

# **The Reality of Fiction:**

An Inquiry into the Ontology and Logic of Fiction

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## 1. Introduction

If I were to pose the seemingly simple question, “Who is Sherlock Holmes?” most people would be able to provide a detailed description. Perhaps they would say that he was a detective, liked smoking pipes, and played the violin. Others may add that his brother’s name was ‘Mycroft’ or that Dr. Watson was his close friend. Many people would even be able to tell you that he lived in London—at 221B Baker Street, to be exact. What is even more interesting is that we could imagine the Sherlock Holmes we just described doing something differently: perhaps he smoked cigars instead of pipes or played the viola instead of the violin. Indeed, we do this every day in discussing literature. English professors often ask students to consider what would have happened if a character had behaved differently. We leave the movie theatre exclaiming, “If he had just been honest, they wouldn’t have gotten divorced!” People close a book with an undesirable ending and daydream of alternate endings. The intuition seems to be that we *can* imagine a character or event which differs from what was explicitly stated or demonstrated in a fictional work.

The question then becomes how to address this intuition philosophically. Perhaps the answer should begin with determining what fiction is. The quick, simple answer seems to be that it is something that is not at all ‘real,’ but how can we then say meaningful things about it? Alternatively we might say that fiction *is* real—albeit in an attenuated or different sense. It is, so to speak, really about ‘fictitious’ people, places, and events. If this is right, then what can we know about these fictitious people, places, and events? I will answer these questions and others, as I explore the idea of a multiplicity of

worlds in search of the solution.<sup>1</sup> This paper will begin by outlining and explaining David Lewis's argument for the existence of possible worlds. In Lewis's extreme form of modal realism, all worlds are equally as real as the actual world. I will then address his particular uses of language in relation to his argument. I will then suggest improvements to Lewis's view on possible worlds and will apply the plurality of worlds hypothesis to fictional characters, forming an argument which will provide an ontology for fictional entities. The theory of modal realism I will present will allow for a logical manner of discussion concerning counterfactuals and possibilities in fictional works. I further examine the pragmatic uses of such a system and then respond to objections.

## *2. Lewis on Possible Worlds*

Lewis begins by clarifying what our own world is. It is "a very inclusive thing,"<sup>1</sup> he explains. Every object you have ever seen is part of it: every table, every chair, every weather balloon, every star-nosed mole, even you and I and the paper or screen on which you are reading these words. That is not the end of it, however. Our world even includes the planet Earth, the whole solar system, any galaxies no matter how remote, and anything which might exist beyond these distant galaxies. Anything in our physical realm is part of our world. In the same manner, anything in time is part of our world, be it in the past, present, or future. The building of the Great Pyramids at Giza, your present reading of this thesis, and what the president will have for lunch tomorrow are all part of our

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<sup>1</sup> See John Gibson, Wolfgang Huemer, and Luca Poggi, eds., *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative, and Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2007) for the related question of what we can *learn* from fiction. I will not be addressing that question here.

world. There is nothing too distant in the past or future not to be included. As Lewis says, “nothing is so alien in kind as to not be part of our world.”<sup>ii</sup>

Lewis then begins his argument by asserting that our world could have been different in an incredible number of ways from the way it is. All of these various differences are possible worlds for Lewis. The slightest difference constitutes another separate possible world. If you had worn a red tie in this world on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006, there is a possible world in which you wore a purple tie, another in which you wore a green polka dot tie, and so on for every possibility. There are even worlds in which you wore no tie at all. Every possibility or combination of possibilities constitutes the way things are in another possible world. Lewis further asserts that any way a possible world may be, is a way that a world is.

Depending on how seriously they took talk of ‘possible worlds’, many metaphysicians would agree with Lewis. The actual world *could* have been different, which means that there’s at least *some* sense in which there is a possible world in which it is. What sets Lewis’s theory apart from most metaphysicians, however, is that he is a *modal realist*: he claims that every single one of these possible worlds really exists. All possible worlds are real. However, we cannot ever reach another world in time, space, causality, or in any other way. All worlds exist in complete isolation from each other. That these *possible* worlds exist in reality is what many ultimately reject.<sup>2</sup> I will revisit this later in Section 8.1. Here, let us continue discussing Lewis.

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<sup>2</sup> See Quine, who rejects the existence of possible worlds and even disagrees with the basic notion of possibilities in “On What There Is.”

These other worlds are also quite inclusive, just like ours. However, each exists on a separate and distinct spatiotemporal plane. As such, they are neither near nor far in space from our world. They are simply separate. Likewise, they are neither near nor far from us in time. They exist in their own time. Each possible world is completely isolated. Furthermore, no worlds are connected causally in any way either. Nothing in one world can ever cause anything in another under any circumstance. Also—and this is a hallmark of modal realism—just because we can think of different possible worlds does not mean that we are in any sense creating them. They exist regardless of whether we recognize them or not.

Since there is an infinite number of possible worlds, we in the actual world may find it useful to refer to subsets of possible worlds by relying upon the degree to which they are similar to our actual world or to another possible world. These similarities between worlds are ways in which we say the worlds are accessible to each other. As an example, Lewis describes how worlds can be either historically or nomologically accessible to ours. A world is historically accessible to the actual world if, and only if, it has the exact same history as does our world until the present moment in time. Therefore, you have at least read to this sentence in my paper in all historically accessible worlds to the actual world. Likewise, nomological accessibility refers to the physical laws of a world. As such, in all worlds which obey the same set of physical laws as our world (i.e. are nomologically accessible to the actual world), force is a product of mass and acceleration. It is critical to note that worlds are in no way physically or causally linked to the other worlds to which they are accessible: accessible worlds are merely similar by chance in a

particular way which allows us to speak about a set of them collectively. The application of the concept of accessibility allows us to speak pragmatically about possible worlds which would otherwise be difficult to discuss in a meaningful nature.

Furthermore, Lewis maintains that when something is possible relative to the actual world, it is true in at least one possible world accessible from the actual world.<sup>3</sup> Let us assume that I want to say it is possible that cars fly. Lewis asserts that if what I am saying is true, then it is the case that cars do fly in at least one possible world, say, world C. This is to say that there is one possible world, world C, in which it is the case that it is true that cars fly. If it is the case that of all possible worlds, there is not a single possible world in which cars fly, then it is false to say that it is possible that cars fly. So, for it to be impossible for cars to fly, it must be true that of all worlds, there is no single possible world in which it is true that cars fly. Lewis asserts that we can phrase things as possibilities in such a way because other worlds are possibilities for what the actual world could have been. Because our world could be a different one, the events of our actual world could be the events of a possible world.

In the same manner, a necessary truth is something that is true in every possible world. So, if 2 plus 2 happen to be 4 in every single possible world, it is necessarily true that 2 plus 2 equal 4. This means that it is “not possibly not” the case that 2 plus 2 are 4. This is to say that out of all the infinite possible worlds, there is not a single one in which

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all accessibility relationships henceforth denoted with ‘possible’ or ‘necessary’ will be relative to the actual world.

it is not the case that 2 plus 2 are 4. It would be equivalent to the statement that it is impossible for 2 plus 2 to sum to anything different from 4.<sup>4</sup>

Let us briefly consider actuality before continuing to a discussion on trans-world identity. The actual world is the world in which we live. However, to Lewis, 'actual' is an indexical, rather than definite, term. From the vantage point of a creature living in possible world K, world K is the actual world. However, there is really only one actual world, *ours*. My counterpart in world K is simply incorrect to think her world actual.

As for trans-world identity, because Lewis is not a metaphysical essentialist, he would assert that a difference in any property would constitute an entirely different object. This means that if there is an individual in possible world K who is identical to me in all other ways, the World K individual would still necessarily be another individual because she possesses the property of living in world K, whereas I possess the property of living in the actual world. Because these slight differences in properties will necessarily exist between entities in different worlds, there is no strict trans-world identity for Lewis. As such, Lewis argues for the existence of counterparts, rather than relying on a strict trans-world identity between objects. A counterpart by definition is the object most similar to the actual one in question. A counterpart to Robert E. Lee is an individual who exists in another world from the world in which Lee exists (*viz.*, *ours*), but is still very much like Robert E. Lee. Thus, various Robert E. Lee counterparts exist in any number of possible worlds. If we can say that it is truly possible for Robert E. Lee to have won the Battle of Gettysburg, this means that there is at least one world, world L, in which there is a

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<sup>4</sup> Whether it is necessary that 2 plus 2 equal 4 is beyond the scope of this thesis.

counterpart of Lee who won the Battle of Gettysburg. While the Robert E. Lee in our actual world did not win the battle, Lee's counterpart in world L did. Furthermore, Lewis would declare that a counterpart of Lee does not exist in all possible worlds, though if one did, then Lee would *necessarily* exist.

