowling, in which she takes as evidence the point that both Stouffer’s Larry Potter and Rowling’s Harry Potter have dark hair and glasses. See “Muggle vs. Wizard,” Washington Post, March 28, 2001, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/liveonline/01/style/author_stouffer032801.htm, accessed September 10, 2010.}

\footnote{192 See van Inwagen 1977: 307, n. 8, as well as my note 79, for discussion of this convention.}

\footnote{193 See Chapter 5 for further discussion of imagining characters and emotional response to them.}
namely that our interest in these properties, as well as our imaginings and emotional responses, are based on what is said of the character in the fiction, which is compatible with the character having none of these properties outside the fiction.

A second weak argument is that divorcing the character from its purely internal properties commits the CE realist to incorrect aesthetic judgments. Everett (2005: 637) raises this worry as that of “doing justice to the story,” arguing that we reach the wrong conclusions about stories in which characters break logical laws if we conclude that the character does not have the properties it is said to have in the story. That is, taking the character to have a non-problematic set of properties yields an incorrect interpretation of what is true in the fiction, which in turn leads to impoverished or incorrect aesthetic evaluations. Again, however, the realist can respond that our aesthetic interpretation and evaluation of the fiction primarily turn on what is true in the fiction, and the character has a non-problematic set of properties only outside the fiction. Within the fiction, that is, these non-problematic characters can be said to have problematic properties or to stand in problematic identity relations.

Moreover, the anti-realist must likewise separate the truth about characters from aesthetic interpretation and evaluation of the fiction because, according to anti-realism, characters do not exist. Were we to take such an understanding of the character.

194 Everett (2005), Salmon (1998), Parsons (1980), Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009), and Cameron (forthcoming) all use the term ‘stories’ to refer to fictions. Here and elsewhere in this chapter, I use this term in discussing the respective theorists’ views, to improve readability. In general, however, I use the term ‘fiction’, to emphasize that my argument is not limited to works we would conventionally call ‘stories’.

195 I say that aesthetic interpretation primarily turns on purely internal properties because literary theorists might also take external properties such as genre or historical context into account in interpreting a fiction.
character to infect the aesthetic interpretation or evaluation of the work, we would have to interpret the *Harry Potter* series in such a way that Harry, Hermione, Ron, et al. do not exist according to the fiction. It is hard to imagine how we would interpret the fiction on this assumption, and in any case, it seems fairly clearly to be an incorrect interpretation.\(^\text{196}\) Thus, both the CE realist and the anti-realist must separate what is true of the character from the aesthetic interpretation of the fiction.

### 1.2. Two stronger arguments: conflict with practices and switching

Instead of focusing on our interests and aesthetic interpretation, I argue that it is essential to the character that it have some of its purely internal properties, given our fiction-related practices and what I will call the switching problem. Thus, because CE realism divorces all such properties from the character, we should not accept the objects of CE realism as fictional objects. One should note that I do not argue that all of the purely internal properties of a character are essential to it, or even that some of the purely internal properties of a character are essential to it, but rather that it is essential to the character that it have some purely internal properties. For example, I believe that it is essential to the character Harry Potter that it have some properties such as *being a boy, being a wizard, being the enemy of Voldemort, or having a lightning-bolt shaped...* 

---

\(^\text{196}\) One possibility is to use the “it was all a dream” device, as in *Alice in Wonderland*, though even so, the dreamer remains a character of the fiction. However, it would be absurd to claim that this is how we should interpret every fictional work or that this is the correct way to interpret the *Harry Potter* series.
If an object lacks all of its purely internal properties, I argue, we are not justified in taking this object to be the character Harry Potter.\footnote{197}{I am not committed to these particular properties, however. Indeed, I do not even claim that there are any particular purely internal properties such that it is essential to Harry Potter that he have them. All that I need for my argument is that Harry Potter must have some purely internal properties.}

Of primary importance here are our fiction-related practices, including our engagement in and appreciation of fiction.\footnote{198}{As an initial piece of data in support of this claim, the response to CE realism at conferences has been overwhelming resistance to the idea that the CE realist’s object is a character. The idea that Harry Potter is not really a boy wizard who saves the world from evil, but instead an abstract object that is merely said to have these properties, strikes many who hear it as bizarre. One way to frame this bizarre aspect, which Harry Potter aficionados will appreciate, is that the CE realist view reduces characters to Horcruxes – objects in which the character “exists” – rather than the characters themselves. Thanks to Otto Hans Muller for this suggestion.} For many people, a central aspect of appreciating a fiction is imaginative participation or engagement with the events and characters described therein. As noted above, it is true on CE realism that the events occur according to the fiction and the characters are concrete, actual and existent according to the fiction. However, the point here is that the reality of these objects is quite different from their depiction in the fiction, according to CE realism. Thus it stands to reason that, if we begin to think of characters as the CE realist does, we will end up distanced and alienated from what is said of them in the fiction. After all, characters are generally described in fictions as concrete, actual, existent people who have the properties ascribed to them in the fiction.\footnote{199}{See Kraut 2007: 1-25 for a defense of the view that our theorizing and ontology must take artworld practices into consideration.} But the CE realist rejects this,\footnote{200}{Though this is the rule, there are many exceptions. For example, post-modern novels often emphasize the constructed nature of the characters and the fiction. Even more traditional examples, such as The Mill on the Floss, Vanity Fair, Tristram Shandy and Northanger Abbey, contain reminders on the part of an omniscient narrator that the world described and the people therein are mere constructions.}
arguing that characters have few of the properties ascribed to them in fiction.201

Indeed, as we have seen, the optimal way to understand reference on CE realism might be the MRS supposition that characters are, in fact, numbers or some other arbitrarily chosen object. Since this is quite different from what we imagine, it seems as though CE realism must disrupt our practices of engaging with fictions.

To this worry, the realist might offer the response proposed in Chapter 3: realism identifies fictional objects at the theoretical level, while speakers might have all sorts of incorrect beliefs, or no beliefs at all, about the metaphysical nature of these objects. However, the objection can still be pressed that thinking about realism is likely to interfere with our engagement with fictions. That is to say, while we might be able to imagine and engage with fictions before we learn about CE realism, once we learn about it and accept it as true, it seems reasonable to think this ability will be disrupted.202

The realist could respond to this by noting that any theory of fiction must be phenomenologically implausible to some degree. Just as the realist claims that the characters in fiction are fictional objects that lack most of the properties ascribed to them in the fiction, the anti-realist claims that characters do not exist. Thus, regardless of which theory we keep in mind, it seems that some degree of implausibility and disruption of our practices must result. However, as I argue in more detail in the

201 More broadly, as Sainsbury (2009: 23) notes, every realist view must reject one of these aspects of the character’s description – that they are concrete, existent, actual, and have the properties ascribed to them in the fiction – or else commit to the naïve view that characters walk among us.

202 A parallel to this criticism can be found in meta-ethics, in which some critics worry that naturalist realism, subjectivism, or error theory would disrupt our moral practices. One reply to this line of argument can be found in Mackie 1977: 16, where Mackie argues that consideration of his second-order view need not affect first-order practices. To my mind, such a neat separation between first-order and second-order views is unavailable in the case of fiction – were we to fully keep in mind the realist’s claim, I believe, our fiction-related practices would have to be altered.
following chapter, I believe that the anti-realist view of characters, especially the pretense-theoretic view, allows us to avoid the alienating perspective of anti-realism and to engage with characters that have all their properties, by recognizing that such engagement occurs within the bounds of pretense. Although the anti-realist is committed to the claim that there are no fictional characters, this has the consequence that the character and its purely internal properties are of a piece: both are merely fictional and not real. Thus, the anti-realist never has to sever the close relationship between a character and its purely internal properties.\(^{203}\)

A second piece of justification for the claim that it is essential to characters that they have some of their purely internal properties is that, if we deny that a character has any of its purely internal properties, we must accept the possibility that characters could switch without altering the fiction. For example, if neither Harry Potter nor Voldemort have their purely internal properties, it would be possible for the characters to switch places in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, while the fiction and our understanding of it remain unchanged. Indeed, the characters could switch back and forth throughout the fiction. Moreover, if characters in general lack purely internal properties, this sort of switching could occur across fictions as well, so that, for example, Sherlock Holmes and Harry Potter could switch. One would simply attribute the properties of the relevant fiction to the character, so that Harry Potter would be attributed the properties *being named ‘Sherlock Holmes’* and *being a detective*, while Sherlock Holmes would be attributed the properties *being named ‘Harry Potter’* and *being a boy wizard*. However,

\(^{203}\) This point is developed further in Chapter 5.
these sorts of switching scenarios seem quite implausible. I believe that they
demonstrate that there is an essential connection between the character and at least
some of its purely internal properties, which is lost on the CE realist view.\(^{204}\)

I can think of three responses a realist might offer to this worry. First, a realist
might note that linking characters to purely internal properties is not enough to block
the switching worry, since two characters with the same purely internal description
would be able to switch even if the fictional object has its purely internal properties. To
my mind, this is not as troubling as the widespread switching problem that faces the CE
realist. Moreover, one could argue that being \textit{Harry Potter} is an purely internal property
of Harry Potter. Thus, even if there were a qualitative duplicate of Harry in the fiction,
it would not be possible for the characters to have their purely internal properties and
switch. Second, the realist might note that on SRS this worry is moot, as the object in
question would not “switch” – Holmes and Harry Potter would simply be the same
object. As we have seen, however, SRS has the consequence that all characters are
identical outside of the fiction, which seems more counterintuitive than the possibility of
switching.

Lastly, the realist might note that on MRS, a particular object is stipulated as the
referent of ‘Holmes’ and a different object as the referent of ‘Harry Potter’. It simply is
not the case that the Holmes object is said to be a boy wizard or that the Harry Potter

\(^{204}\) One possible response to this worry would be to turn to external properties. However, as we saw in
Chapter 3, it is difficult if not impossible to identify characters through this means, given the possibility
that two characters could be created simultaneously by the same author. Though essential external
properties might rule out the Harry Potter/ Sherlock Holmes switching case, they might not rule out the
possibility of characters switching if they are created simultaneously by the same author. For a discussion
of contextualized internal properties, see §2.1 of this chapter.
object is said to be an observant detective. While the switching described above might be counterfactually possible, it does not actually occur, because the nature of stipulation is such that the object picked out as Holmes is the object said to be an observant detective in Conan Doyle’s stories. To this, I would respond that the best theory of fictional objects should capture not merely their actual properties but also their counterfactual properties. If we are trying to get at the essential nature of fictional objects, we must take into consideration merely possible states of affairs.

A better realist response, I believe, would be to try to regain the connection between characters and their purely internal properties, arguing that even if characters lack these properties, they nonetheless have an “intimate” connection to them. I now consider three attempts to understand this intimate connection. First, I consider Salmon’s CE realism, on which it is essential to a character that it be depicted in a certain role. I then consider a Lewisian view on which characters are possible objects and a Meinongian view on which characters are nonexistent objects. I introduce the latter two views because one might imagine either of these views to be preferable to the realist view I have been considering, especially when one focuses on the desideratum that characters essentially have some of their purely internal properties. As I argue, however, none of these accounts succeeds in reconnecting fictional characters with their purely internal properties. In the final chapter, I discuss in more

---

205 I borrow the term ‘intimate’ from van Inwagen (2003), who uses it to describe the primitive holding relation between a character and its purely internal properties. In van Inwagen 1977, he refers to it as a “special relation,” which he calls “ascription.”
detail how pretense theory maintains an intimate relationship between the character and its purely internal properties.

2. Intimacy with purely internal properties

2.1. CE realism: Salmon

Salmon attempts to establish an intimate connection between the character and its purely internal properties by arguing that it is essential to the character that it be depicted in a particular role in the fiction. To understand this claim, we must see his view in more detail. Following Thomasson (1996), Salmon (1998: 300) holds that, in telling a story, the author creates many abstract artifacts, “each playing a certain role in the story.” Taking Holmes and Doyle as his example, Salmon (1998: 300) writes

The name 'Sherlock Holmes' was originally coined by Conan Doyle in writing the story … as the fictional name for the protagonist. That thing – in fact merely an abstract artifact – is according to the story, a man by the name of 'Sherlock Holmes'. … At a later stage, use of the name is imported from the fiction into reality, to name the very same thing that it is the name of according to the story.206

Thus Salmon maintains that the author, in writing the fiction, merely pretends to use the name to refer to a detective. When the use becomes genuine in meta-fictive discourse, it refers to the abstract artifact, and the name refers to this object within the fiction as well. Thus, Salmon is committed to a view of reference on which names refer to sui generis abstract artifacts and engaged utterances that use the name, such as

(21) Harry Potter is a wizard.

---

206 Emphasis in original. This view, on which pretend reference is “exported” to become real reference, is similar to the view espoused in Kripke ms., the difference being that Salmon does not take our use of the name to be ambiguous.
are nearly all false, although they are true according to the fiction.\footnote{There are some exceptions to this rule, e.g. ‘Harry Potter exists’, ‘Someone in England has heard of Harry Potter’, etc.} Thus, as we have seen, the character is divorced from what is said of it in the fiction. The name ‘Harry Potter’ refers to an abstract artifact, which is not a wizard.

Salmon then attempts to reconnect the character to its purely internal properties, recognizing the latter’s essential nature. He does so by introducing the concept of the character’s “depiction in a role” and arguing that it is essential to the character, as follows:

It is of the very essence of a fictional character to be depicted in the fiction as the person who takes part in such-and-such events, performs such-and-such actions, thinks such-and-such thoughts. Being so depicted is the character’s \textit{raison d’être}. As Clark Gable was born to play Rhett Butler in Margaret Mitchell’s \textit{Gone with the Wind}, that character [Rhett Butler] was born to be the romantic leading man of that fiction.\footnote{Salmon 1998: 302, emphasis in original.}

It is of the essence of Fleming’s character precisely to be the character depicted in the dashing and debonair 007 role in the \textit{James Bond} stories – and not merely in the sense that being depicted thus is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for being the character of Bond in any metaphysically possible world. Rather, this is the condition that defines the character; being the thing so depicted in those stories characterizes exactly what the character of James Bond \textit{is}.\footnote{Salmon 1998: 302, emphasis in original.}

Thus, Salmon argues that it is essential to the character that it be depicted as having certain properties in certain stories, although the character does not have these properties.

Does Salmon’s view assuage the worry I have raised about the purely internal properties of the character? He argues that the character is an abstract artifact created by the author to play the role it is depicted as playing in the fiction. Thus, even though
the character does not have the properties ascribed to it in the fiction, it is essentially linked to these properties, because it exists only to be depicted in a certain role. We might conclude from this discussion that the realist can have his cake and eat it too; characters are essentially depicted as having the properties they are depicted as having, despite not having these properties. In the first part of my reply to Salmon’s view, I criticize the idea that it is “depiction in the role” that is essential to the character, rather than the purely internal properties themselves. In the second part, I turn to the strength of Salmon’s claim: it is stronger than my own view, both because it takes depiction in the role in a given fiction to be sufficient for being a particular character and because the role can be understood to include all of the purely internal properties of a character as essential to its depiction.

My first response to Salmon is that it simply seems wrong to say that the character Harry Potter is “depicted in the role” of a dark-haired boy wizard with glasses and a scar and that Daniel Radcliffe plays the character that is thus depicted.\footnote{Alternatively, we might say that Radcliffe plays both the character and the role on Salmon’s view, but the worry about the unnecessary epicycle remains.} Instead, I would contend that the character Harry Potter simply is a dark-haired wizard with glasses and a scar and that Radcliffe plays that character.\footnote{As a humorous exception to the above rule, Radcliffe asserts that he simply is Harry Potter, in the following video: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gH2P0jbp8A}.} If we consider non-performative fiction, the situation becomes even stranger.\footnote{Salmon, after all, considers characters such as Clark Gable and James Bond, which we closely associate with screen performances. I believe that this association helps massage our intuitions that the character is depicted in a certain role.} Salmon must say that Mrs. Gamp is essentially depicted in the role of the fat, alcoholic nursemaid in Martin Chuzzlewit, which seems bizarre. Rather, I would say that the character just is the fat, Chuzzlewit, which seems bizarre. Rather, I would say that the character just is the fat, Chuzzlewit,
alcoholic nursemaid in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. At the very least, it seems gratuitous to say that Mrs. Gamp is “depicted in the role” of a fat, alcoholic nursemaid. Thus, I conclude that Salmon, in an attempt to maintain a close relation between the character and its purely internal properties, has added an epicycle where no epicycle is necessary.

Another way to understand this worry is to ask what we mean when we say ‘the dashing and debonair 007 role in the *James Bond* stories’. The clearest way to understand this phrase seems to be that it picks out the character James Bond, not a role that James Bond plays. Similarly the clearest way to understand ‘the romantic leading man of *Gone with the Wind*’ is that what it picks out just is Rhett Butler. There seems to be no motivation for saying that it is the role Rhett Butler was created to be depicted in except an *ad hoc* attempt to demonstrate an essential connection between the character and the properties attributed to it in the fiction.