### 3. *Interpreting Lewis on Fiction*

How does this relate to fiction? What, if anything, is true about fiction? Can we truly state that Sherlock Holmes was a friend of Watson's? Is it true to declare that Darth Vader is Luke's father? Is it false that Elizabeth Bennett marries Mr. Collins rather than Mr. Darcy? Is it nonsense to apply any truth values to fiction at all? In this section, I will attempt to provide answers to these questions through the application of David Lewis's plurality of worlds thesis. In his paper *Truth in Fiction*, David Lewis applies such modal realism to fiction. In the following sections, particularly from section 5 onward, I will also apply modal realism to fiction. While I base my application of modal realism to fiction on Lewis's plurality of worlds thesis, my argument will differ significantly from his in terms of both theory and application.

Let us begin by determining what we can call true or false in relation to fictitious works. Examine the following sentence: "Scarlett O'Hara married Rhett Butler." This statement must be taken to be false upon initial observation, as Scarlett O'Hara does not and never did exist. Indeed, a la Russell's theory of descriptions, any sentence about Scarlett O'Hara would be false since she did not *actually* exist.<sup>iii</sup> Does this mean everything that could be said about fictional events and characters is false? Lewis asserts that such is not the case. To the contrary, he argues that we are referring to the events



and people of another, albeit fictional, world. Thus, when people speak of fictional entities and occurrences, Lewis declares that they are actually abbreviating the sentence by only implying, rather than stating, that these fictional characters are existing in their 'fictional' world. So, the sentence "Scarlett O'Hara marries Rhett Butler" is actually an abbreviated form of the intended sentence, "In the world of *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara marries Rhett Butler." This sentence is of course true. We can, therefore, take the abbreviated sentence to be true under the condition that it is meant to be prefixed with a reference to another world. This applies to all fiction. As long as a statement about the fiction is intended to be prefixed with "In the world of such-and-such fiction..." it has the potential to have a truth value.<sup>iv</sup>

Of course, there are countless sentences which are not intended to be prefixed; for example: "Many southern belles came from South Carolina and Georgia." Without the appropriate context, we would not automatically assume that this sentence was in relation to a specific fiction, but rather that it was a statement about the actual world. It is not necessarily a statement in or about a fiction, say *Gone with the Wind*. As such, this sentence is not intended to be prefixed. The problem now lies in discerning which sentences *are* intended to be prefixed. Lewis's solution is the use of common sense; whether a sentence is intended to be prefixed or not is generally discernable by examining context and content. If the sentence is about something that is not part of our actual world but is in fiction, we assume the sentence to be prefixed. If the sentence is about something that is part of the actual world, then the sentence is taken as not to be in need of a prefix and should be taken as is. Similarly, if a sentence is about what we

consider to be actual, there is no need for a prefix. If objections arise as to the use of prefixed and unprefixed sentences, the solution is to simply prefix all sentences. The aforementioned unprefixed sentences would merely be given the prefix, "In the actual world." This merely makes the system more consistent.

But what do these operators really mean: what is it to speak of something in fiction? As Lewis initially notes, the truth of any given fiction is "closed under implication" and "such closure is the earmark of relative necessity." In other words, a premise X is *necessarily* true in fiction A, if and only if premise X is true in every possible world that provides the proper circumstances necessary to fiction A. Essentially, of all the possible worlds, a subset of them is determined due to the restrictions imposed by details ascribed to the world within fiction A. Imagine the world of *The Lord of the Rings*. The text explicitly states that elves have pointy ears; Gandalf was Bilbo's friend; dwarves do not typically get along well with elves; and a plethora of other facts about characters, locations, and events. All these defining details of the fiction are also details that restrict the abovementioned subset of worlds. The subset includes all possible worlds in which the details explicitly stated in the book are instantiated. These details do not include things that readers merely assume and therefore ascribe to the work. Simply because people assume that there is not an undiscovered subterranean city in Middle Earth which is controlled by flying pink elephants does not mean that there indeed is not one. Therefore, worlds which exhibit all details of *The Lord of the Rings* and also have this subterranean city of colorful pachyderms are included in the subset, seeing as nothing is in direct contradiction with the novel's facts.

However, just because the plot is enacted in a world and there are no direct conflicts with the details of the fiction, does not mean that these people are the Gandalf, Bilbo, Legolas, Aragorn, and Shadowfax of *The Lord of the Rings*, does it? Lewis would argue that the answer to this question is a definite *no*. Recall Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone with the Wind*. Imagine that here, in our very own actual world, there was a woman who lived during the Civil War, was the eldest of three girls, grew up at Tara, was named 'Katie Scarlett O'Hara', and possesses all the other features of the fictional Scarlett of Margaret Mitchell's novel. Furthermore, assume that Mitchell did not know of this real life Scarlett and happened to write *Gone with the Wind* to be exactly the same as this real Scarlett's life. Lewis declares that this actual person is not the Scarlett of the great novel. While it is true that *an* actual Scarlett exists, it is certainly not true that this is the Scarlett to which *Gone with the Wind* refers. Since Mitchell did not know of the actual Scarlett, her Scarlett is a different, fictional one. A similar distinction would be drawn between two towns named 'Greenville'. They share the same name and many features, yet they are not the same town in the slightest.

Does this technically mean that the aforementioned subset of possible worlds used to determine a statement's truth value is an incorrectly determined subset? Lewis argues that the subset may indeed be too large. As a solution, he proposes that a better analogue than a world in which the plot is enacted, would be a world in which the same exact story is told as a nonfictional account of history. In that case, there is no need to discern from this world or that which has exactly the feature of the story. The necessary condition for this subset for determining truth values now becomes that the story of what

is fictional in our world is told in the same manner, but as nonfiction, in another possible world. Thus, the story must be known as details of facts, rather than details of fiction. As such, people in these other worlds would read novels such as *Gone with the Wind*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as historical fact rather than mere fiction.

#### 4. Lewis's Analysis of Fiction

In light of the abovementioned progression of thoughts on how to determine the proper and useful subset of possible worlds as they relate to works of fiction, Lewis presents three options. These applications of modal realism to fiction are presented in the form of Analyses 0, 1, and 2, each of which evolves from the prior analysis. As was discussed at the end of Section 3, Lewis initially finds that the possible worlds in which the facts of a given fiction are told as a nonfictional account of history are the best place to begin. As such, he presents Analysis 0, which is Lewis's first attempt to define the subset of possible worlds which we are referencing when discussing truth in fiction.

ANALYSIS 0: "A sentence in the form 'in fiction *f*,  $\phi$ ' is true iff  $\phi$  is true at every world where *f* is told as known fact rather than fiction."

These are worlds where the details of a fiction have occurred and are facts, as opposed to being merely imagined. This means that anything explicitly stated in the fictional work is true, but no more.

This is the most severe of Lewis's explanations of truth existing in fiction. It disregards all previous background with which many readers view the works. Lewis asserts that the audience should not *read into* the fiction, as many are inclined to do. For

example, I would claim that in *Gone with the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara lives closer to Mississippi than she does to Maine. However, since that is never unequivocally stated in the novel, it is not true under Analysis 0. For Lewis under Analysis 0, this assumption is simply a projection onto the work of fiction by the reader and as such, should not be used in determining the subset of possible worlds to be considered when speaking of the relevant fiction. The text leaves room for the case in which the relative locations of Maine, Georgia, and Mississippi are different in the world of *Gone with the Wind* than in actual world, since such details were never directly stated in the novel.

Under this analysis, one also cannot assume any seemingly inconsequential thought as to what *should* be true in the world of any fiction. It is crucial to note here that names used in fictional works are non-rigid designators, meaning that a name does not necessarily refer to the same exact object in every possible world. What this means to us is that "Georgia" in *Gone with the Wind* does not necessarily refer to the exact Georgia that we know to exist in actuality. That in fiction nouns are not rigid designators should be kept in mind when studying possible worlds.