Salmon might respond to these criticisms by arguing that his claim that “it is of the essence of Fleming’s character precisely to be the character depicted in the dashing and debonair 007 role in the *James Bond* stories” is just another way of saying that it is essential to the character that it be said to have certain properties in the fiction. This claim, in turn, is simply the contextualist version of the claim that the purely internal properties of a character are essential. The difference is that, where I would say that it is essential to the character that it have some of its purely internal properties, Salmon
would say that it is essential to the character that it be *depicted* as having these properties.\footnote{Salmon’s position might also be stronger than my own when it comes to the number of properties that are included in the essential depiction. That is, it is consistent with his view that the *007 role* includes all the properties ascribed to *007* in the fiction, and thus that it is necessary that James Bond have all of these properties. This suggests the modal worry discussed in Chapter 3 §3.1, though, as I noted in that section, there are ways to respond to that worry. It is also possible that Salmon does not intend to include all of the character’s purely internal properties in the role, though he then seems to need a principled account of how the purely internal properties that are part of the role are distinguished from those that are not part of the role.}

I do not find such a reply convincing, as it seems that the worry about unnecessary theoretical complexity and *ad hoc*-ery remains. In addition, one might wonder whether being depicted in a particular role is the sort of property that can reasonably be considered an essential property of an object. One might initially wish to rule out the possibility that *being depicted in the role of x* could be essential, on the grounds that it is extrinsic to the character.\footnote{Putnam (1983), for example, seems to use ‘essential’ and ‘intrinsic’ interchangeably. Dunn (1990) and Humberstone (1996), on the other hand, assert that essential properties are clearly distinct from intrinsic properties.} However, it is widely agreed that extrinsic properties can be essential. For example, many argue that a person’s origins are essential to that person, yet one’s origin, e.g., *being created from sperm x and egg y*, is arguably an extrinsic property, since it depends on other beings outside oneself.\footnote{One way of understanding extrinsic properties, proposed by Yablo (1999), is that they are properties that could be possessed by a “lonely object,” i.e., an object with no worldmates. If one instead adopts Lewis’s (1983a: 111-112) proposal that an intrinsic property is one had in virtue of how a certain thing is, or one that does not vary across duplicates, then the gap between the essentiality and intrinsicality seems to be somewhat narrower, but nonetheless, it seems to be a mistake to treat the two as identical.}

Thus, we are not justified in claiming that “depiction in a role” is inessential merely on the grounds that it is extrinsic. But there are further reasons for thinking that “depiction in a role” is not the sort of property that can be essential to an object. Consider fictions that describe real people, for example. It is certainly an accidental
property of Napoleon that he is depicted in the role of Napoleon in *War and Peace*, as it is an accidental property of me that I am depicted in the role of Cathleen Muller in *The Muller’s Tale*. If characters are like real people in this respect, it seems to follow that the descriptions of characters in the fiction are just as accidental for these fictional objects as they are for Napoleon and me.

Salmon would no doubt deny this analogy and argue that a character is a unique sort of thing, precisely because it is essential to the character that it be depicted in a certain role in the fiction. After all, this is the reason that the author creates the object, on his view. This suggests that his view requires a strong commitment to created abstracta, because it is the author’s intention to create a character to be depicted in a particular role that explains why this depiction is essential to the character. If we think of characters as existing prior to their inclusion in a story and lacking all their purely internal properties, then it seems that it would *not* be essential to the character that it be depicted in a certain role. While this commitment to created abstracta is not a damning criticism of Salmon’s view, it is a controversial commitment because, as discussed in §5.3 of Chapter 3, some doubt whether abstracta other than sets can be created.

Moreover, there is a final worry for Salmon’s view. As noted above, the view is stronger than my own, in that Salmon asserts that being depicted as having certain properties in a particular fiction, such as *being the dashing and debonair 007 in the James Bond stories*, is both necessary and sufficient for being the character James Bond, whereas I hold merely that it is necessary that the James Bond character have some of
its purely internal properties. Taking depiction in a particular role in a fiction to be sufficient for being the character has the consequence that all characters that are depicted in the same role in the fiction are identical. However, this is complicated by problem cases, such as a story about two characters, Dum and Dee, to whom all the same properties are attributed. Such characters would arguably play the same role in the same fiction, and hence on Salmon’s view, each would be depicted in a way that is sufficient to count as the other, making them identical. While Salmon could respond to such a worry by taking being Dee and being Dum to be part of the characters’ respective roles, such a move threatens circularity, as it seems that we must use the character to identify the role that the character is depicted in.

In conclusion, I would note that the flaws of Salmon’s view ramify more broadly for CE realists in general. If the realist tries to reconnect the purely internal properties to the character while maintaining that the character does not have these properties, it is likely that this will require additional theoretical machinery and will be an ad hoc adjustment to the view. Questions of strength, such as the question above regarding how many purely internal properties are necessary and sufficient for the role, are likely to arise for any CE realist attempt to reconnect purely internal properties to characters as well. In contrast, anti-realists allow that the character has the properties attributed to it in the fiction, though they deny the existence of such a character. They thus avoid

---

216 This example is from Fine 1982: 133.
217 To some extent, the strength question afflicts the anti-realist as well. On Walton’s view for instance, we might wonder what we are authorized to pretend when two characters have the same purely internal properties. However, I would say that the worry here is not as serious, because the pretense theorist can defer to literary theorists or others regarding the proper interpretation of the fiction and assert that this is what we are authorized to pretend. In contrast, the realist cannot appeal to such sources as readily, as it seems odd to say that these interpretive claims determine something essential about a real object.
the need for any additional means of connecting the character to is purely internal properties.

2.2. Possibilism: a Lewisian view

Before moving on to anti-realism, however, we should consider a few other realist possibilities, namely the possibilist and Meinongian options. The view that the character is a merely possible person appears, *prima facie*, to be more successful in connecting the character to its purely internal properties.\(^{218}\) Although it is not a CE realist position, one might conclude from the discussion in §2.1 that CE realism cannot sufficiently connect the character to its purely internal properties and hence that we ought to seek out a different realist option.

If we understand the character as a possible person, we seem able to maintain that, at the possible world described by the fiction, the character *has* its purely internal properties.\(^{219}\) Thus, Harry Potter really is a boy wizard who attends Hogwarts, yet this does not require that there is a secret Hogwarts one can reach by running through the wall of an actual London train station or that the wizarding world is a secret kept from

---

\(^{218}\) One should note at the outset that there is a problem for this view, even before we get into the additional complexities discussed in this section. Namely, the *character* could have certain properties essentially that a possible *person* would not have essentially, such as *having a lightning-bolt shaped scar*. Nonetheless, because possibilism *prima facie* seems to provide a straightforward understanding of the intimate relation between characters and their purely internal properties, I give it a more thorough discussion here.

\(^{219}\) Though this approach uses Lewis’s theory of possible worlds, Lewis does not seem to endorse such an extension of his view; he applies his possible worlds view to the problem of truth in fiction, not the ontological status of fictional objects. As he understands names in fiction, they have content only if the sentences containing them can be prefixed with “according to the fiction,” and otherwise they are denotationless. See Lewis 1978: 38. Nonetheless, we can develop his view of truth in fiction to provide a possibilist view of fictional objects. See Sainsbury 2009: 68-90 for such a development of the view, as well as criticism of it.
Muggles at the actual world. Instead, the school and its students are safely ensconced in a separate possible world.\footnote{It is interesting to note, however, that fantasy novels often offer provisos for the compatibility of the fantasy world with the actual world, just as the Harry Potter series does. For example, in Alice in Wonderland, Wonderland is a mere dream and in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, the children enter Narnia through an old wardrobe in an otherwise normal house.} This proposal seems to draw the separation where it ought to be: not between the character and its purely internal properties, but between the fiction and the actual world.

One might think that the CE realist draws the line between fiction and reality as well, in that she asserts

\begin{equation}
\text{(26) According to the fiction, Harry Potter is a wizard, but in reality, he is not.}
\end{equation}

This assertion seems parallel to the possibilist assertion that

\begin{equation}
\text{(27) Possibly, Harry Potter is a wizard, but actually, he is not.}
\end{equation}

However, one notes that (26) still separates the character from its purely internal properties, in reality. In contrast, consider Lewis's modal realist understanding of (27). On such a view, Harry Potter is a flesh-and-blood person who really is a wizard in a different possible world. Thus, the character has the properties that he seems to have in the fiction; he just doesn't have them in this world. That is, the Lewisian possibilist can assert

\begin{equation}
\text{(28) Harry Potter is a wizard, but he is not spatiotemporally connected to us.}
\end{equation}

This seems to resolve the issues raised in §1, as it allows that the character can simply have the properties it is said to have in the fiction.
Unfortunately, there are a number of problems with possibilism. First, it has a difficult time making sense of contradiction within a fiction. This is particularly problematic in this discussion, given the goal of responding to the problem stories discussed in Chapter 2. Lewis (1978, 1983b) offers a few methods for interpreting contradictory fiction. In his first pass at this problem, Lewis asserts that everything is true in “blatantly impossible” fictions, because he takes truth in fiction to be closed under classical entailment.\(^{221}\) Meanwhile, “accidentally impossible” fictions, such as the Holmes stories, should be understood by considering a number of possible revised versions and taking what is true in the fiction to be whatever is true at the intersection of these revised versions.\(^{222}\) However, the former solution results in an interpretation that does not seem merited by fictions such as Everett’s, and the latter solution eliminates the inconsistency altogether, which fails to make sense of Dialethialand. In Lewis 1983b, he revises the latter suggestion and argues that we should break up the fiction into maximal consistent parts, deleting “the bare minimum that will give us consistency,” and then take what is true in the fiction to be what is true at their union.\(^{223}\) Thus, both \(\phi\) and not-\(\phi\) might be true in the fiction, but the conjunction will not be. This allows the interpreter of fiction to maintain the “distinctive peculiarity” of contradictory fictions.

---

\(^{221}\) One need not accept that truth in fiction adheres to classical logic, however.  
\(^{222}\) Lewis 1978: 45-46. The Holmes stories collectively are accidentally impossible because Watson’s single war wound is described as being in his arm in A Study in Scarlet and his leg in The Sign of Four.  
\(^{223}\) Lewis 1983b: 277. As an alternative, we might introduce impossible worlds. See Salmon 1984 for a defense of ersatz impossible worlds and Yagisawa 1988, 2009 for a defense of real impossible worlds.
However, the view that characters are merely possible objects faces a much deeper worry. Namely, which possible objects are they? Kripke (1972b: 157-158) puts this point as follows:

granted that there is no Sherlock Holmes, one cannot say of any possible person, that he would have been Sherlock Holmes, had he existed. Several distinct possible people, and even actual ones such as Darwin or Jack the Ripper, might have performed the exploits of Holmes, but there is none of whom we can say that he would have been Holmes had he performed these exploits. For if so, which one? I thus could no longer write, as I once did, that “Holmes does not exist, but in other states of affairs, he would have existed.”

This is a deep challenge to the adapted Lewisian proposal, because it suggests that there is no possible world where Sherlock Holmes exists. A related worry is the incompleteness of the character, as Sainsbury (2009) argues. He notes that fictional characters are, in their essence, radically incomplete: while they have many properties according to the fiction, there are also many properties they lack. In particular, for many properties F, such as \textit{having a mole on his back}, a character such as Holmes lacks both F and not-F, where not-F is \textit{not having a mole on his back}. In contrast, every possible object is complete: if it lacks F, it will have not-F.\footnote{Sainsbury 2009: 84-85. His presentation of the incompleteness worry, which is perhaps more persuasive, is to consider the properties \textit{being under 6 foot 2} and \textit{being 6 foot 2 or more}. Neither is a property Holmes has, yet any possible physical object must have a particular height. Thus, Holmes is not a possible physical object.}

One solution to this problem is to adopt Priest’s (2005: 123) “super-valuational approach,” on which all the possible people who have the properties explicitly attributed to Holmes in the fiction are “Holmes-surrogates.”\footnote{The supervaluational response to Kripke’s worry is also advocated in Stone 2010.} Each of these
surrogates is complete, though none is Holmes. However, there is a problem with this proposal. As Sainsbury (2009: 87) puts the point,

the account says nothing about the metaphysical status of Sherlock Holmes himself, for he simply drops out of the picture in favor of his surrogates. The theory we have is simply not one according to which Holmes is a nonactual but possible object. Rather, it's a theory according to which we can replace or reconstrue talk of Holmes in terms of talk of other objects. None of the entities taken to be real (though nonactual) is Holmes.

Even if one does not go so far as Sainsbury in claiming that Holmes “simply drops out of the picture,” it is nonetheless the case on the super-valuational approach that characters are reduced to super-valuations over character-surrogates, which are the truthmakers for particular utterances about characters. That is, ‘a is F’ is true if and only if every a-surrogate is F. Thus, individual character-surrogates will have the purely internal properties the character is depicted as having, as well as many further properties, but the character itself will not have the purely internal property in the straightforward way that lent the possibilist approach its initial appeal.

The possibilist proposal is also unable to make sense of many external properties, such as being the main satiric villainess of Martin Chuzzlewit. While Dickens could ostensibly have based the character of Mrs. Gamp on an actual person, this would not give the actual person the property of being the satiric villainess of a fiction. Rather, the actual person would continue to be just that – a real, live person. The same is true for all of the merely possible fat, alcoholic nursemaids named ‘Mrs. Gamp’. They lack
the property being a satiric villainess, because they are not fictional. Thus, many intuitively true theoretical utterances are false on the possibilist proposal.\footnote{226 Lewis (1978: 38) accepts this limitation in his account of truth in fiction, noting that he “does not have anything to say about the proper treatment of” such utterances as ‘Holmes has acquired a cultish following’. He deems such utterances untrue, because they contain a denotationless name. Although we are considering an extension of Lewis’s original proposal, the problem persists.}

Relatedly, a possibilist account of characters (or character-surrogates) leaves little room for applying literary conventions to our understanding of characters. So such a view might artificially restrict or overstep what is true about the character in the fiction. As an example of an artificial restriction, we would not be able to conclude that

\[(29) \quad \text{Mrs. Verloc committed suicide.}\]

is true according to The Secret Agent, because the worlds where (29) is true and the fiction is reported as known fact are as close to the actual world as worlds at which (29) is false and the fiction is reported as known fact.\footnote{227 This example is found in Walton 1990: 162-163. A possibilist account would not yield (29), because the only aspect of the novel that allows us to reach this conclusion is a newspaper headline that reads ‘Suicide of Lady Passenger from a Cross-Channel Boat’. In making the inference to (29), we rely on the literary convention that such headlines are brought up in the fiction only if they are relevant to the characters depicted there, and thus we know that it was the distressed Mrs. Verloc who died, not any of the numerous other lady passengers of cross-Channel boats.}

As an example of an artificial overstepping, pace Priest (2005) we would draw too strong a conclusion about what we can judge to be true of a fictional object, if we took Jules and Jim of Dialethialand to be possible objects. That is, it seems on the possibilist account that we should judge

\[(30) \quad \text{Jules is possible.}\]

to be true, when really it seems to be false.\footnote{228 At any rate, it does not seem to be true on the basis of the fiction alone.} Thus, while there seems to be something right about treating the character as a person, it is doubtful that the possibilist view can
achieve this, and it is unclear how such a view can make sense of our treatment of characters as both people and objects governed by literary convention.²²⁹

2.3. Meinongianism: Parsons and Zalta

Lastly, the Meinongian view also seems prima facie to preserve the intimacy between characters and their purely internal properties, and one might therefore think that it provides a useful alternative to CE realism.²³⁰ Parsons (1980: 54) provides one contemporary development of Meinong’s theory, on which fictional objects are nonexistent objects that literally have all of the properties ascribed to them in the fiction.²³¹ He divides properties into nuclear properties such as being a boy and extranuclear properties such as exists and is possible, i.e., the “ontological, modal, intentional, and technical properties of the object.”²³² Roughly, fictional objects that are

²²⁹ One might think that the proper solution here is to substitute the possible world with a fictional world that avoids the issues discussed above, i.e., one that allows for contradictions, incomplete objects, and even fictional properties such as being a satiric villainess. However, I would say that this sort of move obscures or even eliminates the usefulness of the possible worlds approach and suggests a host of new problems. In what sense would such entities count as “worlds”? What could we conclude about fictional objects as a result of them? One might even argue that locating the character at a sui generis fictional world is just a long-winded way of making the original contextualist point in CE realism: a character would have its properties at the fictional world but would not have them at the real world, which seems like it would mean that a character has its purely internal properties only according to the fiction, but does not really have them.

²³⁰ Arguably, the Meinongian theorist Edward Zalta can be seen as a CE realist, since he uses ‘nonexistent’ and ‘abstract’ interchangeably and takes characters to bear two different relations to their properties, which is similar to van Inwagen’s having/holding distinction. On this understanding, his view and CE realism are not clearly opposed.