However, Lewis asserts that we *should* actually be able to read this sort of background into fictions, though in a very careful manner. He finds it possible to say that Sherlock Holmes "does not have a third nostril; that he never had a case in which the murderer turned out to be a purple gnome; that he solved his cases without the aid of divine revelation; that he never visited the moons of Saturn; and that he wears underpants."<sup>vi</sup> Lewis justifies such assumptions by declaring that though there is nothing in the fiction "to make them true...there is nothing to make them false."<sup>vii</sup> Lewis furthers

this argument by reminding us that there is nothing in many fictions, such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* or *Gone with the Wind*, that would give readers any reason to suspend their beliefs about historical aspects of the novels, especially details of the time periods and locations. To the contrary, the only details that need changing are specifically noted by the authors, such as the locations of the characters' residences. To assume more than these necessary details have been changed would be excessive for Lewis: what is true in actuality about the period and location of the fiction is true also in the worlds of these fictions. This is an application of Ockham's razor: the simpler of two equally correct theories is the better. One can transpose the actual world upon the possible worlds of fiction, but need only to change the details stipulated in the fictional work. This way, we do not find ourselves in a world with the aforementioned subterranean pink elephants running around needlessly.

Lewis declares that the solution to Analysis 0's disregard for background knowledge is to examine sentences of truth in fiction as counterfactuals, leading us the next analysis:

ANALYSIS 1: "A sentence of the form 'In the fiction  $f$ ,  $\phi$ ' is non-vacuously true iff some world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\phi$  is true differs less from our actual world, on balance than does any world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\phi$  is not true. It is vacuously true iff there are no possible worlds where  $f$  is told as known fact."<sup>viii</sup>

In fact, that we commonly refer to "the world of Scarlett and Rhett" demonstrates that we intuitively consider less than *all* the infinite number of possible worlds that relate to *Gone with the Wind* where the plot is known as historical fact. This is also less than the number of worlds in which the story's plot is enacted. To clarify, the number of worlds in

which the plot is enacted is also infinite; however, Lewis deems it a smaller infinity than the infinity of *all possible worlds*.<sup>5</sup> “In the world of Scarlett and Rhett” there are facts, just as there are in our actual world: that there are no pink elephants living in Wyoming, that Georgia is in the same location as in our actual world, that Ashley Wilkes does not have six toes on his left foot, and that Melanie has never been abducted by an alien. Nevertheless, we should not follow the lead of everyday language to assume that there is only one world for each fiction. This would be to arbitrarily single out one of the worlds in which the fiction is told as known fact. We should merely note that there are not as many as some might suggest.

Because the number of worlds which pass the test of Analysis 1 is infinite, there are some statements that do not have truth values, according to Lewis. Consider the statement, “There is an even number of hairs on Scarlett O’Hara’s head at the moment she marries Rhett Butler.” This is a sentence that does not have a truth value.<sup>6</sup> Since there is a plurality of Scarlett O’Hara’s worlds, there may be some worlds in which she has an odd number of hairs on her head and others in which she has an even number of hairs upon her head at that time. Thus the statement “There is an even number of hairs on Scarlett O’Hara’s head at the moment she marries Rhett Butler” is sometimes true and sometimes false, determining that there cannot be one definitive truth value for that particular statement. However, if something is true throughout all of the fiction’s

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<sup>5</sup> There are different degrees of mathematical infinities. As a simple example, consider a set which is infinitely large. If you were to add one to this infinite set, it would result in a larger—though still infinite—set. The same logic applies to possible worlds. Subsets of them, as stipulated by each analysis Lewis presents, constitute an infinity. However, as they are a subset of all possible worlds, the entire set of possible worlds is also infinite.

<sup>6</sup> I argue that it is a deficiency in Lewis’s argument to assert that such statements have no truth value. I will offer my solution to contingent truth values in Section 7.

possible worlds, then it is true in the fiction. Likewise, whenever something is false throughout all of the fiction's possible worlds, it is false in the fiction.<sup>7</sup>

As was earlier stated, the worlds of any fiction should differ as little as possible from the actual world. To this end, it is important to know exactly what constitutes the actual world. In this particular case, Lewis means that the 'actual world' which we should apply to fiction to form its background, is the *conceived* actual world. Lewis asserts that our conceived actual world consists of the current, generally accepted contingent facts about our world. So, if the general population believes that the acceleration due to gravity is 9.81 meters per second squared, that the sky is blue, that there is not a colony of Spanish speaking echidnas living in southern Florida, and that George W. Bush served two terms as President of the United States, then these and their other beliefs constitute the current definition of our actual world. The various possible worlds of a fiction should then be compared to this set of general beliefs about our actual world in order to decide which possible worlds are most like the actual world. It is also essential to use the set of general beliefs from the culture and time period of the fiction's unique origin.

Note that it is critical to use this set of contingent beliefs about the actual world as opposed to what is true about the actual world. Such is the case because these fictions arose out of a society in which the former was deemed to be fact, whether or not that was the case. For example, imagine that scientists discovered there was indeed a colony of Spanish speaking echidnas which lived in Southern Florida, but decided to keep the colony secret in order to protect these unique creatures. The general consensus among

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<sup>7</sup> The matter of contingency in fiction will be further addressed in Section 7.



the nation's population would be that this colony did not exist and as such would never imagine this colony as being in their works of fiction. The readers of a fiction would never on the whole imagine such animals to live within the context of their fiction. Would you imagine these special echidnas to be living in Florida as you read the latest novel?—certainly not. Thus, it is best to judge the proper application of the actual world to fictional worlds using the prevailing, collective beliefs of the society in the correct time period from which the fiction came. With this revelation, we arrive at the following:

ANALYSIS 2: "A sentence of the form 'In the fiction  $f$ ,  $\phi$ ' is non-vacuously true iff, whenever  $w$  is one of the collective belief worlds of the community of origin of  $f$ , then some world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\phi$  is true differs less from the world  $w$ , on balance, than does any world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\phi$  is not true. It is vacuously true iff there are no possible worlds where  $f$  is told as known fact."<sup>ix</sup>

This is David Lewis's final conclusion as to what is true in fiction. This further demonstrates that Lewis is indeed a fictional realist: he argues that the possible worlds in which fictional characters exist also exist.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, Lewis asserts that truth in fiction is determined by two factors—the precise content of the fiction and the background, consisting of the general societal beliefs of the community of origin. A stricter view could also be adopted that rejects the background of societal beliefs and truth is determined solely by the explicit content of the fiction.

### 5. *Improving on Lewis*

While there are many points Lewis makes with which I agree, I would also argue that his system is *both* unnecessarily complicated *and* fails to adequately describe many

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<sup>8</sup> I will critique, revise, and expand Lewis's fictional realism view in Section 5.

features of a fiction. As such, I will use Lewis's argument as the basis for mine, but will also offer simplifications and alterations where necessary. In doing so, I will introduce the notion of fictional accessibility, which is a similar notion to Lewis's ideas of historical and nomological accessibility. The paper's next section will then allow me to further expand on the pragmatic uses of fictional accessibility of possible worlds in talking about counterfactuals in fiction.

I begin my account of fictional realism from Lewis's Analysis 0. I will argue that Analysis 0 accurately depicts what must be the case for there to be truth in fiction. Again, it states that something is only true of a fiction if and only if such is true at every possible world in which the fiction is told as known fact. However, I now shall take this argument in a new direction. Lewis stipulates that these possible worlds are not only possible, but that they are also *real* worlds. They are real in the same manner in which our world is real. There is the reality of our world and there are the realities of worlds x, y, z, and so on to an infinite number of other real worlds. Things in our real world are real things, so it follows that things in other real worlds are also real things. This means that the things in all these other real, possible worlds are also real.

It is the case, in some of these possible worlds, that characters from the fiction of our actual world are not fictional at all—they are fact rather than 'fiction.' For example, Mr. Darcy does not exist in the actual world, but we know of a fictional character called 'Mr. Darcy' via Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Somewhere in the infinity of possible worlds, there *are* possible worlds in which Mr. Darcy exists as real, rather than imagined. In fact, you and I could be the stuff of fiction in other possible worlds. In many possible worlds, however, these people of our fiction exist just as we do in the actual world. If we accept that things that are

real are things that therefore exist, then we now arrive at an explanation for the existence of fictional characters. In a world where a fictional character is actual, the fictional character exists. Furthermore, these fictional characters exist just as we do in our world, only in a separate world. The only difference is that we privilege the world in which we exist. This does not change the fact that a different set of things are equally as real in another world.