²³¹ Parsons 1980: 54. Routley (1980) advocates a similar position, but I focus on Parsons’s rendering of the view, because it is presented in more systematic detail. See also Priest 2005. I discuss the view of Edward Zalta, another prominent Meinongian, below.

²³² Parsons 1980: 23. Parsons (1980: 51) adds that ‘create’ does not mean ‘bring into existence’, because “such objects typically do not exist.”
“native” to a fiction have the nuclear properties attributed to them in that fiction.233

Thus, Harry Potter has the nuclear properties being a wizard and having a lightning-bolt-shaped scar, as well as the extranuclear property being fictional.234 Also, Parsons’s (1980: 19) theory straightforwardly allows for incomplete objects: there is an object for any cluster of properties, and many of these objects are incomplete.

Edward Zalta (2003: 13) advances an alternative Meinongian view, on which fictional objects have two different types of relations to their properties, but there is only one type of property.235 On this view, characters and other fictional objects encode certain properties and exemplify others. While this roughly maps onto Parsons’s distinction, so that the properties encoded are those Parsons describes as nuclear and the properties exemplified are those he describes as extranuclear, this parallel does not hold across the board. For example, Zalta (1983: 18) would say that the existent round square encodes the property existing without exemplifying it, while Parsons (1980: 155)

---

233 Parsons 1980: 54. A “native” object is such that, “roughly, the story totally ‘creates’ the object in question,” as opposed to an “immigrant” object, which is “an already familiar [object] imported into the story.” I have said ‘roughly’ here because this point actually is quite complex, especially when one considers the “nuclear weakenings” of the character’s extranuclear properties. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Fine 1984, especially 103-110.

234 If an extranuclear property such as existing is attributed to the character in the story, the character has the “watered down” nuclear property being existent. See Parsons 1980: 155 and Fine 1984: 100-101. Parsons (1980: 43-44) discusses Meinong’s idea of the “watered down” version of an extranuclear property in somewhat more detail, building on the work of Meinong’s student Mally, as follows:

We know at least this much about the relation between a property and its watered-down version: if $p$ is a watered-down version of $P$, then (1) $P$ is extranuclear, (2) $p$ is nuclear, and (3) it’s hard to tell the difference between $p$ and $P$. We can be more explicit about (3), by suggesting: (4) necessarily, any real object has $p$ if and only if it has $P$. In the theory given below, for every extranuclear property $P$, there will be at least one nuclear property $p$ which is related to $P$ as in (4).

Fine (1984: 100) suggests that the notion of nuclear weakening can be understood using property abstraction. To focus on this aspect of Parsons’s view would take us too far astray from the goals of this dissertation, so I set it to one side.

235 As noted above in note 230, this difference makes Zalta’s view closer to CE realism than Parsons’s. The suggestion that characters have two different types of relations to their properties is also found in Mally 1904.
takes *existing* to be extranuclear and claims that the existent round square has only the nuclear correlate *being existent*. On Zalta’s (1983: 2) view, fictional objects differ from concrete objects in that fictional objects can both encode and exemplify properties, while concrete objects can only exemplify properties. Roughly speaking, fictional objects encode certain properties by exemplifying them *according to the fiction*.\(^{236}\)

Both Parsons’s and Zalta’s views of fictional objects have advantages over the Lewisian view. Most notably, the Meinongian can make sense of the entire range of utterances. Theoretical utterances concern the extranuclear (or exemplified) properties of the character, comparative, utterances concern a comparison of nuclear (or encoded) properties across fictions, and engaged utterances likewise concern the nuclear (or encoded) properties a fictional object possesses. It might seem at first that the Meinongian cannot make sense of comparative, utterances, i.e., utterances that compare a fictional object and a real object, a worry Everett (2005: 644) raises using the following example:

\[(19)\] Both Oedipus and Freud were devoted to their mothers. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

As I discussed in Chapter 2 §5.2, the apparent felicity of the conjunction in (19) poses a concern for Zalta’s view, on which Oedipus encodes the property *being devoted to one’s mother* while Freud exemplifies this property. However, like the CE realist, Zalta can explain away the apparent problem by paraphrasing (19) as

\(^{236}\) Zalta 1983: 93.
Freud was devoted to his mother and Oedipus encodes the property being devoted to his mother. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character. While such a paraphrase is stilted, Zalta can adopt the argument we have seen before, i.e., that he is attempting to capture the underlying theoretical truth, which need not be what ordinary speakers would take to be the meaning of the utterance. It is also worth noting that this example does not work against Parsons’s view; rather, the example works as a point in favor of it, for it supports the conclusion that fictional objects have the same properties, in the same way, as existent objects.  

Despite the substantive advantage over the Lewisian view of being able to straightforwardly account for incomplete objects and accommodate the whole range of utterances about fiction, the Meinongian position has at least two serious problems. First, it is committed to impossible or contradictory objects, not only within fictions but outside fictions as well. As Russell (1905b: 533) argues, this leads to the following counting objection: 

If ‘A differs from B’ and ‘A does not differ from B’ are to be both true, we cannot tell, for example, whether a class composed of A and B has one member or two. Thus in all counting, if our results are to be definite, we must first exclude impossible objects. We cannot, if B is

---

237 Everett avoids this conclusion only by reinterpreting Parsons’s view dramatically, as I discussed in note 95. He claims that Parsons must take being devoted to one’s mother to be an extranuclear property of which the fictional object has only the nuclear correlate. As this reinterpretation contradicts Parsons’s view, I do not address it, though I believe that a similar paraphrase would be available. One might also worry that Everett’s criticism could be raised for Parsons regarding an extranuclear property as follows: 

(vi) Both Oedipus and Freud are self-identical. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character. However, I do not see a worry here, because again, Oedipus and Freud would have the same extranuclear property, being self-identical, in the same way. Moreover, if such a worry does arise for Parsons, I believe he can appeal to loose talk just as Zalta can.

119
impossible, say ‘A and B are two objects’; nor can we strictly say ‘B is one object’.

Thus, he concludes that we must exclude impossible objects from our ontology. This worry is quite similar, if not identical in form, to the problem of arbitrariness for the CE realist discussed in the following section.

Also, many balk at the Meinongian view simply because it requires one to accept an ontology of nonexistent objects. Though this move has the benefit of making both

(1) Harry Potter does not exist.

and

(9) There is a fictional character named ‘Harry Potter’.

straightforwardly true, it seems problematic, simply because one must accept the “paradoxical” claim that there are things that do not exist.\(^\text{238}\) Although Meinong (1904: 78) would no doubt accuse me of a “prejudice in favor of the actual,” it seems to me, and to many others, that such a prejudice is warranted. This is especially so if we can do without nonexistent objects and nonetheless make sense of our fiction-related practices, including the apparent truth of both (1) and (9). I argue in the following chapter that we can.

To sum up, CE realism, having divorced the purely internal properties from the character, lacks a means of reconnecting them. Yet it is essential to characters that they have some of their purely internal properties. Thus, the objects that CE realists posit lack properties that are essential to fictional characters, and thus their view should not

\(^\text{238}\) Meinong (1904: 83) notes that “those who like paradoxical forms of expression could very well say, ‘There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects’.” To my ear, this becomes no less paradoxical if one says instead, “Some things do not exist,” so it is not the claim that “there are” such things that causes the problem so much as the use of ‘thing’ beyond the limits of existence.
be considered a view of fictional objects. Possibilist views at first seem to fare somewhat better in this regard, but they face difficulties regarding contradictory fictions, the question of which possible object is the character and the incompleteness of fictional objects. If the possibilist makes the move to a super-valuational account to resolve the latter worries, he loses the character in exchange for character-surrogates. Moreover, possibilism provides no method for treating the character from the external perspective. Lastly, Meinongian views are committed to objects that cannot be counted and, even more problematically, to objects that do not exist, which seems to give us characters at the cost of a sensible ontology. I conclude from this discussion that none of these views provides an acceptable ontology of fictional characters that maintains the essential connection between a character and some of its purely internal properties.

3. A problem for externalism: arbitrariness

3.1. The arbitrariness problem

A second metaphysical worry facing CE realism stems from the view’s externalism, which makes it arbitrary how we should count fictional objects in certain fictional works. As we saw at the end of Chapter 2, the move to CE realism avoids the problem of commitment to objects that are indeterminately identical but at the cost of facing a new problem: arbitrariness in counting the characters in fictions like *It’s a Frick/Frack World*. Everett (2005: 632-633) describes the problem as follows:

---

239 I use *It’s a Frick/Frack World* rather than *Frackworld* because it is only in the former fiction that it is explicitly stated that it is indeterminate whether Frick and Frack are identical. See Chapter 2 §3.2.
A fictional realist might nevertheless hope to block my arguments by rejecting [(P1) and (P2)]. However, it is worth pointing out that this strategy faces a problem. For, even if we block my arguments by rejecting (P1) and (P2), we still face the problem of deciding whether the Frick-character is the same as the Frack-character … . And there seems no principled way in which we might decide these questions. … We have no more reason to choose one of the options than the other and whatever choice we make will be unacceptably ad hoc. Hence, I would argue, simply rejecting (P1) and (P2) will not save the fictional realist.240

Thus, Everett does not think that the realist gains anything from the move to CE realism, because it is still not clear whether the CE realist should say that there is one character or two in cases such as It’s a Frick/Frack World. As in Russell’s criticism of Meinong described above, two ways of counting characters seem equally justified, so there is no reason to say either that there are two characters or that there is only one.241 I call this “the arbitrariness problem.”

One way that the realist might attempt to eliminate the arbitrariness is to interpret Frackworld along the lines that Lewis proposes for contradictory fictions, i.e., by interpreting the fiction simultaneously as two separate fictions, one in which Frick

\[ \text{(P1)} \quad \text{If the world of a story concerns } a \text{ and if } a \text{ is not a real thing, then } a \text{ is a fictional character.} \]

\[ \text{(P2)} \quad \text{If the world of a story concerns } a \text{ and } b, \text{ and if } a \text{ and } b \text{ are not real things, then } a \text{ and } b \text{ are identical in the world of the story iff the fictional character of } a \text{ is identical to the fictional character of } b. \]

240 Italics in original. Here, Everett is referring to the principles (P1) and (P2) discussed in Chapter 2 §2.2, which I repeat here for ease of reference. See Everett 2005: 627.

241 If one additionally adopts Russell’s contention that countability is a requirement for objecthood, this arbitrariness calls into question whether fictional objects are even objects. In Principles of Mathematics, Russell (1903: 43) emphasizes the connection between countability and objecthood as follows:

> Whatever may be an object of thought, or may occur in any true or false proposition, or can be counted as one, I call a term. This, then, is the widest word in the philosophical vocabulary. I shall use as synonymous with it the words unit, individual, and entity. The first two emphasize the fact that every term is one, while the third is derived from the fact that every term has being, i.e. is in some sense.

Emphasis in original. Thus, the fact that the CE realist cannot say that Frick and Frack are two objects, nor that they (or it) are one, undermines the claim that they (or it) count as objects (or an object), on this account of objecthood.
and Frack are identical and one in which they are distinct. She might then hold on to Everett's (P2) and maintain that, according to the former fiction, there is only one character and, according to the latter fiction, there are two. However, there is a problem with such an account, which is similar to that discussed in Chapter 2 §3.2: regardless of whether we consider the text of the work or the author's intention, it seems that neither of these fictions is It's a Frick/Frack World. So it seems that we should interpret the fiction as a single fiction, according to which it is indeterminate whether the characters are identical. Thus the arbitrariness problem cannot be resolved in this way. In the following two sections I present two further attempts to respond to the arbitrariness problem and argue that neither of them succeeds.

3.2. A proposed solution: Schnieder and von Solodkoff

Benjamin Schnieder and Tatjana von Solodkoff (2009: 143) respond to the arbitrariness problem by arguing that fictional objects are identical if and only if they are identical according to the fiction in which they originate. If they are explicitly said to be distinct characters in the fiction, or if it is left open whether they are identical or distinct, then the fictional objects are distinct. As Schnieder and von Solodkoff put it, using ‘ACCₜ’ to mean ‘according to story T,’ these principles are

---

242 Thanks to Gregory Currie for this suggestion. Cameron (forthcoming) proposes a similar solution. Cameron argues that the text contains two separate fictions, which, along with the assumption that distinct fictions contain distinct characters, shifts the indeterminacy from the objects to the identity sentence, so that it is indeterminate only whether ‘Frick = Frack’ is true, because it is indeterminate whether ‘Frick’ names the Frick-character from the one-character story or the Frick-character from the two-character story. Although I agree with Cameron that it is indeterminate whether ‘Frick=Frack’ is true, I do not believe that the fiction can be resolved into two plausible fictions in this way, as I argue in the text above. Moreover, I disagree with Cameron that distinct fictions contain distinct characters, since I find the resulting view of sequels and intrafictional carry-over to be implausible. I thus do not find his argument sound, although I am sympathetic with his conclusion.
Identity

If $a$ and $b$ are fictional entities originating in story $T$, then the fictional entity $a = \text{the fictional entity } b \iff \text{ACC}_T (a = b)$, and

Identity*

If $a$ and $b$ are fictional entities originating in story $T$, then the fictional entity $a \neq \text{the fictional entity } b \iff \neg \text{ACC}_T (a = b)$. ²⁴³

They thus take Frick and Frack to be distinct fictional entities, in Frackworld, because the story leaves open whether the character(s) are identical or distinct.

Importantly, they offer this argument only as a reply to a story like Frackworld, not as a reply to a story like It's a Frick/Frack World, in which it is explicitly stated that it is indeterminate whether the characters are identical.²⁴⁴ They deem stories such as the latter to be inconsistent fictions because, if Evans's (1978: 208) argument is sound, then two objects cannot be indeterminately identical to each other, and so a fiction like It's a Frick/Frack World contains a “necessary falsehood.”²⁴⁵ They then suggest that, in the case of inconsistent fictions,

we should be driven back to the default option, which is the non-identity of the two fictional entities. Accordingly, we are willing to restrict (Identity) to consistent fictions, and to add a separate clause saying that

²⁴³ Schnieder and von Solodkoff 2009: 143. These principles are modeled on, and quite close to, Everett's (2005: 627)

(P2) If [the world of] a story concerns $a$ and $b$, and if $a$ and $b$ are not real things, then $a$ and $b$ are identical in the world of the story iff the fictional character of $a$ is identical to the fictional character of $b$.

²⁴⁴ They compose new stories to bring out this difference. The Frackworld parallel is

Bah-Tale There once was a man called Bahrooh/ There once was a man called Bahraah/ But nobody knew if Bahraah was Bahrooh/ Or if they were actually two.

See Schnieder and von Solodkoff 2009: 139. Meanwhile, the parallel to It's a Frick/Frack World is

Bah-Tale II There once was a man called Bahrooh/ There once was a man called Bahraah/ But nothing determined if Bahraah was Bahrooh/ Or if they were actually two.

See Schnieder and von Solodkoff 2009: 141. I do not introduce these stories in the text, because the point can be demonstrated using the stories already presented.

inconsistent identity statements yield the non-identity of fictional entities.\textsuperscript{246}

The case they consider as their inconsistent fiction is a parallel to \textit{Dialethialand}, not to \textit{It's a Frick/Frack World}, and thus they can point to an “inconsistent identity statement” in the fiction.\textsuperscript{247} It strikes me that this move would seem even more \textit{ad hoc} than it already does if their “separate clause” said that “inconsistent fictions yield the non-identity of fictional entities.” Putting the accusation of \textit{ad-hoc-ery} to one side, however, I have two further objections to Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s proposal: (1) we cannot appeal to a “default option” regarding problem stories, and (2) a default assumption of \textit{identity} might be just as plausible as a default assumption of non-identity anyway.\textsuperscript{248}

Before exploring these worries, let us see Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s theory in more detail. They take \textit{Identity} and \textit{Identity*} to be supported by two further principles:

\textbf{Grounding} \hspace{1em} The nature (and identity) of fictional entities must be grounded in facts about their stories; unless the story provides sufficient grounds for the identity of an entity $x$ and an entity $y$, no such identity is constituted.

\textbf{Interpretation} \hspace{1em} Since stories seldom explicitly state the non-identity of an entity $x$ and an independently mentioned entity $y$, their non-identity is the (warranted but defeasible) default assumption in interpreting a story.\textsuperscript{249}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{246} Schnieder and von Solodkoff 2009: 148.
\item \textsuperscript{247} Their parallel to \textit{Dialethialand} is \textit{Bah-Tale III} Bahrooh and Bahraah were strange lads/ Bahrooh was Bahraah and yet/ Bahraah not Bahrooh/ A riddle that is – do you know what to do? See Schnieder and von Solodkoff 2009: 148.
\item \textsuperscript{248} Both arguments can also be found in Caplan and Muller (ms.).
\item \textsuperscript{249} Schnieder and von Solodkoff 2009: 143, emphases in original.
\end{itemize}
Because they take these principles to ground *Identity* and *Identity*\(^*\), the "facts about [the characters'] stories" that are relevant here must be the internal facts, i.e. what identity relations fictional entities stand in according to the story.