As you will recall, Lewis offered the following:

ANALYSIS 1: "A sentence of the form 'In the fiction  $f$ ,  $\phi$ ' is non-vacuously true iff some world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\phi$  is true differs less from our actual world, on balance than does any world where  $f$  is told as known fact and  $\phi$  is not true."

I find this 'on balance' distinction to be entirely too ambiguous and unnecessarily complicated.<sup>9</sup> Is there no other standard that could be appropriate? In lieu of Lewis's expansion of Analysis 0 into Analyses 1 and 2, I propose a different approach. Instead of going into detail as to how a world may or may not be a world which "differs less from our actual world, on balance" than is prudential, I would simply reference the other possible worlds which are what I shall call 'fictionally accessible'. Lewis discusses cases where worlds are both historically and nomologically accessible to ours. Again, these are worlds which are the same as our actual world with respect to either historical facts or with respect to physical laws. I assert that worlds are also accessible via fictions. As I define it, a fictional accessibility relationship exists between two worlds when the explicit facts of a fiction in one world are enacted in another possible world. As an example, if a world is fictionally accessible via *Pride and Prejudice*, then all the explicitly stated details of the fiction are true in that real world—in

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<sup>9</sup> See Gregory Currie's article "The Nature of Fiction" for similar objections.

reality. These are worlds in which the plots of the fiction are not necessarily told as known fact, but worlds in which the plot is enacted.

Instead of Lewis's rather vague suggestion for which of the many worlds differ "less from our actual world, on balance" than other worlds, we now only have two categories: the worlds which are fictionally accessible via a work of fiction and worlds which are not accessible via that work of fiction. This removes the human attempt to discern which worlds are close enough "on balance" to be relevant and provides a more definite description of these worlds. This is an effective, yet much simpler theory than that asserted by Lewis. Ergo, as per Occam's razor, my system should be adopted in place of Lewis's. In fact, it may be the case that Lewis himself would adopt my system without too much objection, as it is based in his own modal realist system. The additional accessibility relationship I define still fits into Lewis's framework: the only components of Lewis's system I reject are those pertaining to *how* we define the subset of existing possible worlds which relate to the plot of a given fiction.

Lewis commonly discusses individuals and their counterparts in other possible worlds. I have a counterpart in a possible world where every single detail about my life is as it is here in the actual world—this is Lewis's normal counterpart theory. An expansion and slight revision of Lewis's counterpart theory is integral to my assertion of fictional accessibility. In contrast to Lewis, I suggest that not all counterparts need to be 'real' in the vernacular sense: they can be 'fictional.' This is to say that my counterpart in another world can still be considered to be a counterpart of mine, even if she is a character in a work of fiction in that world. Likewise, a character of a novel in the actual world can be a counterpart to a person who exists outside of fiction in another possible world. This allows for the fictional Mr. Darcy of Jane Austen's novel

to exist in another world via a real counterpart. In worlds which are fictionally accessible to our world, Mr. Darcy has a counterpart who exists outside of the fiction. Likewise, a fictional character from a novel in another possible world has a counterpart who exists outside of the fiction in our actual world. Furthermore, I have a counterpart in another world who is fictional in relation to that world. This means that my life, which is real in actuality, is told as fiction in other possible worlds. This would occur when *our* actual world is fictionally accessible via another possible world's fictions. I am real, just as 'fictional' characters are real; we merely exist as *real* in different worlds.

#### *6. Addressing Counterfactuals and Possibilities in Fiction*

Now that we have the concept of fictional accessibility in our arsenal, we can tackle the truly interesting problem of how to speak about counterfactuals of a given fiction. What would Sherlock Holmes's life be like were he not to play the violin? My basic intuition is that this is not a nonsensical question. Indeed, I can quite imagine the Sherlock Holmes of 221B Baker Street being exactly as he is, *sans* knowledge of the violin. Lewis would argue, through all of his Analyses, that a possible world in which a counterpart of Sherlock Holmes exists must be one in which he exists as is explicitly stated in the relevant fiction. While Lewis does allow for the inclusion of various cultural beliefs or period-specific understandings of the world to be applied as background knowledge to various fictions, he will not allow for a possible world to be included in the consideration set when it differs in the slightest manner from the text of the fiction (unless, of course, the author of the fiction has made a mistake and we are simply being charitable in our understanding of the work). This is a distinct shortcoming of his theory, which

can be quite nicely remedied through the concept of fictional accessibility, in addition to Lewis's concepts of historical and nomological accessibility.

Let us begin by recalling what it means for something to be possible. Consider the following statement: "It is possible that I will eat a sandwich for lunch tomorrow." In terms of possible worlds, this translates to 'there exists at least one possible world in which it is true that I will eat a sandwich for lunch tomorrow.'<sup>10</sup> If there is somehow not at least a single possible world in which I will eat a sandwich for lunch tomorrow, then it is false to say that it is possible that I will eat a sandwich for lunch tomorrow. However, the point remains that if the statement is true in at least one possible world, it is possible in the actual world.

The same principles apply to counterfactuals, including past possibilities. If I were to have said that "I could have eaten pizza yesterday," then for this to be true there must be at least one possible world in which my counterpart did indeed eat pizza for lunch yesterday. There may also be an infinite number of possible worlds in which my counterpart did so, but there only must be one for the counterfactual to be possible.

How does this aid us in discussing counterfactuals in fiction? Let us first consider the actual world (world A) and a possible world to which it is fictionally accessible ( $w'$ ). Again, this means that  $w'$  is a world were a fiction of world A is enacted and is told as fact. A la Lewis, everything which is explicitly stated in a fiction in world A must be true in  $w'$ . At this stage, via fictional accessibility between the two worlds, we are now capable of discussing the characters, events, and places of a fiction in a meaningful manner. What is especially interesting is to

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<sup>10</sup> See Footnote 2 with respect to accessibility relationships of the actual world.

consider further degrees of accessibility through transitive relationships and to combine various accessibilities in order to allow us to talk about counterfactuals in fiction.

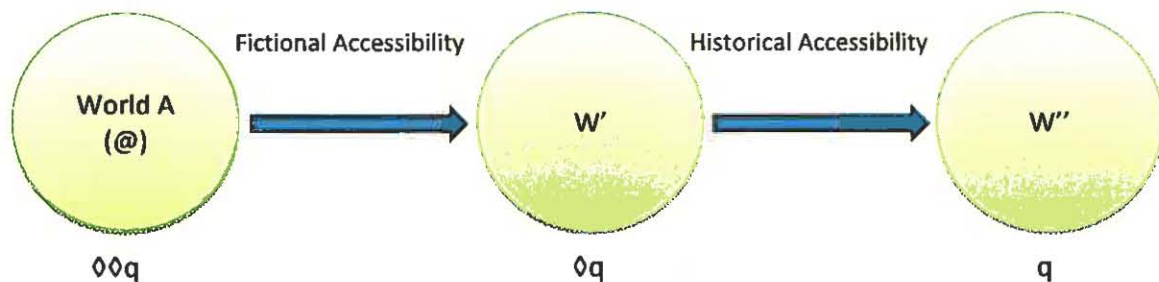
Lewis, of course, does not allow for counterfactuals of fiction. He argues that any world which varies explicitly from the fiction's text in the actual world is not to be considered in the subset of possible worlds relating to it, as it could not be a world in which the plot is enacted and told as fact. I will agree with him to a degree, though only in determining which worlds are to be considered fictionally accessible to another world. However, I will argue that one *can* then contemplate additional accessibility relationships to other possible worlds to address possibilities in fiction. Again, we have world A (the actual world) and  $w'$  (a fictionally accessible world to the actual world). We also need to consider  $w''$ , another possible world which is historically accessible to some degree to  $w'$ .  $w''$  is more distantly related to world A than it is to  $w'$ , but is related logically nonetheless.