Schnieder and von Solodkoff then assert, "More specifically, if entities are named, the default assumption is that different names name different entities."\(^{250}\) So, for example, they would hold that facts about the fiction *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* are required to ground the claim that ‘You-Know-Who’ and ‘Voldemort’ name the same character, because we would otherwise assume that they name distinct entities. As evidence of such a grounding fact, one might point to the part of the story where Dumbledore says,

All this ‘You-Know-Who’ nonsense – for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name: *Voldemort.*\(^{251}\)

The externalist would disagree with *Grounding*, arguing that the identity or distinctness of characters is grounded in facts that are external to the fiction. However, the point Schnieder and von Solodkoff are making here is that the realist does not need to become an externalist, because there is a default assumption that can establish the identity and distinctness of characters using the identity relations internal to fiction, even in the case of the problem stories. In the rest of this section, I remain within Schnieder and von Solodkoff's internalist framework to argue against their claim that the distinctness of fictional characters is the default assumption.

\(^{250}\) Schnieder and von Solodkoff 2009: 143.

\(^{251}\) Rowling 1997: 11, emphasis in original. I use the awkward phrase ‘evidence of a grounding fact’ because it seems to me that the story as a whole contains the grounding fact but that it might not be possible to point to this fact in an excerpt from the story, given that the narrator could turn out to be unreliable, etc. Thus, it seems to me that a short passage can only provide evidence of such a grounding fact.
There are two reasons to reject the view that *Grounding* and *Interpretation* allow us to be internalist about problem stories. First, even if Schnieder and von Solodkoff are correct about the default assumption, fictions such as *It’s a Frick/Frack World* do not allow us to rely on default assumptions, given that such a fiction explicitly states that it is indeterminate whether the characters are identical. Such a claim overrides any defaults that might be in place, much as the explicit statement that magical wands can turn people into toads overrides our default interpretive assumption that the laws of nature at the actual world hold true in the fiction. Although it is certainly an option for the metaphysician to stipulate that this “default” should remain in place, this would result in a rather serious conflict with our practices of interpreting fictions. Thus, I believe it should be avoided.

Second, I have doubts about the default position that Schnieder and von Solodkoff propose. I argue that *Grounding* and *Interpretation* are no more justified than the following principles:

*Grounding*¹: The nature (and distinctness) of fictional entities must be grounded in facts about their stories; unless the story provides sufficient grounds for the distinctness of an entity \( x \) and an entity \( y \), no such distinctness is constituted.

*Interpretation*¹: Since stories seldom explicitly state the identity of an entity \( x \) and an independently mentioned entity \( y \), their identity is the (warranted but defeasible) default assumption in interpreting a story.

²⁵² This is a very quick gesture toward the complex issue of what we accept as true in the fiction. Interestingly, while we seem to accommodate claims about truth in fiction that contradict both laws of logic and laws of nature, we seem to have a much harder time overriding our own default assumptions about morality. Discussion of this puzzle of “imaginative resistance” goes beyond the scope of my project here, but see Gendler 2000, 2006; Stock 2003, 2005; Weatherson 2004; and Walton 2006, for discussion of the puzzle.
That is, there seems to be little reason to take identity facts to require grounding in facts about their stories but to take distinctness facts not to require any such grounding.\textsuperscript{253} While it might be true that we often assume that distinct names name distinct entities, and thus that identity facts require grounding, it seems equally true that we often assume that distinct definite descriptions or names name the same entity, and thus that distinctness facts require grounding. As an example of such a default assumption of identity, we assume that ‘the boy who lived’, ‘Harry’, ‘the Dursley’s nephew’ and ‘the Potter’s little boy’ all pick out the same character, and that ‘Harry Potter’ names the same character from chapter to chapter. Thus, facts about the fiction \textit{Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone} are required to ground the claim that, for example, ‘Neville’ and ‘a boy with dreadlocks’ name distinct characters. As evidence of such a grounding fact, one might point to the part of the story that reads,

\begin{quote}
He passed a round-faced boy who was saying, “Gran, I’ve lost my toad again.”

“Oh, Neville,” he heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small crowd.

“Give us a look, Lee, go on.”

The boy lifted the lid of the box and the people around him shrieked and yelled as something inside pushed out a long, hairy leg.\textsuperscript{254}
\end{quote}

Without this grounding in the fiction, there would be no reason to take ‘Neville’ and ‘a boy with dreadlocks’ to name distinct characters, if we follow Schniede and von Solodkoff in assuming internalism.

\textsuperscript{253} Indeed, given Salmon’s (1987) argument that \(x=y\) is equivalent to \(x=x\) and hence requires no qualitative grounding fact, one might argue that distinctness facts are more in need of grounding than identity facts.

\textsuperscript{254} Rowling 1997: 94.
Schnieder and von Solodkoff might reply that there is already a presumption of the distinctness of Neville and the dreadlocked boy, and thus that it does not need to be grounded in any further fact about the fiction. However, it is hard to see why this would be the case, given that we often presume that different descriptions or names pick out the same character. I conclude that, just as a grounding fact is needed in the fiction to tell us that You-Know-Who and Voldemort are identical, a grounding fact is needed in the fiction to tell us that Neville and the dreadlocked boy are distinct. This suggests that Grounding' and Interpretation' are as legitimate as Grounding and Interpretation, and so we cannot use either pair of principles to resolve the arbitrariness posed by a fiction such as It's a Frick/Frack World. Or, more precisely, we could use either pair of principles. Because there is no reason to choose one rather than the other, we are faced with arbitrariness at the level of which principles to choose, which leaves us no better off.255

3.3. Another proposed solution: Thomasson

An alternative response to the arbitrariness problem is to show that it is a more general problem. If the CE realist can demonstrate this, she can appeal to the adage that a problem for all is a problem for none. After acknowledging a level of indeterminacy regarding whether characters are the same from one fiction to another, Thomasson attempts to make this generalizing move:

255 Schnieder and von Solodkoff might reply that principle-level arbitrariness is preferable to object-level arbitrariness. However, it is not clear what would justify this claim. For instance, it is unclear whether objects are more fundamental than principles or vice-versa and unclear whether fundamentality would make arbitrariness more or less problematic. This issue is discussed in Caplan and Muller ms.
Fuzzy cases similarly afflict attempts to offer identity conditions for real individuals, not only persons, but even more so plants, ships, fungi, and piles of rubbish. Such fuzziness with respect to identity is certainly not unique to fictional characters, and few would argue against allowing plants and fungi in our ontology on the basis of their tricky individuation. It is certainly true that much metaphysical debate has been devoted to the individuation of objects, creatures, and persons. Then again, some metaphysicians have concluded from those debates that there is room to doubt the very ontological claims Thomasson lists. While we might retain plants and fungi in our “common-sense” ontology despite having difficulty individuating them, it is another question altogether whether we should include them in our philosophically informed ontology. Thus, even if the analogy between fungi and fictional characters is sound, it is not clear that it provides a useful response to the arbitrariness problem, since we might decide that the best response to this arbitrariness is to be anti-realist about both fictional characters and fungi, when discussing our philosophically informed ontology.

---

256 Thomasson 1999: 69. In a footnote to this passage, she seems to indicate agreement with Parsons’s (1987) argument that there can be indeterminacy in the world, not merely in our claims about it. See also Parsons 2000 for the argument that fictional objects can be indeterminate. In a more recent reply to Everett, Thomasson (2010: 34) again makes this generalizing move, arguing that “our terms like ‘table’ ‘mountain’ and … ‘fictional character’ refer, if at all, to vague objects.” However, she does not believe this to be problematic, because “this vagueness can still be explained as a reflection of (or trivial consequence of) the vagueness in our representations.” Thomasson 2010: 34. Ultimately, she argues that this apparent vagueness indicates the need to “minimally revise the concept [fictional character] as we philosophically precisify it,” mentioning Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s view as an example of such a precisification. Thomasson 2010: 35. As I discussed in §3.2 of this chapter, I find their view committed to an arbitrary choice between principles and thus I do not believe that it solves the problem of arbitrariness for the CE realist. While there might yet be a way for the CE realist to precisify the concept fictional character without making an arbitrary choice, I have difficulty seeing what this could be, given the indeterminacy in It’s a Frick/Frack World.

257 Thomasson (2007) holds that we should so include them, on the grounds that ‘x meets the relevant application conditions for the term ‘x’ ‘analytically entails ‘x exists’. Thus, a heap of rubbish exists if the world is such that this entity meets the application-conditions for the term ‘heap of rubbish’. See Thomasson 2007: 55. I have a knee-jerk response against this sort of linguisticism, but to expand on this point would go beyond the scope of the dissertation.
I also worry that there are problems with the analogy, because it seems to me that arguments can be made, on a scientific or pragmatic basis, for individuating plants, fungi, and even rubbish heaps in one way rather than another. In contrast, as I have argued, there is no good justification for individuating characters in a particular way in stories like *It’s a Frick/Frack World*. Default assumptions, if they can even be motivated, seem inappropriate in cases where it is explicitly stated that it is indeterminate whether the characters are identical, and there is nothing more to go on in this fiction.\(^{258}\) Thus, the arbitrariness concerning fungi and heaps of rubbish seems less problematic than the arbitrariness the CE realist faces in counting fictional objects.

Alternatively, the CE realist might argue, not that arbitrariness is a problem for everyone, but that it is a problem specifically for the anti-realist. To take pretense theory as an example, if it is arbitrary whether there are one or two characters, it is not clear what we should pretend.\(^{259}\) I explore this potential criticism, along with concerns over reference and essential properties on the anti-realist view, in the following chapter. I argue that anti-realism has a stronger response to the problems of reference, essential properties, and arbitrariness than does CE realism, making it the preferable theory of fictional objects.

\(^{258}\) Admittedly, one might simply say that their identity is fundamentally indeterminate, which would avoid the arbitrariness problem, but this simply returns us to the contradiction entailed by indeterminate identity, discussed in Chapter 2 §2.2. Moreover, even if ontic indeterminacy can be admitted without contradiction, as Thomasson (2007) and Parsons (1987, 2000) argue, one can still raise Everett’s (2005: 633) point that it such indeterminacy should not be so easy to come by.

\(^{259}\) I take pretense theory as my main example of anti-realism, for reasons presented in the following chapter.
Chapter 5.

Pretense Theory: A Solution to the Problems Facing CE Realism

“Heel-looo, Pretenders!” “Helllllooo, Uncle Bill!”

-- Let’s Pretend radio show, CBS

0. Introduction

I have argued that, to avoid commitment to metaphysically problematic objects, the realist ought to separate the properties and identity relations that characters are said to have in the story from those they actually have, taking their internal properties to be contextualized by the phrase “according to the story” and their identity relations to be established by external facts rather than by the identity relations established within the fiction. I then argued that such a move introduces a problem with reference to the fictional object, separates the fictional object from properties that are essential to it, and introduces arbitrariness in the counting of fictional objects. In this chapter, I argue that the anti-realist can resolve all three of these concerns better than the CE realist can.

In §1, I discuss the range of anti-realist views of fictional objects and offer my reasons for taking pretense theory as the representative anti-realist view.\(^\text{260}\) I then outline the pretense theory developed by Kendall Walton, one of the view’s staunchest.

\(^{260}\) However, as I stress below, my primary goal in this chapter is to defend anti-realism in general.
defenders. In §§ 2-3, I address three worries for pretense theory: (1) that speakers are not pretending when they make meta-fictive utterances, (2) that pretense theory is baroque, and (3) that Walton lacks a clear theory of the imagination. Addressing these concerns also allows me to spell out in more detail the specifics of the view. However, it should be noted that my overall aim is to defend anti-realism. Throughout the latter sections of this chapter, I offer footnotes to show how the arguments available to the pretense theorist are similarly available to alternative anti-realist views. Thus, should the reader find pretense theory unpalatable, a different anti-realist view could be used to solve the problems that face realism.

I next discuss, in §§4-6, how pretense theory can address the worries raised in Chapters III and IV better than CE realism. Briefly, it avoids the problem of reference to the fictional object by maintaining that all apparent reference occurs within a pretense, and it does not encounter the problems of divorcing fictional objects from their essential properties or arbitrariness in the counting of such objects, because within the pretense, the objects straightforwardly have the properties and identity relations ascribed to them. However, I acknowledge that the realist could develop parallel criticisms of pretense theory, by arguing that “pretended reference” suffers from the same problems as actual reference or that there is arbitrariness in the individuation of games of make-believe. I devote the remainder of the chapter to defusing these potential criticisms.

Indeed, he is seen by many to be the progenitor of the view. However, see Ryle et al. 1933: 18-43, for an example of a view much like Walton’s, though less well developed. Evans 1982 also develops a pretense-theoretic proposal.
I. Pretense theory

I.1. Types of anti-realism

Anti-realist views about fictional objects can be divided into four broad categories: descriptivist, fictionalist, presupposition-based and pretense-based.\(^{262}\) The anti-realist descriptivist approach has been most prominently defended by Russell, who took avoiding commitment to non-existent objects to be one of the benefits of his theory of descriptions.\(^{263}\) On such a view, a fictional name such as ‘Harry Potter’ is to be understood as a disguised definite description such as ‘the boy wizard with a scar on his forehead’. An utterance of

\[(31) \quad \text{Harry Potter exists.}\]

would thus be false, on Russell’s understanding, because it would mean

\[(31') \quad \text{There is one and only one entity that is a boy wizard with a scar on his forehead.}\]

and \((31')\) is false. Similarly,

\[(1) \quad \text{Harry Potter does not exist.}\]

\(^{262}\) See Russell 1905a, 1919, Braithwaite 1933, Gabriel 1979 and Wolterstorff 1980 for descriptivist approaches. Richard (1998) also seems to hold a descriptivist view, which is much like Wolterstorff’s except that he does not take the “set of characteristics” to be an existent character. See Phillips 2000 and Brock 2002 for fictionalist proposals. Kroon (2001: 197, n. 2) also appears to be a fictionalist, asserting that one “can be fictionalist about theoretical entities or possible worlds no less than about characters of fiction.” Donnellan (1974) and Sainsbury (2009) offer presupposition-based views, while von Fintel (2004) suggests a similar account for empty definite descriptions. Lastly, see Ryle et al. 1933, Evans 1982, Walton 1990 and Everett 2005 for examples of pretense theory. While Everett calls himself a fictionalist, his view seems much closer to pretense theory. Currie (1990) appeals to make-believe, but since he takes the character’s name to have a referent in our meta-fictive utterances, I treat him as a realist about characters. Orenstein (2003) defends an anti-realism that intentionally leaves open the propositional attitude involved, noting that it might be make-believing, imagining, or presupposing. One view that has been lumped in with pretense theory is the more limited claim that the author “pretends to assert” in writing the story. See Searle 1975 and Beardsley 1978 for presentations of this view and Currie 1990: 12-18 for a criticism of it.

\(^{263}\) See Russell 1905a: 484; 1919: 46.
would be true, because it would mean

\[(1'')\] It is not the case that there is one and only one entity that is a boy wizard with a scar on his forehead.\(^{264}\)

Russell thus accommodates our truth-value intuitions about (32) and (1) without postulating fictional objects, by taking names from fiction to be disguised descriptions.

However, Kripke’s arguments from ignorance and error, discussed in Chapter 3 §3.2, extend to Russell’s view of names from fiction, as Braun (1993: 454) argues:

Suppose that astronomers who follow Le Verrier take the name ‘Vulcan’ to be synonymous with ‘the planet closest to the Sun’. Then on the Descriptivist View, these astronomers refer to Mercury whenever they utter ‘Vulcan’. So when they say ‘Vulcan exists’, they say something true. But they don’t.\(^{265}\)

In the case of fictional objects, one might imagine a naïve reader who believes that the *Harry Potter* stories are true and thus takes the name ‘Harry Potter’ to be synonymous with ‘the bravest person in England’. She would then refer to the person in England who is actually the bravest when she uses the name ‘Harry Potter’. So, when she says ‘Harry Potter is an actual, concrete, existent person,’ she would say something true. But she doesn’t.\(^{266}\) A related issue is the problem of accidental reference: on the descriptivist view, if there was an actual, concrete, existent person with the properties ascribed to Mrs. Gamp in the fiction, then the name ‘Mrs. Gamp’ would pick out this person. I take these objections to provide sufficient reason for rejecting descriptivism.

---

\(^{264}\) Von Fintel (2004) develops his presupposition-based account in response to Russell’s interpretation of negative existentials, arguing that we should instead understand them as instances of presupposition-failure and take the utterance to lack a truth-value rather than taking it to be false.