In light of these accessibility relationships between worlds, consider the following case:  $q$  is true at  $w''$ . What are the implications of this? As previously explained, when  $q$  is true in at least one possible world related to the world in question,  $q$  is then considered *possible* at the world in question, which in this case, is  $w'$ . So, at one world removed via historical accessibility,  $q$  is possible at  $w'$ . That is to say,  $\Diamond q$  is true at  $w'$ . What is interesting is to speak of the logical implications of  $q$  being true at  $w''$  in relation to the actual world. At two worlds removed from where  $q$  is true, via historical and fictional accessibility respectively,  $q$  is then possibly possible

at world A.<sup>11</sup> That is to say,  $\Box\Box q$  is true at A. Now at worlds  $w'$  and world A, it may or may not be the case that  $q$  is false. There is no necessary truth value for  $q$  at worlds A and  $w'$ .<sup>12</sup>

Diagram 1a illustrates the accessibility relationships between the worlds and the logical implications of these relationships. For the sake of simplicity, Diagram 1a ignores the infinite other possible worlds which would also be assessable to the three depicted worlds:<sup>13</sup>

Diagram 1a:



The implications and pragmatic applications of applying accessibilities across different possible worlds may best be understood through an example. Let us examine the case of a given fiction, such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. This is a novel which is well-known throughout modern society. People are especially familiar with its main characters, Dr. Watson and Detective Sherlock Holmes. For instance, I know that Sherlock Holmes plays the violin, smokes a pipe, and has a brother named 'Mycroft'. Intuitively, however, I can imagine that

<sup>11</sup> World A is represented in Diagram 1a by '@.' This symbol is used to denote the actual world.

<sup>12</sup> Consider  $q$  to be the following statement: 'the grass is green.' It may be the case that the grass is also green in the given fiction and in the actual world; however, this case seems rather trivial. The more interesting case to consider would be one in which  $q$  is false at one or both of the accessible worlds, as it would then be pragmatic to speak of possibilities. For this to be the case, consider that  $q$  represents the statement, 'the grass is fuchsia.' This is true at  $w''$  and false at both world A and  $w'$  (consider the work of fiction in this example to be *Gone with the Wind*, which explicitly states in various places that the grass is green). In such a case it is particularly useful for us to be able to speak of possibilities of the grass being fuchsia, as it is not so at the actual world.

<sup>13</sup> I will later address the set of accessible worlds on the whole as a world series with reference to Diagram 1b.



Sherlock Holmes's brother's name was not 'Mycroft' but 'Henry.' According to Lewis, this would be nonsense to discuss, as the novel explicitly states that Holmes only has one brother and that his name was indeed 'Mycroft.' For Lewis, any derivation from the details explicitly stated in the fiction would remove a possible world from the subset of consideration when speaking about fictions. Thus, to speak of a possibility within the fiction would be absurd to Lewis. I, in contrast, argue that we *can* speak meaningfully about such possibilities in fiction. The manner in which we can do so is outlined in the following paragraphs.

We are in the actual world. Here, in the actual world, there is a novel entitled *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. We know of the story and it is told as fiction at the actual world. However, there are possible worlds in which the exact story of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is told as fact, as it occurs in these worlds. There may be an infinite number of possible worlds in which the plot is enacted and told as fact, but there need be only one for this theory to apply. All such worlds are fictionally accessible to the actual world, as all of the explicitly stated details of the fiction are expressed. Let us examine just one of the worlds which is fictionally accessible to the actual world,  $w'$ . There are, of course, an infinite number of worlds which are accessible to  $w'$ . There is one such possible world which is historically accessible to  $w'$ , the world of Sherlock Holmes. This is to say that the same events have transpired at both worlds to a certain point in history. Sherlock Holmes and his counterpart in the historically accessible world,  $w''$ , have lived the same lives and the same events have occurred, with one exception: Sherlock's brother's given name is 'Henry'. Everything else which happens in one world is mirrored by a counterpart in the other world. We now have a situation where there is a distinct logical truth at  $w''$ : "Sherlock Holmes's brother is named 'Henry.'" Given the relation of  $w''$  to  $w'$ , we can

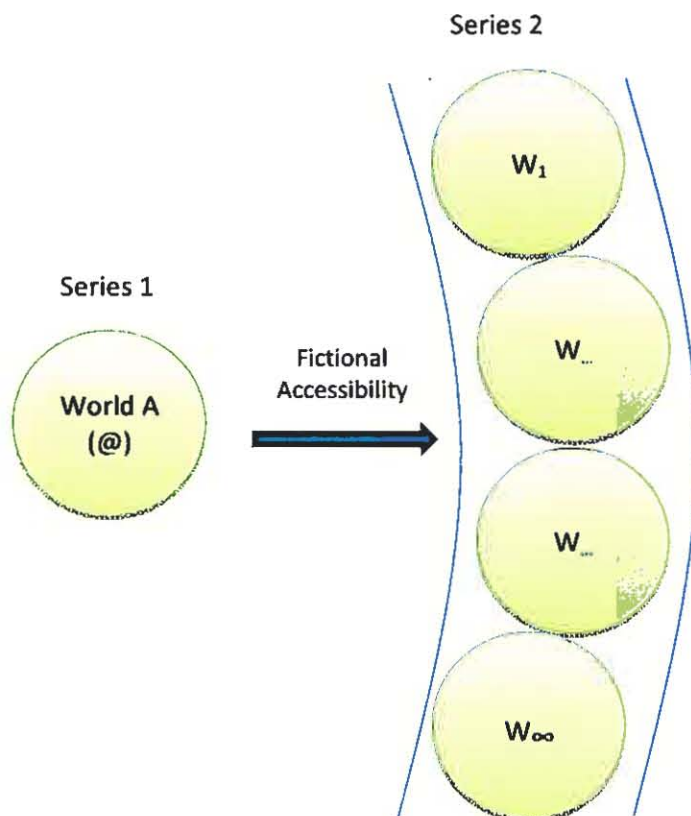
now deduce that at  $w'$  it is true that 'it is possible that "Sherlock Holmes's brother is named 'Henry.'"' Furthermore, as  $w'$  is accessible to the real world, we can truly say that 'it is possibly possible that "Sherlock Holmes's brother is named 'Henry.'"' Using this system, one can now speak logically about possibilities and counterfactuals in fiction.

These different accessibility relationships essentially provide us with distinguishable categories of possibilities. While all possibilities are simply statements which are true in at least one possible world, we may find it useful to differentiate between possibilities that are defined by the three types of accessibility relationships. Take, for instance, the case of fictional accessibility. Imagine that we wish to consider possible worlds which are fictionally accessible to the actual world via *Gone with the Wind*. Premises which are possible at the actual world due to their being true in these fictionally accessible worlds would qualify as 'fictionally possible' at the actual world. In a similar manner, worlds which are accessible in different ways can qualify as that respective sort of possibility—historically accessible worlds are 'historically possible,' whereas nomologically accessible worlds are 'nomologically [or physically] possible.' Such categorization of possibilities will prove useful in the discussion of possibilities in this system of modal realism.

It may also be useful to consider accessibility relationships on the whole. In Diagram 1a, I simplified the accessibility relationships to those between individual possible worlds, as only one possible world need exist in order for a relevant statement to be considered possible. However, often it will also be useful to reference the whole set of accessible worlds given a certain accessibility relationship. For example, I may want to discuss Sherlock Holmes: in this case, I would perhaps find it pragmatic to reference the potentially infinite number of possible

worlds which are fictionally accessible to the actual world. In this case, we would utilize world series. Imagine that we begin from the actual world. We then want to talk about all the possible worlds which are fictionally accessible via the given fiction: all of these possible worlds constitute one world series. Diagram 1b demonstrates world series with the use of a fictional accessibility relationship. Of course, this can be any type of accessibility relationship.

Diagram 1b:



Of course, there are an infinite number of possible worlds to be included in series 2, as denoted by the subscripts of the worlds in the series. While it simply is not feasible to model all the possible worlds in series 2, it is clear that we mean to reference the entire subset of worlds

defined by the particular accessibility relationship in question. Something which is particularly interesting about discussing series of worlds is that one can speak of necessary truths within the series.<sup>14</sup> Recall that for a world to be fictionally accessible to the actual world, everything explicitly stated in the fiction must be enacted in the worlds which are in the fictionally accessible world series 2. Thus, anything which is explicitly stated in a fiction is necessarily true within the fictionally accessible series 2. Additional statements may be necessarily true in a given world series by chance as well, if they are facts not explicitly defined in the fiction. The same applies to all accessibility relationships. If a world series is defined as being those possible worlds which are nomologically accessible to the actual world, then it is necessarily true that the acceleration due to gravity is  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ . For all worlds historically accessible (until say, January 1st of 2011) in a world series 2 to the actual world, it would be necessarily true that Robert E. Lee was the president of Washington College.