\(^{265}\) Braun notes that a similar example can found in Donnellan 1974: 24.

\(^{266}\) I use ‘is an actual, concrete, existent person’ rather than ‘exists’ so as not to beg the question against the realist in this example.
as a form of anti-realism about characters and focus instead on the three other broad types of anti-realist views: fictionalist, presupposition-based, and pretense-theoretic. Below, I present basic outlines of the three views, to bring out their similarities.\textsuperscript{267}

- **Fictionalism**: Fictive utterances are implicitly prefixed by ‘according to the fiction’ and meta-fictive utterances are implicitly prefixed by ‘according to the fiction of the realist theory’.

- **Presupposition-based view**: In making and evaluating fictive utterances, we presuppose that the character name refers to a person, while in making and evaluating meta-fictive utterances, we presuppose that the character name refers to a fictional object.\textsuperscript{268}

- **Pretense theory**: Fictive utterances are moves in an authorized game of make-believe and meta-fictive utterances are moves in an unofficial game of make-believe, generally one on which realism about fictional objects is true.

All three views are similar in the ways they explain both our meta-fictive utterances and our fictive utterances, and they also all tie in the realist theory via a prefix, a presupposition or an unofficial game.

\textsuperscript{267} Because comparative utterances require creative modifications on all three anti-realist accounts, I leave them out of this brief overview for the sake of simplicity.

\textsuperscript{268} Closely related to the presupposition-based view is the view that the context of utterance determines our evaluation of the truth-value of the utterance. I do not treat this as an importantly different view of fiction-related utterances, because context and presupposition are closely interrelated, at least on some views of presupposition. See Karttunen 1974 and von Fintel 2008 for support for this connection. While there is disagreement over whether the shift should be understood at the semantic or pragmatic level, consideration of such a debate would go beyond the scope of this dissertation.
1.2 A preference for pretense

As the three anti-realist views just presented have much in common and the primary goal of my dissertation is a defense of anti-realism, I only sketch here a few reasons to prefer pretense theory. Primarily, I prefer it because it treats our fiction-related practices as central to understanding our thought and talk about fiction and as distinct from other areas of human thought. In contrast, fictionalism draws parallels between fiction, mathematics and science, and the presupposition-based view connects talk of fiction to conversation in general. While the latter views might seem preferable exactly because they make fiction continuous with other disciplines, I think that pretense theory is correct to treat our interaction with fictional works as significantly different from other aspects of human life.269

Pretense theory might also provide more room for flexibility than the other two views, because all it requires is that we engage in a game of some sort. By making utterances about fiction, we then pragmatically convey what can be permissibly uttered within the game. While not every utterance will be felicitous, a wide range of utterances will be, and appropriate interpretations of these utterances will range widely as well. Thus, Walton (1990: 411) writes

The way of treating statements concerning fiction that I have proposed is not meant to be taken rigidly. A certain looseness infects their interpretation, especially when unofficial games of make-believe are involved (even if it is clear what unofficial games are implied).

269 That being said, pretense theory is closely connected with children’s games of make-believe, so it is not an ad hoc theory invented solely for the purpose of understanding our relation to fiction.
While fictionalism might be similarly loose in its understanding of fictive utterances, since these are understood to reflect whatever is true in the fiction, meta-fictive utterances are understood more strictly, through a realist theory about fictional objects. The latter is taken to be fictional and thus might not be as constrained as the realist theory I have discussed in previous chapters, but it still seems that it must meet certain constraints to count as a “theory” at all.\(^{270}\)

Presupposition-based views, for their part, seem to require that we presuppose a well-defined referent for our terms. Like fictionalism, this view admits of some flexibility, but it seems as if too much would make it unclear that presupposition provided the right sort of analysis. For example, if we allow for indeterminate identity in *It’s a Frick/Frack World* on the presupposition-based view, it is no longer clear that we are presupposing referents for the names ‘Frick’ and ‘Frack’. Another way to put my argument here is that, as I see it, both fictionalism and presupposition-based view would become indistinguishable from pretense theory, if we allowed for the same degree of flexibility that pretense theory admits. Thus, it seems to me that pretense theory allows for more variety and nuance, in understanding fictions and our relation to them, than do the other two anti-realist proposals. I return to this point at the end of the chapter. However, as I indicate in footnotes throughout the chapter, the arguments offered in §§4-6 are arguments not only for pretense theory but for anti-realism about fictional objects more generally.

\(^{270}\) In addition, one might wonder whether our meta-fictive utterances are appropriately understood as implicitly prefixed by “according to the (fictional) realist theory.”
1.3. An overview of pretense theory

I now present pretense theory in more detail. Walton (1990: 219-220) takes all of our utterances about fiction to be moves of verbal pretense in a game of make-believe. Names from fiction lack reference, on his view, in both fictive and meta-fictive utterances. Thus, according to Walton (1990: 371), these utterances do not express propositions, and an utterance that seems to use these names referentially should be understood as pragmatically conveying that this sort of utterance is permissible in the game in question.\(^{271}\) When we talk about the character \textit{qua} person in the fiction in fictive utterances, we are playing an authorized game.\(^{272}\) When we talk about the character \textit{qua} fictional character in meta-fictive utterances, we are playing an unofficial game.\(^{273}\)

To understand these claims, we need to see both how games of make-believe avoid ontological commitment and how they are used to understand fictive and meta-fictive utterances. Walton begins by using games of make-believe to interpret fictive utterances such as

\begin{equation}
(32) \quad \text{Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral.}
\end{equation}

An utterance of (32) appears to commit the speaker to an entity named by ‘Tom Sawyer’. However, Walton argues that, when we intend to convey a truth by uttering (32), we pragmatically convey

\(^{271}\) See Kaplan 1973, Braun 1993, Adams, et al. 1997, Salmon 1998 and Caplan 2002 for the contrasting view that sentences containing empty names can express propositions, for example by expressing “gappy propositions.”

\(^{272}\) Walton 1990: 397.

\(^{273}\) Walton 1990: 406. When discussing games such as those played by literary theorists, Walton uses ‘unofficial’ rather than ‘unauthorized’ to avoid the implication that these games are illicit. Walton also uses the term ‘extended’ to discuss natural extensions of authorized games, and I follow him in this.
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is such that one who engages in pretense of kind K in a game authorized for it makes it fictional of himself in that game that he speaks truly.\(^\text{274}\)

That is, when a speaker utters (32), she pragmatically conveys that the utterance she just made is authorized, i.e. that it is an acceptable move to make in the game of pretense.\(^\text{275}\) Walton takes “pretense of kind K” not to admit of definition. Rather, it can only be indicated by pointing to examples; in this instance, we may “point” to the relevant pretense by the utterance of (32) itself.\(^\text{276}\) By understanding (32) as a contentless utterance that nonetheless pragmatically conveys true content, Walton explains why we count (32) as true, while avoiding ontological commitment to a referent for the name ‘Tom Sawyer’.

For Walton, similar claims hold true of meta-fictive utterances. He argues that meta-fictive utterances are moves in an “unofficial” game of make-believe and thus that

\(^{274}\) Walton 1990: 402. The word ‘it’, in this paraphrase, refers back to the work The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. “To make x fictional of oneself in that game” is equivalent to “to make it true in the fiction of that game that one x’s.” While the idea that readers are “reflexive props” in their own games of make-believe might be difficult to swallow at first, consider a book like Gulliver’s Travels. In reading this book, a reader makes it fictional of himself that he reads a travelogue by Lemuel Gulliver. Other fictional works have less obvious devices to connect the reader to the fiction, but we can still understand ourselves to be playing a game with the fictional work, within which we can speak truly or falsely about the events in the fiction. Hence, when I say ‘Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral’, it is true in the game that I utter a truth. More generally, ‘it is fictional that’ for Walton means the same thing I have indicated by ‘it is true in the fiction that’. He avoids the phrase ‘true in the fiction’ to avoid the implication that there are varieties of truth. However, the phrase ‘true in the fiction’ is so widespread that I see little danger in using it, and I find it easier to read than ‘it is fictional that’.

\(^{275}\) This sort of pragmatic conveying goes on more generally, e.g. when, in speaking openly about an award at a party, one pragmatically conveys that it is no longer a secret. See Walton 1990: 399. While it might be possible to understand what is conveyed using the semantics instead, it seems preferable to give a pragmatic account for two reasons, first because doing so keeps the semantics relatively simple and locates the complexity in the pragmatics and second because the truth-bearing utterance is understood to be one with no empty names or commitment to fictional objects.

\(^{276}\) Walton thus resists the meta-linguistic move of explaining the pretense as the pretense that (32) is true, because he holds that speakers can engage in the same pretense even if they speak a different language and use different names to refer to the same character within the pretense. As I understand his view, this is also why he uses a kind of pretense rather than a specific pretense act. See Walton 1990: 400 and my discussion below.
the lack of ontological commitment found in fictive utterances extends to the meta-
fictive level. For example, consider again van Inwagen's

(4) There is a fictional character who, for every novel, either appears in that novel or is a model for someone who does.

Walton (1990: 417) takes this utterance to pragmatically convey the following proposition:

(4P) To engage in pretense of kind K is fictionally to speak truly in a game of such and such a sort.\(^{277}\)

As in fictive utterances, the kind of pretense is picked out by the utterance of (4).

However, in contrast to (32), which is true according to an authorized game, (4) is true according to an unofficial game, which can be described roughly as follows:

(a) All novels are props in it and most of what is fictional in any novel is fictional in it; the unofficial game combines the games authorized for each individual novel . . . . (b) It is fictional in the . . . game that the universe is divided into realms corresponding to the various novels. To say that “a character appears in a certain novel” is, fictionally, to locate a person in a certain realm. (c) To write a novel of a certain sort is to make it fictional of oneself, in a game of the implied sort, that one creates people (“characters”) and endows them with certain properties. . . . (d) When, as we say, an author “models a character on some preexisting character,” it is fictional that he creates someone to be like some other person, that he makes someone in the image of someone else. (In speaking of

\(^{277}\) Walton also addresses van Inwagen’s (1977) claim, discussed in Chapter 2, that an utterance such as (4) can be translated into logical form, from which we can infer

(5) If no character appears in every novel, then some character is modeled on another character.

Walton claims that it is true according to the unofficial game both that (4) and (5) have the logical form that van Inwagen suggests and that the inference can be made. However, he holds that the semantics of these sentences is such that they do not express propositions, although utterances of these sentences can be used to pragmatically convey the propositions expressed by (4P) and

(5P) To engage in pretense of kind K is fictionally to speak truly in a game of such and such a sort.

The relevant game for (5P) is the one indicated by an utterance of (5). Both (4) and (5) are moves in the same extended game, as described in the text above.

141
“characters” rather than “people” the speaker betrays his pretense, but this does not affect the content of the assertion.)\textsuperscript{278}

This description of the unofficial game, though it might at first appear complex, can be understood more simply as follows: in uttering (4), we pragmatically convey that (4) is true in a game in which novels describe distinct fictional worlds, authors create people in these fictional worlds and, when we say that a character is modeled on another, it is true in the game that the author has “create[d] someone in the image of someone else.”\textsuperscript{279} For instance, when we talk about Rowling creating the character of Harry Potter, we pretend that the author created a person in the “fictional realm” of the \textit{Harry Potter} novels. And, when we assert that she modeled Harry on Wart in \textit{The Once and Future King}, we pretend that the author created Harry in the likeness of another person from a distinct fictional realm.\textsuperscript{280}

One should keep in mind that this description of the game is only a rough approximation; some speakers might be engaged in a somewhat different game. As noted above, this description of the relevant game is approximate and there is a “looseness between the … interpretations” of what is asserted, which depend on “details of the example, on features of the context and/or the speaker’s state of mind

\textsuperscript{278} Walton 1990: 417-418, emphasis in original. Walton discusses two games in this quote, and I have systematically replaced the relevant terms to discuss only one of the two games. For Walton, ‘betrayal’ is a technical term meaning that one overtly “indicates that one is just pretending.” See Walton 1990: 420 and §5.2 of this chapter for further discussion of this topic.

\textsuperscript{279} If one looks at an early realist such as Crittenden (1966, 1970), one finds a very similar description of what goes on in fiction, although Crittenden takes these to be arguments for the existence of characters.

\textsuperscript{280} See Morris (ms.) for the claim that the character of Harry Potter is modeled on Wart, a.k.a. the young King Arthur, in T. H. White’s \textit{The Once and Future King}. Rowling apparently asserted this in an interview with \textit{The Guardian} (see Wikipedia, “Harry Potter (character)” July 10, 2011) but I have not been able to access this interview.
which we need not try to specify, as well as on one’s favored account of assertion.”

This variation, Walton asserts, is present whenever we convey something pragmatically. However, it is hard to imagine how the game could be wildly different and still make sense of the truth-values we assign to meta-fictive utterances.

2. Clashes with intuition and replies

2.1. Denial of the character’s existence

*Prima facie*, it might seem as though pretense theory does a worse job capturing our intuitions about fictional objects than does realism, because it denies the existence of fictional objects. Even an utterance such as

(33) Harry Potter is a fictional character.

turns out not to be strictly true according to pretense theory, although it can be used by the speaker to pragmatically convey a truth, namely that the kind of pretense indicated by (33) is appropriate in an unofficial game. Yet (33) seems to be strictly and literally true.

Walton (1990: 390) replies that, far from being unintuitive, pretense theory gets at “the heart” of our relation to fiction:

> It is my contention, briefly, that when realists claim with a straight face that people refer to and talk about fictional entities and that our theory must postulate them in order to make sense of what people say, they are overlooking or underemphasizing the element of make-believe that lies at the heart of the institution. They mistake the pretense of referring to

---

281 Walton 1990: 413, 412.
282 Walton 1990: 407. (33), in particular, involves betrayal of the pretense one engages in while uttering it. In Walton’s words, an utterance of (33) would “acknowledge, while betraying the pretense, only that there *is* a work in whose authorized games so pretending is fictionally to refer successfully.” I discuss betrayal of the pretense in the discussion of negative existentials, in §5.2 of this chapter.
fictions, combined with a serious interest in this pretense, for genuine ontological commitment. We are so deeply immersed in make-believe that it infects even theorizing itself.  

Here, Walton argues that it is the pretense of referring within a game of make-believe that lies at the heart of our relationship to fiction, and this pretense “infects” our meta-fictive utterances. His view is thus directly opposed to Salmon’s: rather than taking our reference to fictional objects in meta-fictive utterances to determine the reference of the name in fictive utterances, Walton takes our pretended reference in fictive utterances to carry over to our meta-fictive utterances. Pretense theory thus begins from the intuitions that arise in our ordinary participation with fiction, rather than from those that arise out of the meta-fictive perspective. While there might be something counterintuitive about denying the truth of (33), this counterintuitive aspect seems to me to be outweighed by the relative intuitiveness of beginning with our engagement with fiction rather than with the distanced, theoretical perspective.  

2.2. Speakers are not pretending

However, one might still feel some resistance to the idea that ordinary speakers and literary theorists are pretending or playing a game when they make meta-fictive utterances. Van Inwagen (2003: 137, n. 4) develops such an argument:

it simply does not seem to me to be true that the speaker who utters [(1)] (assertively and so on) is engaged in any sort of pretense. I would assimilate this case to the case of the speaker who says ‘Some novels are longer than others’ – a case of simple description of how things stand in

283 Emphasis in original.

284 Also, as noted above, Walton claims that an utterance of (34) can be used to pragmatically convey a truth. He thus can explain our intuition that the sentence is true.
the world if ever there was one. Is it really plausible to suppose that the speaker who says ‘Some novels contain more chapters than others’ and the speaker who says ‘Some novels contain more characters than others’ are engaged in radically different kinds of speech act?

This is an important challenge for pretense theory, because it suggests that, by distinguishing between our talk of characters and our talk of chapters, e.g., the pretense theorist draws a line where there is no line to be drawn.\textsuperscript{285} If such a challenge holds, then there is little reason to explore whether pretense theory better resolves the problems of Chapters III and IV, because the theory is implausible.\textsuperscript{286}

There are a number of replies that the pretense theorist can offer to van Inwagen’s objection. To begin, consider again Richard’s (2003: 2) argument that there is a significant difference between chapters and characters. Namely, a chapter can be understood as a part of a novel, which can in turn be understood as a common sort of object, such as a set of instructions or template for telling a story. In contrast, Richard argues, characters must be \textit{sui generis}. While there are flaws with this argument once one adopts CE realism, the more general point remains.\textsuperscript{287} Namely, \textit{pace} van Inwagen, there does seem to be a significant difference between the sort of thing that a chapter is – a division in a novel – and the sort of thing a character is.\textsuperscript{288}

\textsuperscript{285} Indeed, if van Inwagen is correct about this parallel, it threatens all three anti-realist views discussed in §1.1, provided that the anti-realist accepts novels and chapters in her ontology.