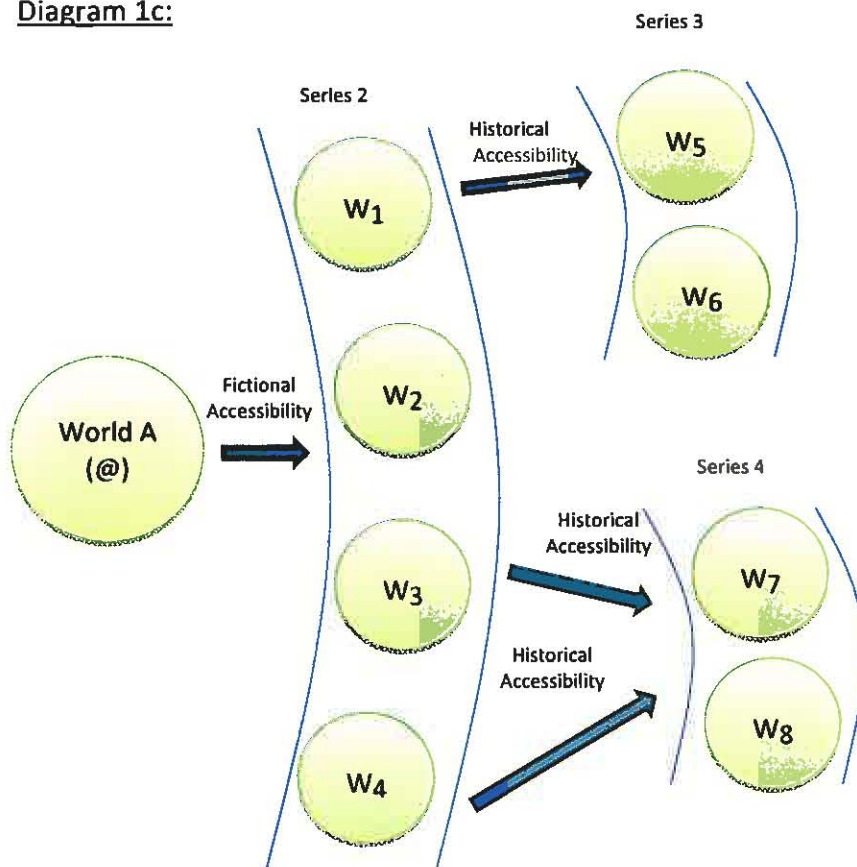
It is important to note that world series beyond series 2 become increasingly complicated, particularly in terms of modeling. Any further series will most generally not match up perfectly in terms of accessibility relationships with a series 2 set of worlds. Though facts explicitly stated in a fiction, in the case of a fictionally accessible world series 2, are necessarily true in all the worlds of the series, there are other statements which have different truth values at different worlds in the series—this would be true of any facts *not* explicitly stated in the fiction. Since it is not stated in *Gone With the Wind* when exactly Ashley's great grandfather was born, that fact may differ across worlds: in some series 2 worlds, he may have been born on May 21. In others it may be December 7<sup>th</sup> and in others still it may be March 7<sup>th</sup> or any

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis provides a similar assertion though not regarding fiction: see David Lewis's *On the Plurality of Worlds*.

other day, for that matter. What this means in terms of modeling accessibility relationships between world series is that series beyond series 2 will not line up perfectly with the entirety of series 2. In fact, there will potentially be an infinite number of series which are two accessibilities away from the actual world. Some of the series may be accessible via only one world in series 2, while others may be accessible by an infinite number of them. Diagram 1c provides a simplified model of second level accessibility relationships and the how series beyond series 2 would appear. For the sake of the model, there are only a few of the infinite number of possible worlds in each series represented.

**Diagram 1c:**



Let us now return to the semantics of this system. What does it mean in the vernacular to say that something is 'possibly possible?' The notion of something being 'possibly possible' is a function of the logical system and generally does not reflect how people would actually speak. It simply demonstrates how removed the possibility is from the actual world. So, something that is 'possible' is more closely related to the actual world in terms of the accessibility relationships than something that is 'possibly possible.' As to how people would generally speak of things that are logically possibly possible, it is more likely that people will elect to prefix the sentence and then simply indicate that the statement is merely 'possible.' For example, let us consider the statement "Sherlock Holmes is an only child." This would be true at some possible worlds which are historically accessible to the worlds which are in turn fictionally accessible to the actual world. At the fictionally accessible worlds, the statement is possible and at the actual world the statement is then possibly possible. For the purposes of everyday conversation, I would probably not say that it is 'possibly possible' that Sherlock Holmes was an only child. Instead, I would most likely say that "In the world of Sherlock Holmes, it is possible that Sherlock Holmes was an only child" or something to that effect. What this means is that from the vantage point of at least one possible world which is fictionally accessible to the actual world via *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, it is possible that Sherlock Holmes was an only child. This merely simplifies the semantics. Nonetheless, if I am right, then modifying and expanding Lewis's system offers us a powerful formal tool to make sense of fiction and fictional counterfactuals. I consider this next.

## 7. *The Utility of Being Able to Address Counterfactuals in Fiction*

This is all very fascinating, but is it useful? In fact, the application of this system of modal logic gives people a way to speak in a logically meaningful manner on any number of subjects. The most pragmatic application of the system is to the study of literature. A student's question "What would have happened if Elizabeth had not married Mr. Darcy?" is no longer nonsense, but a perfectly logical thought which can in turn be addressed with a variety of meaningful responses. Of course, these sorts of questions have been asked and answered in English classes for hundreds of years, but now there is a philosophical basis for understanding and justifying their meanings. Simple accessibility relationships à la Lewis also provide interesting insight on how to speak of counterfactuals in the fields of politics, history, business, biology, and in the end—everyday life. Possible worlds provide a logical way of explaining counterfactuals in any of these fields. What if Obama had lost the 2008 presidential election? What if mRNA malfunctions due to a mutation? What if I had worn polka dotted socks yesterday? Various combinations of accessibility relationships allow us to speak meaningfully about all of these topics.

Likewise, this framework also allows one to speaking meaningfully about a statement which Lewis deems to have no truth value within fiction. For Lewis, a statement such as "The number of hairs on Scarlett O'Hara's head at time t is even," has no truth value. He argues this based upon the notion that there is no *overarching* truth value which is the same at all worlds where the explicit details of the fiction are enacted. Essentially, there are some worlds where the plot is enacted that the abovementioned statement is true and others where it is false. As a result, Lewis abandons this statement as having no truth value.

Instead of saying that there is no truth value to the statement about fiction, we can make progress over Lewis by speaking about the truth of it in terms of possibilities through accessibility relationships between possible worlds and the actual world. For example, there are an infinite number of possible worlds which are fictionally accessible to the actual world through the given fiction, *Gone with the Wind* in this case. Of course, all of these worlds are worlds in which the explicit details of the novel's plot are enacted and told as fact. If it is the case that in at least one of these worlds it is true that Scarlett has an even number of hairs on her head at time  $t$ , then it is logical to say that at the actual world, it is possible that Scarlett has an even number of hairs on her head at time  $t$ . Likewise, there may be at least one other possible world which is fictionally accessible to the actual world in which there are an odd number of hairs on Scarlett's head at time  $t$ . If this is the case, then it is also logical from the vantage point of the actual world, to say that it is possible that Scarlett did not have an even number of hairs on her head at time  $t$ . However, if there is no possible world which is fictionally accessible to the actual world via the novel where it is true that Scarlett has an odd number of hairs on her head at time  $t$ , then it would be false to say that it is possible that Scarlett has an odd number of hairs on her head at time  $t$ .

On a final note, it may also be useful to use a shorthand notation when writing about accessibility relationships between multiple possible worlds. The shorthand is comprised of three components in a distinct order: the three symbols represent a possible world, the accessibility relationship between the two worlds, and the related possible world, respectively. The notation will always take a form similar to " $w_1Aw_2$ ." The " $w_1$ " and " $w_2$ " denote the two worlds in question, whereas the " $A$ " will denote the accessibility relationship. For example,



consider a possible world,  $w_2$ , and the actual world,  $w_1$ . Let us say that  $w_1$  is fictionally accessible to  $w_2$  via *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. One could simply write " $w_1Fw_2$ " to denote this relationship between worlds. The "F" denotes the fictional accessibility, while an "H" or an "N" would denote a historical or nomological accessibility relationship, respectively. This notation is particularly useful when writing about numerous relationships between a significant number of possible worlds or when examining worlds which are linked through long chains of accessibility relationships.

Diagram 2:

Fictional Accessibility Shorthand:  $w_1Fw_2$

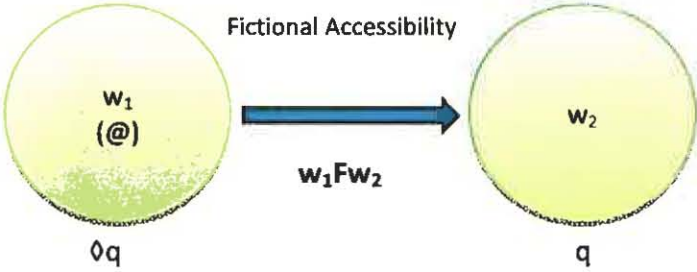
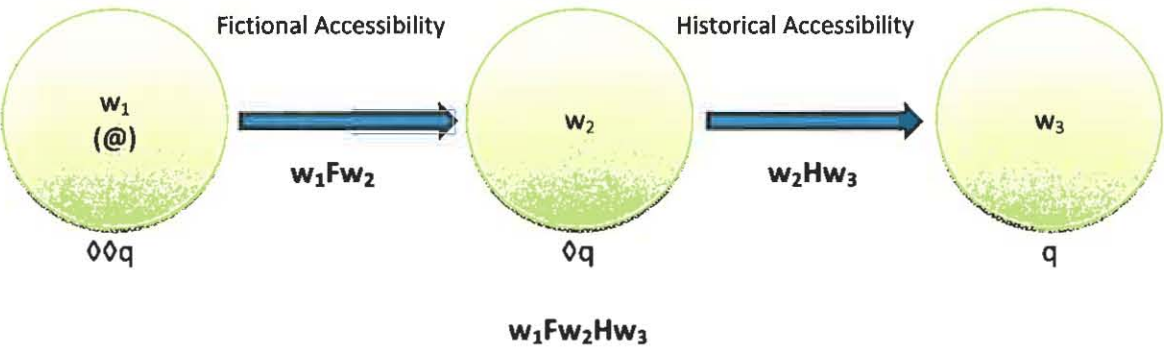


Diagram 3:

Fictional and Historical Accessibility Shorthand:  $w_1Fw_2Hw_3$



## 8. Objections

I will now consider various objections to my argument for accessibility relationships between possible worlds and the consequent explanation of counterfactuals in fiction which follows from this system of modal logic.

### 8.1. Possible worlds offend "the aesthetic sense of us who have a taste for desert landscapes."<sup>15</sup>

Here, Quine is objecting to both the perceived lack of identity conditions on possible objects and the sheer magnitude of possibilities to which one commits when one accepts the existence of any worlds outside the actual world. Quine continues the objection by discussing the problem of the 'possible fat man in the doorway.' Essentially, Quine worries that the possible man cannot be discussed because it is unclear whether the possible fat man is identical to the possible thin man and because of the potentially infinite number of various men that could be in the doorway. Since we are dealing in possibilities, rather than the actual, we do not know for certain which man may be there. In the end, Quine rejects the idea of possibilities due to their uncertain nature.<sup>x</sup>

The simple solution to Quine's objection is that in talking about possible worlds, we are able to stipulate which objects we are discussing, thus defining which man is in the doorway. While there are an infinite number of possible men in the doorway, I am able to pragmatically select which men and consequent possible worlds I am referencing. This system of modal logic is ultimately intended to provide a valid and useful logical framework for discussing counterfactuals. As Quine points out, it is generally not useful—and is perhaps even confusing—to consider every possibility in each situation. However, that is not what possible

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<sup>15</sup> See Quine: "On What There Is."

worlds are intended to do. Including them in a logical system allows one to speak of counterfactuals, which generally only pertain to a subset of possible worlds in which only one counterfactual is present. For example, consider the following statement: "I could have had pizza for lunch yesterday." In this case, we mean that "there is at least one possible world in which I had pizza for lunch yesterday." This is to say that we only necessarily are referencing one possible world, rather than allowing for an infinite number of possibilities, as Quine worries.

The more interesting case to consider is that of a possible fat man in the doorway. In this situation, it may still be the case that I am only referring to one or a limited number of possible worlds in my analysis of the situation. I would simply need to stipulate as much. However, it may indeed be the case that I am actually referring to an infinite number of different possible worlds and possible men in the doorway. Quine argues that this is absurd in that we cannot know which man is in the doorway. This is the wonderful thing about possibilities! They inherently rely on counterfactuals—they are contrary to how the actual world is. Quine will eventually argue against all counterfactuals on principle, as they are not true in actuality. Yet, this is not how language has developed. People want to be able to speak of counterfactuals because they are useful. Furthermore, most people have the intuition that things could have been a different way than they are. This is expressed in the development of languages around the world and across cultures. In fact, as Lewis notes, talk about possible worlds is useful across the board in philosophy. Ethicists, empiricists, and ontologists all quantify over possible worlds. For Quine's own reasons we should therefore say that they exist.

Further, even if we grant him the notion that possible worlds do not exist, we still are left with a very interesting and useful logical system which allow us a practical way to discuss counterfactuals in both fiction and actuality. In other words, we could abandon the modal realism and simply treat possible worlds as logical constructs: nothing else on my view would need to change.

*8.2. It makes no sense to ask about what a fictional character "would" have done. We should instead be asking about what the author of the fictional character "would have imagined," and this doesn't involve any analysis of fiction.*

Though the way the actual world is influences how an author writes his fiction, this does not impact what happens in a given fictional world. A fictional world would be the same regardless of what an author wrote, as none of the worlds are related causally. For example, imagine the possible world which is fictionally accessible via *Pride and Prejudice*, world x. Now, let us assume for the sake of this objection, that Jane Austen had chosen to have Elizabeth marry Mr. Collins as opposed to Mr. Darcy. Assuming this were true at the actual world, world x would no longer be in the subset of possible worlds which is fictionally accessible via *Pride and Prejudice*. Regardless, world x would remain exactly the same: it would be a world in which all the events happen to coincide with the events of the novel, yet Elizabeth marries Mr. Darcy. On the model of modal realism that I am adapting from Lewis, when an author writes any work of fiction, he is merely defining a subset of possible worlds which coincidentally happen to have the same set of occurrences. He is not changing any detail of any possible world. If any facet of a novel were to be different, we would simply refer to a different set of possible worlds when discussing it.

Speaking of what an author would have written is also useful—I agree. Doing so, however, would also utilize counterfactuals and as such, possible worlds through historical or nomological accessibility relationships. Interestingly, fictional accessibility is still useful in this case; the order of the accessibility relations is merely switched. Consider again the above stated example of *Pride and Prejudice*. Let us define the actual world as  $w_1$ , the fictionally accessible world as  $w_2$ , and a world historically accessible to  $w_2$  as  $w_3$ . The relationship between the three is as follows:  $w_1Fw_2Hw_3$ . In the case mentioned above,  $w_3$  becomes the world which is fictionally accessible to the *actual* world, while  $w_2$  is then historically accessible to  $w_3$ .

*8.3. The accessibility relations may turn out to go in both directions. Not only does the actual world affect what happens in a fictional world, because the author bases her stories on reality, but fictional worlds can affect what happens in the actual world since people who read fiction can be inspired by it to act.*

As described above, what happens in the actual world does not affect what happens in a fictional world; it merely alters the subset of possible worlds to which we refer when speaking of a given fiction. Likewise, fictional worlds do not affect what happens in the actual world for the same reason: none of the worlds are related causally or by space or time. So, it is impossible for them to influence one another. It is indeed true that people who read fiction may be inspired to act by it or to change various components of their behaviors or perceptions of the actual world due to the content of a novel. Fictionally accessible worlds do not affect a person in the actual world. What *is* affecting the person is their experience of reading the

novel. As such it is the *actual* novel's words that are at the heart of what is affecting the individual in actuality, not a possible world.