\textsuperscript{286} Van Inwagen’s argument has a similar structure to the argument for realism based on the parallels between novels and other fictional objects discussed in Chapter 2 §1.2, though the present argument concerns speech acts rather than metaphysics.

\textsuperscript{287} This argument is discussed and critiqued in Chapter 2 §1.2

\textsuperscript{288} For example, a chapter will generally have a certain number of pages in a given edition, will begin with one word and end with another, and so on. The realist might respond to this that we can imagine a post-modern fiction in which chapters are said to have contradictory properties or stand in indeterminate identity relations, and thus we should be CE realists about both chapters and characters, opening up the possibility that they \textit{are} of the same sort. However, to my mind, this move only calls into question
Even if they are different sorts of things, however, van Inwagen can still insist that a speech act about chapters is not “radically different” from a speech act about characters. To this, the pretense theorist can offer the same reply to the phenomenological worries that we have seen before. As Walton (1990: 404-405) argues, the speaker need not have her paraphrase in mind because it merely “indicates, in an explicit form needed for theoretical purposes, the state of affairs [the speaker] claims to obtain when she asserts [a fictive utterance].” Thus, the difference between the speech act of referring to chapters and that of pretending to refer to fictional objects might not be apparent to the speaker.

To this move, the realist might respond that speakers should at least recognize what they have pragmatically conveyed, once it is explained to them, and that they would not recognize a speech act about characters as radically different from a speech act about chapters, if the background theory were explained.\textsuperscript{289} However, I see no reason to expect that either ordinary speakers or literary theorists would be better able to recognize their utterances as being \textit{about} the objects described by the realist than as demonstrating permissible moves in a game of make-believe. Indeed, it seems more likely to me that speakers would be willing to acknowledge their utterances as coming from within a pretense than as being about abstract objects to which the speaker ascribes various properties they do not actually have.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{289} This point can be found in Reimer 2001: 235-236, who uses it to flesh out Braun’s (1993: 460) worry concerning the pragmatic explanation of our intuitions about the truth values of utterances of sentences containing empty names.}
Lastly, by distinguishing “appreciation” from “criticism,” Walton leaves room for the possibility that the literary theorist might not participate in the relevant game. While the appreciator is caught up in the pretense, the critic often considers the work and the games in which it is a prop from a distanced perspective, “describing matter-of-factly what truths it generates.” With her utterance, that is, she might pragmatically assert that a move is authorized in the game without participating in the game herself. Though he allows that this is possible, Walton (1990: 394) has doubts about this separation:

Appreciation and criticism, participation and observation, are not very separate. One can hardly do either without doing the other, and nearly simultaneously. In order to appreciate a work one must notice what it makes fictional; one must be sensitive to the fictional world. To this extent the appreciator must be a critic. The critic usually cannot get very far in describing the world of a work unless she allows herself to be caught up in the spirit of pretense to some extent, as appreciators are. … Appreciation (participatory appreciation) and criticism are intimately intertwined, and so are the activities of pretending to describe the real world and actually describing a fictional one.

Moreover, even if one resists the claim that appreciation and criticism are intertwined, Walton believes that some type of pretense might linger in the utterances of critics. As he puts it:

It is worth noting, however, that even on a narrow construction, even if we do not regard the sober critic as pretending, weakly, to recount real-world events, pretense may be lurking in the background. The critic may be pretending to pretend to recount real events — it may be fictional that he is participating verbally in a game — or he may be deliberately going through the motions of so pretending. Performing either of these actions would naturally substitute for actually pretending to recount real events as a way of describing the fictional world of the work.291

290 Walton 1990: 393.
291 Walton 1990: 395, emphasis in original. One way to understand this suggestion is that the “sober critic” who describes the fictional world of the work is parallel to a parent commenting on his child’s game. For example, the parent might say, “The funniest part was when Yorgle the couch monster scared
Thus, although he allows for the possibility that critics might not participate in the game at all, he also holds that pretense often underlies a critic’s utterances.

2.3. Positive evidence for pretending

As evidence for this underlying pretense, one might first consider an utterance of a “mixed” sentence, in which a character is attributed both internal and external properties, such as

(34)  Harry Potter, who is only a boy, is nonetheless an epic hero, due to his courage and his ability to act alone.

In (34), predication within the fiction is mixed with predication outside the fiction, and the former is taken as a justification for the latter. On Walton’s (1990: 423) view, the entire utterance can be understood as a move within an unofficial game according to which “it is fictional that there are two kinds of people: ‘real’ people and ‘fictional characters’.” The speaker participates in this unofficial game of make-believe by pretending to refer to something with the name ‘Harry Potter’ and attributing to it two sorts of properties: being a boy – which is of the same sort as being courageous and being able to act alone – and being an epic hero.292 By uttering (34), Walton would say, the speaker communicates that within the game, one speaks truthfully by engaging in a pretense of this sort. In contrast, as we saw in Chapter 2 §5.1, the CE realist must interpret sentences such as (34) by inserting the prefix ‘according to the story’, as in

Katie into releasing all the animals.” Despite the parent’s “sober” stance, he also seems to be pretending to pretend. This worry is discussed further in §3.1.

292 See Walton 1990: 423 for a discussion of the attribution of literary properties to a character.
(34R) Harry Potter, a character that is said to be a boy in the fiction, is nonetheless an epic hero, given the courage and ability to act alone that it is depicted as having.

Such an interpretation lacks the unity and elegance of Walton’s interpretation. Thus, mixed utterances support Walton’s suggestion that literary theorists do engage in some sort of pretense.

Moreover, utterances like (34) are commonplace in literary theory. What is true in the fiction justifies theoretical claims about the stereotype that the character represents, its symbolic nature, what other character it is modeled on, and so on. The latter claims concern external properties, but they rely for their justification and explanation on purely internal properties. This close relation between the internal and the external properties supports the idea that literary theorists engage in some sort of pretense.

3. Two additional worries for pretense theory

3.1 Theoretical complexity

Despite the relative ease with which the pretense theorist can paraphrase utterances of mixed sentences such as (34), one might nonetheless worry that Walton’s paraphrases are unnecessarily baroque for a wide range of utterances. For instance, consider

(33) Harry Potter is a fictional character.

The realist interpretation of (33) is relatively straightforward: the utterance concerns Harry Potter, a fictional character. Meanwhile, as we have seen, the realist can interpret
(21) Harry Potter is a wizard.

by prefixing it with the phrase ‘according to the relevant fiction’. Thus, the realist avoids talk of authorized and unofficial games of make-believe and the primitive “pretense of kind K.” While realist paraphrases might be complex for certain utterances, the theory in general is arguably more elegant than pretense theory and should thus be preferred.

The pretense theorist can respond to this, first, by arguing that his paraphrase strategy merely appears complex. On his view, all utterances that seem to use fictional names to refer can be understood as moves in games of make-believe that use a work of fiction as a prop, and the paraphrases he suggests are merely ways of spelling out what the speaker is communicating about the game with her utterance.293 Thus, although the various paraphrases might seem to lack uniformity, the fundamental idea is the same throughout and is not very theoretically complex at all. While it does require the additional machinery of games of pretense that use fictions as props, this is not a very significant additional complication. After all, every theory of fiction needs some way of understanding how we draw inferences about the fiction and why certain claims are authorized while others are not, and the idea that we use the fiction as a prop in our imaginative game is just one way of spelling out this process. The significant additional claim, then, is that the pretense theorist maintains that even speakers referring to the fiction from an external perspective are engaged in a game, which seems to reduce theoretical complexity rather than add to it.

293 See Walton 1990: 404-405.
Moreover, as I noted in Chapter 2 §2.1, many realists are committed to a relatively profligate ontology, because they are committed to the existence of numerous referents for the characters’ names. While the anti-realist is committed to numerous official and unofficial games, these are practices, rather than objects, and thus do not bring with them additional ontological weight.\footnote{Of course, these practices would have ontological weight if ontological commitment to fictional characters were required to understand the games of pretense. However, as I explain in more detail in §4.1 of this chapter, such commitment is not required. One might nonetheless argue that practices are an ontological burden, given that the pretense theorist is committed to their existence. In reply, I would say that all theories of fiction must commit to practices of engaging with fictions, and hence that the pretense theorist accrues no additional ontological burden by relying on such practices in her theory.} Thus, even if one finds pretense theory to be more theoretically complex than realism, it has fewer ontological commitments, and as noted in Chapter 2 §2.1, these varieties of simplicity might cancel each other out. The realist could respond that this problem is alleviated by taking the number zero or other numbers to be the referent or referents of names from fiction, as I suggest at the end of Chapter 3. On such a view, the ontological commitment is significantly reduced.\footnote{Arguably, the realist would then not have any special ontological commitment, as we would take to the numbers to exist even if we did not accept the CE realist theory.} However, as I have noted, this view seems quite artificial. In addition, I argue in §5.1 of this chapter that, if we reduce realism this drastically, the resulting objects of realist theory become unnecessary, because all the work is done by pretend reference.

### 3.2. What is the imagination?

Before exploring how pretense theory better responds to the worries raised for the CE realist in Chapters III and IV, a final worry for pretense theory is that make-believe is
underspecified because Walton lacks a clear theory of the imagination.\textsuperscript{296} After all, Walton defines make-believe as “prop-oriented imagining,” which is a useful definition only to the extent that we understand ‘imagining’. I believe that the proper response to this concern is to focus on the examples Walton offers, which illustrate how make-believe works and also suggest what imagination must be like on his view. These illustrations provide a way to understand make-believe in more detail, despite Walton’s lack of a general theory of the imagination.\textsuperscript{297}

In discussing the difficulties in developing an account of the imagination, Walton (1990: 20) briefly considers the idea that propositional imagining could be understood in terms of “entertaining a proposition,” i.e., holding a proposition in mind, but notes that this makes it hard to understand nonoccurrent imagining, for example when Fred imagines that he is healthy at retirement as a background presupposition for his daydream about retiring. More importantly, he asserts, imagining is more than just entertaining a proposition, “it’s doing something with a proposition one has in mind.”\textsuperscript{298} Thus, entertaining a proposition does not work even as an understanding of occurrent imagining. Walton (1990:20-21) then tallies up a number of alternative accounts of imagination, concluding

\begin{quote}
It is not easy to see what behavioral criteria might shed light on imagining, or what the relevant functions of a functional account might be. Imagining seems less tractable than more frequently discussed attitudes such as
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{296} Thanks to Gregory Currie for this suggestion.  
\textsuperscript{297} Walton (1990: 20-21) openly admits that he has no such general theory. It is no surprise that Walton avoids developing a general, synthetic theory of the imagination, given the wide variety of types of imagination. See Gendler 2011 for an overview.  
\textsuperscript{298} Walton 1990: 20, emphasis in original.
believing, intending, and desiring, as well as emotional states such as being happy or sad or feeling guilty or jealous.\textsuperscript{299}

Nonetheless, Walton (1990:21) relies on imagining as a central notion of his account, using it to “stand in” for “a notion yet to be fully clarified.” To the extent that the notion does work for his view, it is understandable that others have been critical of this lack of clarification. Yet I believe we can understand his view of imagination by examining its role in his work and then determining what imagination must be like to play that role.

Walton (1990: 21, 37) begins by observing that props can prompt imaginings. In a game of make-believe about bears that uses stumps as props, for example, a discovery of a stump can prompt the imagining that there is a bear.\textsuperscript{300} Similarly, props generate fictional truths that are appropriate to imagine within a given game. For example, it can be true in the game that there is a bear on the other side of the hill, even if the children never explore that area and find it.\textsuperscript{301} By directing these imaginings at an object rather than conjuring them “out of thin air,” we add a vividness to our imagining, and details about the object can prompt further fictional truths.\textsuperscript{302} So, for example, a stump with pointed bits of bark peeling off of it might be imagined to be a particularly toothy bear, while a stump that has fallen over and become covered in moss might be a bear noted for its soft fur.

For Walton, this sort of prop-oriented imagining in child’s play provides the template for the make-believe we engage in with representational fictions such as novels

\textsuperscript{299} Walton is not referring to any particular functional account of imagination here.
\textsuperscript{300} Walton 1990: 22.
\textsuperscript{301} Walton 1990: 37.
\textsuperscript{302} Walton 1990: 26, 23.
and visual art. When the fiction prompts us to imagine certain things and events, it
generates further fictional truths, and our imagining is about the representations found
in the fiction, which makes it more vivid and surprising than it would be if we were
making up the story ourselves. For example, when one reads

BOOM. The whole shack shivered and Harry sat bolt upright, staring at
the door. Someone was outside, knocking to come in.

we are to imagine a loud noise, the shivering house, and Harry Potter listening to the
knocking.  The text serves as a prop for this imagining, just as a stump serves as the
prompt for imagining a bear. Ideally, such a sentence will surprise us, much as a stump
around a turn in the path would surprise the playing children. Furthermore, given that
the description of this scene includes a thunderstorm, it generates a further fictional
truth that this person is wet, just as a mossy stump might generate the truth that this is
a particularly furry bear. Lastly, given that the person in question turns out to be
Hagrid, it is a fictional truth even in this scene that it is Hagrid, though this is not yet
part of what we are prescribed to imagine. This is parallel to the children's game in
which an undiscovered stump is a bear according to the game, but there is no
prescription to imagine it if the children have not discovered the stump.

Like Walton, I am not going to attempt a general account of the imagination.
Instead, I would say that however it is that children imagine when they play a game of
make-believe, we engage in a parallel type of imagination when we participate in a game
of make-believe with a fiction. Moreover, whatever a mother is doing when she says
“Time to put the horses in the corral” to children who need to put their bikes away, the

303 Rowling 1997: 45.
theorist is engaged in a similar act when she theorizes about fiction. These sorts of parallels allows for many degrees of pretense between these two levels as well, as we see in comparative utterances, for example. I believe that this parallel is sufficient for an understanding of pretense theory and establishes that imagination is more than mere supposition. I now turn to the question of how pretense theory resolves the problems of reference, essential properties and arbitrariness that plague CE realism.

4. The problem of reference

4.1. Reference in the pretense

As I argued in Chapter 3, the CE realist faces serious challenges in referring to fictional objects, once we separate these referents from the properties the characters are said to have in the fiction. Descriptivist approaches to fixing the reference fail, due to Kripke's criticisms, while causal-historical approaches are unable to make sense of the initial baptism, at least in some cases. The stipulation-based MRS seems to provide the best option for the realist; one can maintain realism by stipulating, e.g., that names in fiction refer to numbers. This stipulated object then serves as the object for our de re thought and talk apparently about fictional objects.

However, the pretense theorist can respond to this move by arguing that positing objects like natural numbers as the referents of names from fiction does not contribute to our understanding of thought and talk about fiction. That is, such an object is explanatorily “thin,” a worry Robert Stecker (2005: 150) describes for realism about fictional objects more generally:
The plausibility of [realism about fictional objects] hangs on whether we actually gain something by making this posit [fictional objects] that is denied to those who claim that we merely make believe that people are being referred to in fiction, or who claim that it is merely true in the fiction, but not in reality, that such reference occurs.

I believe this challenge becomes even more serious when we consider a view on which the referent of names from fiction is stipulated to be the natural numbers. Such an object seems even less likely to be explanatorily “thick” than the descriptive roles posited by Currie or the abstract artifacts posited by Thomasson.

In contrast, the pretense theorist can argue that we can make sense of apparently de re talk by considering only pretended acts of reference within a game of make-believe. As noted above, within the authorized game that uses *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* as a prop, ‘Harry Potter’ refers to a person. Within a natural unofficial game that we play with the text, ‘Harry Potter’ refers to a character. But in neither case does the name have a genuine referent: it is true only in the relevant game that it does. This view is quite close to Kripke's (1972a: 5-6) “pretense principle,” according to which

One is pretending or imagining that the conditions for reference are satisfied, and this is in some sense derivative then on the standard case in which the conditions for reference really are satisfied. … Part of the pretense is these names are names just like ordinary names, that ordinary conditions for reference are satisfied, even though in fact they are not.
The pretense theorist extends such a view to literary theory as well, arguing that we pretend that the conditions for reference are satisfied for meta-fictive utterances as well.  

4.2 A realist reply: fixing ‘kind K’

The realist might respond to this claim by arguing that pretense theorists such as Walton need fictional objects to fix the reference of ‘pretense of kind K’, since the names of fictional objects are used to distinguish one pretense from another. As Walton (1990: 402) notes, “the reference of ‘K’ can be fixed by pointing to examples, such as the pretense [the speaker] displays” with her utterance. This utterance, in turn, often contains a character’s name. Because there is no “informative individuating description,” the realist might question whether the reference of ‘K’ can be fixed without reference to fictional objects. Walton (1990: 404) addresses this concern as follows:

The paraphrase I suggested does not contain a reference to Tom Sawyer. But it requires the introduction of a technical term, “K,” which was explained, whose reference was fixed, by pointing to the use of a sentence containing the name “Tom Sawyer,” to an instance of the kind K. Should we conclude that a commitment to fictional entities is deeply embedded in our language and conceptual scheme, even if there aren’t really any? No. For it is the use of names like “Tom Sawyer” in pretense that enables us to fix the reference of “K.” To pretend to refer to someone with the name “Tom Sawyer” is not in any interesting sense to be committed to there being a referent of that name. What we should

---

304 Along similar lines, the fictionalist can argue that the conditions for reference are satisfied “according to the fiction” or “according to the fiction of realist theory,” while the presupposition theorist can argue that the referent is merely presupposed, in either the fictive or meta-fictive utterance, and that it is part of the presupposition that the name can be used to refer.

conclude is that it is our pretendings to assert, our games of make-believe, that are central to our conceptual scheme.

Walton thus denies that there is any ontological commitment involved in the use of names from fiction, because pretend reference is sufficient to fix the reference of ‘K’.

Friend (2007) criticizes this move by arguing that the use of names in pretense is insufficient to fix the referent of ‘K’. As she notes, different characters can have the same name and the same character can have more than one name. However, I do not find this as problematic as Friend suggests. The example she offers of two characters with the same name is Emma in Austen’s Emma and Emma in Flaubert’s Madame Bovary. Consider an utterance of the sentence

\[(35)\] Emma is the protagonist.

This is true according to the unofficial games of both novels. However, if I am evaluating the truth of (35), I do not do so in a vacuum. Rather, I am using one or the other novel as a prop. The same is true for an utterance that is true in only one of the games, such as an utterance of

\[(36)\] Emma considers herself gifted at matchmaking.

This is true when uttered in a game using Emma as a prop but false when uttered in a game using Madame Bovary as a prop. It is unsurprising that we must know what novel we are talking about before we can identify whether a particular utterance is true.

---

306 Friend also worries that descriptive content both fails to distinguish between characters described in the same way and entails that different characters exist if they are described differently. To illustrate this point, she uses the different descriptions ascribed to Odysseus and Ulysses, as addressed in Walton 1990: 408. In brief, he argues that one may play a “fragmentary unofficial game” in which it is true to say ‘Odysseus = Ulysses’, and that “if we do insist on pursuing the game further” there are a number of alternative ways to describe this apparent conflict in descriptions. For example, one might say ‘Odysseus (=Ulysses) both did and did not return home’ or ‘Odysseus (=Ulysses) does return home but is falsely described in Inferno as not doing so’.
according to the respective game.\textsuperscript{307} Thus, this does not seem to be a significant problem for Walton’s view.

\subsection*{4.3. Another realist reply: identifying the same pretense}

The real test for Walton’s anti-realism, as I see it, is whether he can identify two pretenses as the same pretense, without relying on a referent for names from fiction. He considers an example in which two speakers use different languages, including different names for the character, yet engage in the same pretense. Suppose for example that, in the pretense, we decide to use ‘Henri Poitier’ as our name for the character called ‘Harry Potter’ and utter the following:

\begin{equation}
(37) \text{Henri Poitier est un sorcier.}
\end{equation}

Although on Walton’s (1990: 403) view, neither an utterance of (37) nor an utterance of

\begin{equation}
(21) \text{Harry Potter is a wizard.}
\end{equation}

expresses a proposition, it is nonetheless “fictional, in an extended game understood to include both of [the speakers’] actions, that there is a single proposition which both assert.”\textsuperscript{308}

\textsuperscript{307} Friend goes on to argue that the novel alone is not sufficient for identifying the pretense, because it would fail to distinguish between characters in the same novel. However, it is not clear that this criticism is relevant to Walton’s theory. On his view, we play an authorized game with a work of fiction, within which engaging in certain kinds of pretense, indicated by our utterances, makes it true in the game that one says something true. Where the work of fiction is a novel, the novel establishes which game (or games) is authorized. Once it is established that one is playing an authorized game with The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, uttering ‘Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral’ makes it true in the game that one says something true, while uttering ‘Huck Finn attended his own funeral’ would make it true in the game that one says something false.

\textsuperscript{308} Here Walton is referring to the utterances with the word ‘actions’ and envisioning a scenario in which distinct speakers utter sentences such as (37) and (21).
One might then wonder how we are to determine when something counts as
the same proposition within an extended game and when it does not. For instance, we
would not want it to turn out to be true in the game that either (37) or (21) express
the same proposition as

(38) Sherlock Holmes is a wizard.

Walton could respond to this worry by noting that there is no authorized game
according to which it is true that speakers assert a single proposition with these
utterances. The only way we could create such a game would be to artificially create
one, perhaps by saying, “Let’s pretend that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is another name for the
color character we call ‘Harry Potter’.” According to this game, (21) and (38) would express a
single proposition.

One might worry that this sort of reply leads to a “Humpty Dumpty” view of
language on which the speaker can use words to mean whatever they like, which seems
to be a problematic semantic theory.309 To some extent, this worry is warranted. One
can change the meanings of words or the pretended reference of names by creating a
game according to which words mean something other than they usually do or names
refer differently than they do according to the authorized games of the works in which
the names occur. However, if one asserts (38) without first publicly announcing the
unauthorized game, it would be appropriate for a hearer to assume that one is playing

309 The name of this theory of language alludes to Carroll 1875: 123-124, in which Humpty Dumpty
asserts that, by ‘glory’, he meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you’.

160
an authorized game and thus to respond that (38) is false, because it is false according to the authorized game we play with the *Holmes* stories.\footnote{A shorthand way of doing so would be to say that it’s false according to the *Holmes* stories.}

Pautz (2008: 150) argues that Walton’s account of when multiple games of pretense belong to the same extended game of pretense is underspecified. She first considers an account on which two speakers engage in the same extended game of make-believe if they are using the same novel as a prop in their games of make-believe. However, she rejects this on two grounds: first, she notes that this would require an analysis of ‘the same novel’ and second, she argues that a character could arise from an oral tradition alone, and so the account is not sufficiently general. She then moves to an account based on the identity of the causal source.

However, I concur with Hicks’s (2010) assessment that such a move is not necessary for the pretense theorist. Instead, the pretense theorist can link the pretense to the novel in a case such as (37) and (21) and to other props in other hypothetical cases. Pautz (2008: 150) suggests that we would take the French copy and the English copy to be “copies of the same novel because they are about the same fictional character” but this hardly seems to be correct.\footnote{Emphasis mine.} Rather, we consider the causal history of the French text, the intention of the translator, and other details of the two texts, when we judge them to be the same.\footnote{I am glossing over a number of important questions of work identity here. My main argument is that, however work identity is established, we can then use it to establish the identity of characters, rather than the other way around.} We then use this established identity to establish what counts as the same extended game. As for Pautz’s worry about oral tradition, if a character arises from an oral tradition or a “mix of stories told by several
different people that cannot be identified," then this tradition or mix of stories, rather than a novel, would play the role of the prop in the game of make-believe.\textsuperscript{313} It thus seems that we can use work identity to establish when two speakers are engaging in the same extended game of make-believe. Thus, the pretense theorist can solve the problem of coreference, using only pretend reference and an account of work identity, without appeal to fictional objects.

5. Essential properties

5.1. Keeping characters together

The second problem I developed for the CE realist is that the character is divorced from properties that are essential to it. In contrast, pretense theorists do not face the problem of how characters and their purely internal properties are connected, because these properties are never divorced from the character. That is, both the character and its purely internal properties exist in the pretense, within which the character simply has its purely internal properties. Another way to look at this situation is that the pretense theorist never has to postulate an object that is the character but lacks the properties ascribed to the character in the fiction.\textsuperscript{314}

\textsuperscript{313} Pautz 2008: 151.
\textsuperscript{314} Similarly, the fictionalist is not committed to the existence of a fictional object that is separated from its purely internal properties. For example, Brock (2002: 13-14) appeals to a false realist theory on which characters both exist and have all of their purely internal properties. The presupposition theorist, on the other hand, seems committed at least to the presupposition that there is such an object, apart from its properties. Given that this is only a presupposition, however, it does not seem as problematic as the realist’s commitment.
Of course, one might wonder how the pretense theorist can unite the character with its purely internal properties, given that he denies that the character exists.

Consider again

(34) Harry Potter, who is only a boy, is nonetheless an epic hero, due to his courage and his ability to act alone.

Walton would capture what is asserted by (34) as follows:

(34P) To engage in pretense of kind K is fictionally to speak truly in a game of such and such a sort.

In this case, the relevant kind of pretense would be that indicated by the utterance of (34). We might describe the unofficial game as follows: It is fictional in the game that (a) Harry Potter is a boy who battles evil. (b) In creating this boy, the author created a person (a character) who has the properties associated with epic heroes, among which are being courageous and being able to act alone.³¹⁵

One might worry that, by denying that there is a character that has either internal or external properties, pretense theory separates the character from its essential properties even further than realism does. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, pretense theory allows both fictive and meta-fictive utterances to be true within the same unofficial game. Within this game, the character has all of its properties: both those true of it in the fiction and those that appear to be true of it outside the fiction. Thus, according to pretense theory, characters retain an intimate relation to all of their properties; it is simply a relation that exists within a pretense.

³¹⁵ Again, this description is only an approximation of the unofficial game, and many variations on this game could be played.
5.2. Nonexistence

There is a problem here, however. If the pretense has it that the character and its properties are so closely connected, it seems that the pretense theorist will not be able to make sense of negative existentials, paradoxical though it might sound.\footnote{See Hanley 2003: 135-138 for one example of such a criticism.} For it is generally true, in both the authorized and unofficial games we play with fictions, that the character exists.\footnote{I say “generally” because one could write a fiction according to which the characters were nonexistent. For example, in Handler’s The Basic Eight, one of the characters turns out to be imaginary, so ‘n does not exist’ is true according to the fiction.} If our reference to these characters occurs only within the pretense, as Walton argues, then an utterance of the sentence

\begin{equation}
\text{(31) Harry Potter exists.}
\end{equation}

should be judged to be true, and an utterance of

\begin{equation}
\text{(1) Harry Potter does not exist.}
\end{equation}

should be judged to be false. But this contradicts our intuition that (1) is true. Walton’s (1990: 422-427) reply to this worry is to claim that, in uttering a negative existential, the speaker \textit{betrays} the pretense she is engaged in.\footnote{However, while all negative existentials are betrayals of the pretense, not all betrayals yield negative existentials. For example, one might explicitly say
\begin{equation}
\text{(vi) In War and Peace, Napoleon is said to be extremely vain.}
\end{equation}
This betrays the pretense, yet does not yield the negative existential claim that Napoleon does not exist.} That is, Walton takes (1) to be similar to utterances such as

\begin{equation}
\text{(33) Harry Potter is a fictional character.}
\end{equation}
Both utterances “indicate more or less explicitly that [the speaker] is just pretending.”

We engage in the pretense that the name has a referent and, in the same breath, we betray this pretense.

Friend (2007: 145) notes that “realists are likely to treat [this approach to negative existentials] as an ad hoc maneuver designed to extend the pretense analysis to recalcitrant data.” And indeed, this is precisely the response to the pretense approach to meta-fictive utterances and negative existentials that realists offer. For example, Thomasson (2009: 12) offers this rebuttal to Walton’s “betrayal” argument:

Even apparently straightforward nonexistence claims … are treated as involving pretense: first invoking a pretense that there is such a character to refer to … and then in the same breath betraying that as mere pretense, with the addition of ‘doesn’t exist’. The full-blown pretense approach thus seems to implausibly take as pretenseful precisely the … talk about fiction that is designed to step outside of the pretense and speak from the real-world perspective.

The argument here seems to be that negative existentials are a clear example of non-pretended talk about fiction and hence that it is particularly implausible that the pretense theory aims to fit even these utterances into a game of pretense.

One option the pretense theorist might consider would be to simply agree with Thomasson and claim that, in the case of negative existentials, we are not pretending but “stepping outside of the pretense.” However, this would have a number of problematic consequences. First, it would then be unclear what the name refers to in the negative existential, and the realist might use this case to reintroduce the fictional

---

319 Walton 1990: 420. Indeed, Walton takes betrayal to occur as well when the speaker adds an explicit prefix such as “In the novel ….” This is part of the reason that I have taken explicitly prefixed utterances to be a different sort of utterance from those lacking an explicit prefix.

320 Here, Thomasson is also responding to Walton’s use of unofficial games in explaining our meta-fictive utterances. I focus on negative existentials here, as I have already addressed meta-fictive utterances.
object. Second, if the pretense theorist adopts such a solution, the realist could argue that we likewise “step outside of the pretense” with our meta-fictive utterances, and hence that these utterances should be understood as ontologically committing. These worries, I believe, are sufficient to explain why Walton does not go this direction.

Moreover, given the parallels that Walton draws between his theory of engagement with fiction and children’s games of make-believe, his description of “betrayal” is more plausible than it appears at first. Children, after all, engage in betrayal of their games by using phrases like ‘we’re playing that …’ or ‘we’re just pretending’ to communicate with people outside the game or to remind themselves that, while it’s true in the game that a monster exists, there really is no monster. To do the latter, they need to engage in the pretense to make it true in the game that they refer to the monster, but then they betray their own pretense by noting that there is no monster in reality.

Further support for Walton’s move can be found in Kroon’s (1996: 164) argument that utterances such as (33) “entail, and in a sense explain, the corresponding negative existential statements.” For example, “to someone’s question: ‘What do you mean, Mrs. Gamp doesn’t exist?’ we can sensibly answer: ‘She is a fictional character’.” Kroon thus argues for a very close connection between utterances such as (1) and (33), much as Walton does. Indeed, it seems to me that the question and answer Kroon proposes could go in the opposite direction as well, so that to the question “What do

321 Although Kroon uses this to argue against Walton’s proposal, in characterizing that proposal he leaves out the idea of betrayal of pretense and focuses only on the fact that ‘Mrs. Gamp is a fictional character’ can be judged to be true, on Walton’s account.
you mean, Mrs. Gamp is a fictional character?” one could sensibly answer “She doesn’t exist.” Thus, we should understand them in similar ways. Walton’s pretense theory allows us to do this by understanding both utterances as ways of betraying the pretense one is engaged in.

6. Arbitrariness

6.1. How anti-realists avoid arbitrariness

The final concern for the realists is the problem of arbitrariness. As I argued in Chapters II and IV, arbitrariness is preferable to the ontological indeterminacy that Everett claims the realist is committed to. He takes the realist to be committed to objects such that it is indeterminate whether they are identical, but the move to externalism allows the realist to commit herself only to arbitrariness either in the number of characters or in the choice of principles for determining the number of characters. There seems to be no good reason to say that there are two characters rather than one, or to say that there is one character rather than two, in stories like It’s a Frick/Frack World. Thus, the realist is committed to arbitrariness in how characters are to be counted, in problem stories such as this one.

For the pretense theorist, the arbitrariness problem does not even get off the ground. What led to this problem for the CE realist was the externalist claim that characters should be individuated by external properties rather than internal properties. The pretense theorist does not need to make such a move. As Walton (1990: 404)

322 However, I would not take the two utterances to be equivalent, since in different contexts, ‘Mrs. Gamp doesn’t exist’ might be a way of saying that she is mythical, merely imaginary or dead.
points out, we merely “pretend to assert de re of someone” that, for example, it is indeterminate whether he is identical to someone else, without being committed to genuine indeterminate identity. Thus, Walton can maintain that characters have exactly the identity relations they are said to have according to the fiction, which leaves the pretense theorist with no indeterminacy in the world and no arbitrariness problem to resolve.\textsuperscript{323} We can pretend that it is indeterminate how many characters there are, without being committed to genuine indeterminate identity.

Moreover, this seems like a better way of understanding the problem stories than the realist strategy of separating the identity relations the character stands in according to the fiction from those it actually stands in. As I have discussed in previous chapters, not only does the realist face the arbitrariness problem just discussed, but the arbitrary choice seems to be between two bad options. In \textit{It's a Frick/Frack World}, it does not seem correct either (i) that there is one character such that, according to the fiction, it is indeterminate whether it is one or two or (ii) that there are two characters such that, according to the fiction, it is indeterminate whether they are one or two. Instead, it seems to be indeterminate whether there are one or two characters. The pretense theorist can straightforwardly maintain this description of the fiction, because the indeterminate identity in question is merely pretend. The realist cannot, because to

\footnote{323 It is on this criterion that I feel the other two anti-realist views are somewhat weaker than pretense theory. The fictionalist bases her claims on what is true according to the realist theory. Thus, it seems as though arbitrariness in the realist theory could trickle down to fictionalism. For instance, 'According to the (false) realist theory, Frick = Frack' seems to be indeterminate. See Rosen 1990: 341-344 for a discussion of gaps in fictionalist views. Similarly, the presupposition theorist takes names from fiction to presuppose well-defined entities. It is thus unclear what is presupposed in the utterance of 'Frick and Frack are indeterminately identical'. In contrast, on Walton's view, such an utterance would merely pragmatically convey that utterances like this are permissible in the game, without making any arbitrary decision or presupposing referents for the character names.}
do so would require countenancing indeterminate identity in reality. Thus, the realist must shift to externalism, which in turn requires an arbitrary choice between two equally bad options, either at the level of how many objects there are or at the level of which principles govern identity relations between characters.  