*8.4. Kripke has the worry that counterparts of people in other possible worlds are not the same individuals as in the actual world.<sup>xi</sup> How is it that we can talk meaningfully about possibilities when the individual in question only truly exists in the actual world?*

While I must admit that a counterpart is not the person in question in the actual world, counterparts do provide a useful way to speak of possibilities. Furthermore, a counterpart by definition is the object most similar to the actual one in question. Furthermore, if one so desires, one could opt for Kripke's essentialism and claim that we are dealing not with counterparts but with essentially identical objects across possible worlds. So, while properties of the counterpart may be different from that of the actual individual, the essence is still the same and the essence is what truly defines an individual.

*8.5 How are we to address impossibilities of fictions?*

For Lewis, a fiction would be impossible if and only if "there is no world where it is told as fact rather than fiction."<sup>xii</sup> He further argues that this could happen in one of two ways. First, the plot might simply be impossible. This would be the case if there was a blatant impossibility such as a character in a fantasy novel that had successfully drawn a round square, as this is logically impossible (though Lewis does flippantly discuss the potential existence of impossible worlds). It would also be the case if a plot itself were possible, but there was nobody in the plot who could possibly know or tell the events which had occurred. This second sort of impossibility creates impossible fictions for Lewis because his analyses require that the

plots of fictions be told as fact in the subset of possible worlds he would reference; however, there would be nobody who could ever relay the events as facts, thus making it impossible for the given fiction to satisfy the conditions Lewis places upon them.

I approach this issue in an entirely different manner from Lewis. I would argue that a world is impossible if and only if it contains a contradiction within its own system. To clarify, in my view a world which would be nomologically accessible to the actual world could not also be a world in which force was not a product of mass and acceleration, because this would entail a direct contradiction within the framework of the singular world. In contrast to Lewis, I would argue that some worlds which he would deem to be impossible are actually not, such as the fictionally accessible world in which a man is able to draw a round square. While drawing a round square would certainly contradict the logical system of the actual world, it may be the case that there are other possible worlds with different systems of logic. Perhaps there are not any worlds like this, but it seems absurd to say that anything expressed in the actual world is the way something must necessarily be in *all* the possible worlds.<sup>16</sup> I do not argue for the existence of such 'impossible worlds,' but rather that they may in fact be possible. Indeed, there would not be a contradiction *within* such a world, merely between worlds, which is of no consequence. In that event, we would address them as any other counterfactual.

### *8.6 Contradictions in Fiction*

How are we then to consider fictions which are not blatantly impossible, but where there are slight inconsistencies due to carelessness of the author? For example, an author might early in a book describe a character as having been born in one town, only later to

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<sup>16</sup> I will further address the issue of necessary truths in section 8.7.

identify her as having been born in another. Lewis would argue that these are still impossible fictions, but that we may offer what he called a revised version of the fiction in which the inconsistency is corrected. Different revised versions will differ as to the facts of the fiction, but they at least will each allow us to talk about a subset of possible worlds with respect to the fiction. However, Lewis further argues that there is still not going to be a fact of the matter with regard to the inconsistency. For example, Dr. Watson is wounded in battle and Doyle is inconsistent in reporting where the scar is located. In revised versions, there is no definite fact as to where the scar *is* located, but there can be facts about where it is *not* located as per the original fiction. In short, one cannot revise the fiction more than consistency demands.

I would agree with Lewis that various versions of a fiction are useful to employ in this situation. One must simply stipulate which version he is using. Where I differ from Lewis is my treatment of the inconsistency in the original work. For Lewis, there will never be a fact of the matter as to where Dr. Watson's scar is located, for example. I argue that there is a truth value to be attributed to this in different possible worlds. Consider that I stipulate that I want to reference all the possible worlds which are fictionally accessible to the actual world via the version of the Sherlock Holmes story in which the scar is located on Dr. Watson in a specific location (one of those noted in the fiction itself). Then it is true at all the possible worlds I am referencing that the scar is in location x. Likewise, there are other worlds which are accessible via different versions of the fiction in which the abovementioned statement is false. Ultimately, accessibility relationships are intended to be useful: they address the worlds we stipulate that they address, regardless of the exact details of any given fiction. The question then becomes one of mere semantics: are these revised version worlds still to be called fictionally accessible



to the actual world? My verdict is that they should. For all intents and purposes, they are accessible via a fiction, albeit an amended version of a fiction.

### *8.7. Necessary Truths*

There are more general objections that one might raise against my account of fiction. For example, one might question whether there exist any necessary truths if, as I have endorsed, there are an infinite number of possible worlds—including fictional ones—in which anything seems to be possible in relation to at least one of these worlds. (Again, for something to be necessarily true, it must be true at all possible worlds.)

While it would seem exceedingly unlikely that there exist any necessary truths in this system, there is the potential for them to persist. We would have no way of *knowing* that they exist, but an infinity of possible worlds certainly does not preclude their existence. It is important to note here that we cannot *know* that any of these worlds exist, but we discuss them because we find it useful to do so. Likewise, there may be some fact which happens to be consistent throughout all possible worlds and it would certainly be useful for us to be able to talk about this fact in terms of logical necessity. This system certainly does not preclude the existence of necessary truths.

### *9. Conclusion*

I began with the analysis of truth in fiction presented by David Lewis. By relying on a modified form of his modal realism, I presented an ontology of fiction. This ontology was useful in allowing me to develop a system of modal realism which supports a logical system in which it is justified to speak meaningfully about counterfactuals in fiction. We now have a way to

validate speaking of what a character in a given fiction *could have done*, as opposed to what they simply *did* in the work itself. This system even allows for us to speak meaningfully about worlds infinitely removed from the actual world, providing us with a rich and useful array of possibilities and counterfactuals, if we so choose to discuss them. I achieve this primarily by expanding upon and adding to the accessibility relationships asserted by Lewis. My development of 'fictional accessibility' allows for a much cleaner distinction as to which possible worlds we are referencing when we speak about fiction and most interestingly, when we speak about counterfactuals in fiction. Various accessibility relationships allow for different types of possibilities (e.g. 'fictional possibilities'), providing a useful semantic system for denoting further meaning. My system also provides for a simplified form of notation which describes the series of accessibility relationships between any number of linearly related possible worlds.

As is demonstrated in the objections section, whether one accepts or rejects my and Lewis's form of modal realism is largely irrelevant: the logical system still remains intact without the possible worlds necessarily existing. As Lewis notes, possible worlds are simply exceedingly useful objects to consider and as we cannot prove that they do not exist, it would behoove us to continue contemplating them. They are an integral part of our lives, as they allow us logical validation for speaking of possibilities. Otherwise, we would find ourselves in a position similar to what Quine espouses—we would not speak of possibilities at all since what happens in the actual world is the only fact that matters. Of course, Quine's claim that we should not talk about possibilities is absurd in terms of daily implementation. Quite simply, it is useful and

generally intuitive to talk about possibilities and as such, possible worlds find a pragmatic place in most people's way of thinking at least implicitly, if not explicitly.

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<sup>i</sup> David Lewis, "Modal Realism at Work: an Excerpt from *On The Plurality of Worlds*," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 499-511.

<sup>ii</sup> Lewis, *Modal Realism at Work*, 499.

<sup>iii</sup> That is because the sentence would expand to something like: "There exists a unique object with the property of being Scarlett O'Hara *and* there exists a unique object with the property of being Rhett Butler *and* the first object married the second." Bertrand Russell, "Descriptions," in *The Philosophy of Language: Fifth Edition*, ed. A.P. Martinich. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 239-245.

<sup>iv</sup> David Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," in *Philosophical Papers: Volume I*, ed. David Lewis. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 262.

<sup>v</sup> Lewis, *Truth in Fiction*, 268.

<sup>vi</sup> Lewis, *Truth in Fiction*, 268.

<sup>vii</sup> Lewis, *Truth in Fiction*, 269.

<sup>viii</sup> Lewis, *Truth in Fiction*, 270.

<sup>ix</sup> Lewis, *Truth in Fiction*, 273.

<sup>x</sup> W. V. Quine, "On What There Is," in *Review of Metaphysics*, 21-38.

<sup>xi</sup> Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity," in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 519-543.

<sup>xii</sup> Lewis, *Truth in Fiction*, 274.

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