6.2. A realist reply: arbitrariness in the pretense

The realist might respond by arguing that the pretense theorist faces arbitrariness at a different level, namely that it will sometimes be arbitrary which game of pretense is authorized for a given work. If this is correct, the realist might argue, then the pretense theorist is no better off than the realist who adopts Schnieder and von Solodkoff’s reply to the arbitrariness problem. As I have argued, this reply leads the realist into an arbitrary choice of principles, and the realist might draw a parallel between this choice and an arbitrary choice of authorized game.

To make this argument stick, the realist must show that the choice between authorized games is deeply arbitrary, so that there is no good reason to choose one game rather than another. One starting point for this argument is to note the lack of precision in describing a given game of pretense. As I have noted, Walton (1990: 402) acknowledges that he knows of no “informative individuating description” for ‘pretense of kind K’, although it can be indicated by the act of uttering a sentence such as

(32) Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral.

Thus, there is no specific description of the pretense available, on Walton’s view.

---

324 See Chapter 4 §3 for my discussion of this point.
Moreover, his attempts to spell out the principles that generate what is true in
the fiction are loose, flexible, and often unknown to the speaker. As he puts it, we
determine what is true in fictions, not by following an explicit set of principles, but by
engaging with fictions much as Wittgenstein describes our participation in the "language-
game." Thus, when we engage with fictions, although we might be able to reconstruct
the principles we are working from to generate truths about the fiction, such principles
are ultimately grounded only in our practices. The realist might argue that there is too
little precision and too much flexibility in Walton’s view and thus that any way of locking
down the precise nature of the game we are authorized to play with a fiction must be
chosen arbitrarily.

This move is too quick, however. The defender of pretense theory can argue in
reply that Walton does not merely assert that he knows of no informative individuating
description of ‘kind K’ and leave it at that. Instead, he writes, “Appreciators are
supposed to play certain sorts of games with the work. And these are games whose
players are subject to prescriptions … to imagine certain propositions.” Thus, while
we can stipulate that we are playing an unauthorized game, the authorized games are
prescriptive. Moreover, the principles that generate fictional truths within a game are
not just an arbitrary set of principles. As Walton (1990: 38) writes:

I do not assume that principles of generation are, in general or even
normally, “conventional” or “arbitrary,” nor that they must be learned.
Nevertheless, what principles of generation there are depends on which

---

326 Walton 1990: 60.
ones people accept in various contexts. The principles that are in force are those that are understood, at least implicitly, to be in force.\textsuperscript{327}

Thus, Walton argues that appreciators accept certain principles that generate what is true in the fiction, i.e., what one ought to pretend, given the prop. These principles can be implicit and the appreciator might not be aware that he has adopted them. Yet these implicit principles, as well as additional restrictions on authorized games, do not authorize just any game of make-believe, and they are not chosen arbitrarily.\textsuperscript{328}

Nonetheless, the realist might continue to push her point. Even if there are restrictions on what sort of principles of generation are acceptable for a given work, it might still be arbitrary which specific principles of generation one ought to follow. For example, there might be a work such that it is indeterminate whether it should be read as a satire or not, or a work in which our principles of generation conflict and it is arbitrary which of them generates what is true in the fiction.\textsuperscript{329} In other words,

\textsuperscript{327} Walton 1990: 38.
\textsuperscript{328} Walton follows Lewis in developing the principles of generation, though instead of using possible worlds, he proposes two principles:

- **Reality Principle**: If \( p_1, \ldots, p_n \) are the propositions whose fictionality a representation generates directly, another proposition, \( q \), is fictional in it if and only if, were it the case that \( p_1, \ldots, p_n \), it would be the case that \( q \).

- **Mutual Belief Principle**: If \( p_1, \ldots, p_n \) are the propositions whose fictionality a representation generates directly, another proposition, \( q \), is fictional in it if and only if it is mutually believed in the artist’s society that were it the case that \( p_1, \ldots, p_n \), it would be the case that \( q \).

See Walton 1990: 145, 151. One might worry that the Reality principle is too strong, on the grounds that fiction is not closed under logical entailment, though Walton has a response to this worry as well. See Walton 1990: 147-149. Also, as he argues, these principles alone are insufficient to generate what is true in the fiction in every case, especially when additional conventions are in play, as discussed in Chapter 4 §2.2, e.g. See Walton 1990: 161-169.

\textsuperscript{329} For an example of the latter, we might use either a psychoanalytic approach or a teleological approach invoking fate and the Greek gods to interpret what is true in \textit{Oedipus Rex}. The latter would be closer to mutual belief in the author’s society, but the former might generate truths that are closer to reality. It is not clear that one or the other is preferable.
arbitrariness seems to be inherent in Walton’s dictum that we should accept whichever principles are understood to be in force. As he notes, many of the principles that generate authorized games are implicit “rules” that are never explicitly formulated or agreed on, so it seems that what we are authorized to make-believe about a fiction might be deeply arbitrary.

6.3. The wild wild world of fiction

I believe that the pretense theorist can offer two replies to this criticism. Most importantly, the arbitrariness suggested in §6.2 is relatively superficial, compared to either the object-level arbitrariness or the principle-level arbitrariness that the CE realist must commit to. The “arbitrary” choices that the pretense theorist faces, regarding which games to play or which interpretive principles to apply, can be understood as driven by reasons and arguments. Effectively, when we say that there are a number of games one could play with a work of fiction or that there are options as far as the principles used to generate what is true in the fiction, we are simply pointing out that there is room for interpretive difference. In contrast, the CE realist is attempting to move from the fiction to real objects and faces a much more pernicious sort of arbitrary choice. In the case of It’s a Frick/Frack World she must say that there is either one object or two or, taking the Schnieder and von Solodkoff route, that we should use either Grounding and Interpretation or Grounding’ and Interpretation’, and there seems to be no reason to choose one or the other. As I discussed in §6.1, this same type of
arbitrary choice does not plague the anti-realist, because he can simply accept the claim that the character or characters stand in indeterminate identity relations.

Furthermore, the pretense theorist’s flexibility about which pretense we are authorized to engage in and which principles of generation we use to interpret fictions can be seen as a benefit of pretense theory rather than a cost. Although this description of our relation to fiction might seem overly “loose,” that is, it does a better job of capturing how we engage with fiction than a more precise description does. There are at least three ways to understand this point.

First, given the interpretive work that any appreciator of fiction must engage in and the incompleteness of the fictional description, there will always be a range of games that are authorized by the fiction.330 For example, I might imagine that Harry Potter wears red underwear, while you might imagine that it is blue. We would thus be playing slightly different authorized games with the work. On a related note, the looseness in specifying which games are authorized also leaves open the possibility of critical pluralism, the view that multiple different interpretations of an artwork are equally correct.331 For example, it might be the case that both a game on which The Wizard of Oz is a straightforward fiction and a game on which it is a parable of the rise of populism in the U.S. are appropriate games to play with the work. 332

---

330 That is, fictions are incomplete on most traditional ways of interpreting fiction. Fine (1982: 116-117) suggests a genre of “inert fiction” on which all that is true in the fiction is what is directly stated, but this is clearly different from our usual interpretive practices.
332 See Littlefield 1964 for the view that the Oz books are a parable, and see Parker 1994 for an argument against this interpretation. The claim in the text above relies on the premise that both of these interpretations are equally reasonable and that neither disproves the other.
While the CE realist can capture a range of interpretive possibilities as well, by admitting a number of different utterances to count as true “according to the fiction,” it seems to me that, in CE realism, the possibility for critical pluralism will be constrained by one’s view of truth. If one holds a monistic view of truth, that is, then it is hard to understand how multiple, incompatible, prefixed utterances could all count as true. That is, it seems that

(39) According to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the Cowardly Lion is a friend to Dorothy.

and

(40) According to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the Cowardly Lion is William Jennings Bryan.333 cannot both be true.334 If, instead, we see these utterances as moves in different games and evaluate their truth based on the propositions they pragmatically convey, we can judge them both, even in their unprefixed versions, to be true.

Second, many fictions require a non-standard game, as Walton acknowledges. For example, while Romantic paintings require a game in which the viewer stands at a distance from the artwork and imagines the depicted image to be a view of reality,

---

333 Bryan was a populist Democrat in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, who promoted overturning the gold standard. See Wikipedia, “William Jennings Bryan.”
334 Admittedly, a subtler claim than (40) might be true in CE realism, even if one had a monistic view of truth. For example, one could introduce the paraphrase ‘according to Littlefield’s interpretation of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*…’. However, the pretense theorist can evaluate (39) and (40) straightforwardly, as moves in different games.
modern and post-modern artworks require quite different games. The same can be said for literature. Traditional works of literature require readers to use the usual principles to generate fictional truths, although these might be fine-tuned depending on the genre of the work. Post-modern works, on the other hand, often authorize appreciators to use principles of generation associated with unofficial games, because we are explicitly asked to pretend that the fiction and the fictional objects are constructions of the author.

Again, a CE realist can make sense of this range of authorized interpretations to some degree but might lack the flexibility available to the anti-realist. One reason to think this is that the CE realist must maintain a distinction between the properties and identity relations the fictional object has according to the fiction and those that it actually has. Yet post-modern novels often seem to turn on an ambiguity between the fiction and reality, making the boundary between them fuzzy and playing with this boundary as a central aspect of the work. Along similar lines, many novels, such as Handler’s Adverbs, play with our literary conventions for counting or identifying characters, explicitly calling into question a realist understanding of characters on which their identity relations are clear-cut.

Lastly, fiction continues to be produced, and it is far from clear what sorts of pretenses will be appropriate in the future. As literature and other forms of fiction

---

335 For example, Marcel Duchamp’s Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2 requires that you see movement and depth in a static painting, while Daan Roosegaarde’s Flow 5.0 asks only that viewers interact with the 10-meter wall of programmed fans, which might be compatible with many types of games.

336 Jasper Fforde’s humorous Nursery Crime series, in which characters “come to life” but remain fictional entities, is somewhere between these two, but in general it calls for rather ordinary games of pretense rather than post-modern detachment.
evolve, it seems to me quite likely that the plausibility of realism will only decrease. On a related note, I conjecture that, even if the realist were to fine-tune her view to accommodate the worries I raise in this dissertation, new works of fiction could be composed that would threaten the newly refined realist theory. As I argued in Chapter 2, there does not seem to be a sound way to carve off the fictions that fit the realist theory and count only these works as genuine fictions. The way that we engage with fictions is far more accepting of variety than this sort of segregation would allow. I thus see little hope for the future of realism about fictional objects, and I conclude that the potential for vagueness or looseness in pretense theory is a positive aspect of the theory, rather than a problem for it.
Works Cited


“I am Harry Potter.” 2010. *Funny or Die*.


——— and Cathleen Muller. ms. “Brutal Identity.”


Frege, Gottlob. 1892. “Über Sinn Und Bedeutung.” [“On Sense and Reference.”]


Reimer, Marga. 1996. “Quotation Marks: Demonstratives or Demonstrations?” Analysis 56.3 (July): 131-141.


———. 2003. “Comments on Thomasson and Braun.” Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association. Cleveland, OH.


Appendix: List of Numbered Sentences

(i) Harry Potter is a fictional character and therefore does not exist.

(ii) According to the CIA, law enforcement in England has been infiltrated by communist spies. Detailed information is being collected on the private life of everyone who has ever worked for Scotland Yard, including private collaborators! Why, even Holmes is of interest to the director of the Agency!

(iii) Why, even Holmes is of interest to the director of the Agency!

(iv) Atticus Finch would have been a more engaging character, had he been the narrator of the fiction.

(v) If a character had had the same properties as Atticus Finch except that he was the narrator of the fiction, this character would have been more engaging than Atticus Finch.

(vi) Both Oedipus and Freud are self-identical. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

(1) Harry Potter does not exist.

(1') No one is both Harry Potter and sufficiently like that.

(1'') It is not the case that there is one and only one entity x that is a boy wizard with a scar on his forehead.

(2) There are many characters in the *Harry Potter* series.

(3) Take an example from a novel I have just finished … there is a character who appears at intervals and it is never clear what the sex of the character is.

(4) There is a fictional character who, for every novel, either appears in that novel or is a model for a character who does.

(4') \[\exists x (x \text{ is a fictional character } \& \forall y \{y \text{ is a novel } \rightarrow [x \text{ appears in } y \lor \exists z (z \text{ is a fictional character } \& z \text{ appears in } y \& x \text{ is a model for } z)])\].
To engage in pretense of kind K is fictionally to speak truly in a game of such and such a sort.

If no character appears in every novel, then some character is modeled on another character.

\[\sim \exists x \left[ x \text{ is a fictional character} \land \forall y \left( y \text{ is a novel} \rightarrow x \text{ appears in } y \right) \right] \rightarrow \exists x \exists y \left( y \text{ is a model for } x \right)\]

To engage in pretense of kind K is fictionally to speak truly in a game of such and such a sort.

There are fictional characters.

\[\exists x \left( x \text{ is a fictional character} \right)\]

Harry Potter is my favorite character.

The second section is dedicated entirely to the development of Harry Potter as the central heroic character of both the novels and the films.

There is a fictional character named ‘Harry Potter’.

Mozart did not exist.

No one is both Mozart and sufficiently like that.

There is no point in searching all the apartments in Baker Street, looking for stacks of cocaine. Holmes does not exist.

It is doubtful that Moriarty is at all interested in the dark tales of popular gothic literature. Perhaps, he would be attracted by the refined profile of Fitzgerald’s Gatsby, were that literary character available to him. Paradoxically, his favorite literary character would be the character of Holmes, that contradictory synthesis of cold rationality and decadent qualities. But, of course, Holmes does not exist.

I think the most compelling mystery is A Study in Scarlet, where Holmes determines who is Conan Doyle’s killer. Hold on. I mean Enoch Drebber’s killer – Conan Doyle doesn’t exist.

I just can’t wait until we get to the Holmes story where Holmes finally meets Conan Doyle. After all, they both live in London and Conan Doyle exists, right?
Holmes is a human being.

Holmes has 10,000 hairs on his head.

Holmes has 10,001 hairs on his head.

Some nineteenth-century fictional characters dote on their mothers more than any eighteenth-century character does.

Some nineteenth-century fictional characters are said (in their respective fictions) to dote on their mothers, and this doting exceeds the amount any eighteenth-century fictional character is said (in its fiction) to dote on its mother.

Conan Doyle’s most famous character, Sherlock Holmes, saves the life of Queen Victoria.

Conan Doyle’s most famous character, Sherlock Holmes, is such that, according to the relevant fiction, it saves the life of Queen Victoria.

Both Oedipus and Freud were devoted to their mothers. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

Freud was devoted to his mother and, according to the fiction, Oedipus was devoted to his mother as well. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

Freud was devoted to his mother and Oedipus encodes the property being devoted to his mother. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

The Father is not contained in any fictional work.

Harry Potter is a wizard.

According to Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, Harry Potter is a wizard.

Atticus Finch would not have been as famous a character, had the fiction been such that, according to it, Finch chooses not to defend Tom Robinson.

If a character had been created that was depicted as having all the properties of Atticus Finch but lacking defends Tom Robinson, this character would have been less famous than the actual Atticus Finch character.
(24) 5-5 = Holmes.

(25) Holmes = x, where x is an arbitrarily chosen number.

(26) According to the fiction, Harry Potter is a wizard, but in reality he is not.

(27) Possibly, Harry Potter is a wizard, but actually, he is not.

(28) Harry Potter is a wizard, but he is not spatiotemporally connected to us.

(29) Mrs. Verloc committed suicide.

(30) Jules is possible.

(31) Harry Potter exists.

(31') There is one and only one entity x that is a boy wizard with a scar on his forehead.

(32) Tom Sawyer attended his own funeral.

(32P) The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is such that one who engages in pretense of kind K in a game authorized for it makes it fictional of himself in that game that he speaks truly.

(33) Harry Potter is a fictional character.

(34) Harry Potter, who is only a boy, is nonetheless an epic hero, due to his courage and his ability to act alone.

(34R) Harry Potter, a character that is only a boy according to the fiction, is nonetheless an epic hero, given the courage and ability to act alone that it is depicted as having.

(34P) To engage in pretense of kind K is fictionally to speak truly in a game of such and such a sort.

(35) Emma is the protagonist.

(36) Emma considers herself gifted at matchmaking.

(37) Henri Poitier est un sorcier.

(38) Sherlock Holmes is a wizard.
(39) According to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the Cowardly Lion is a friend to Dorothy, the Scarecrow and the Tin Man.

(40) According to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the Cowardly Lion is William Jennings Bryan.