

A Reconsidered Defense of Haecceitism Regarding Fictional Individuals

William G. Lycan

University of North Carolina and Victoria University of Wellington

In *Modality and Meaning* (1994, hereafter *M&M*), I defended several claims about fictional and otherwise nonactual individuals, notably (Ch. 6) the to say the least minority position that nonactual entities have haecceities and few if any other nontrivial essential properties; the descriptions used to introduce them do not produce or determine essences. I also proposed a particular theory of negative existentials (Ch. 7).

I made at least one passing reference to Saul Kripke's "Vacuous Names and Mythical Kinds," which I had heard him deliver at the 1972 Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy but which remained unpublished. I had heard of his subsequent John Locke Lectures, now *Reference and Existence* (1973/2012, hereafter *R&E*), but had never seen a copy. Now that I have been able to read them and some more recent related work by others on fictional characters, my positions need reviewing. In this paper I shall try to sort out what I got right and what may have been mistaken.

HAECCEITISM FOR NONACTUALS

1. Suppose Haecceitism holds for actual individuals (*M&M*, Ch. 5); a person *S* in nonactual world *w* is identical with the real Barack Obama at our world @ just in case *S* is Barack Obama, never mind what other properties *S* may have accidentally or essentially in *w*. We may even suppose that there is a world qualitatively identical to @ down to the last subatomic particle, but differs from it in that the identities of Obama and Newt Gingrich are switched (Wilson (1959), Chisholm (1967)); that would of course require that Obama and Gingrich had only a few essential properties that were not merely logical consequences of their haecceities—being human, perhaps, and possibly being male).¹

Haecceitism for actual individuals is one thing, tolerated by many, but for nonactuals it is quite another. I distinguished two opposing positions on nonactuals. First, the Conservative, according to which fictional and other merely possible individuals have qualitative essences—individuating properties that necessarily apply to at most one individual per world and that serve to pick out those respective individuals from world to world. Suppose, for example, that *Q* is a qualitative individual essence in world *w*, and that at another world *w'*, " $(\exists x)(Qx \ \& \ Fx)$ " holds for some property *F*; then we would say that the merely possible individual identified by *Q* in *w* has *F* in *w'*.

The opposing position is of course Haecceitism itself, in 1994 nearly unheard of for nonexistent. On that view, as in the case of actual things, if *P* is a fictional individual inhabiting nonactual world *w*, then *S* in a distinct nonactual world *w'* is identical with *P* iff *S* is *P*, no matter what other properties *S* may have accidentally or essentially in *w'*. As before, we may even suppose that there is a world qualitatively identical to *w* down to the last subatomic particle, but differs from it in that the identities of *P* and *S* are switched.

2. Even to those who are comfortable with Haecceitism regarding actual entities, Haecceitism for nonactuals at first seems crazy. Indeed, the Conservative line has much to

recommend it (*M&M*, pp. 110-11, 118-19). Briefly: (i) Unlike actual individuals, mere possibilities are not given or encountered or perceived or ostended, but specified, stipulated, or constructed out of existing conceptual material. (ii) In the end, the only way to specify a nonexistent is in effect to proffer a description. Nor does the description seem merely to fix reference (in Kripke's (1972a, 1980) phrase) to an independently identifiable individual. (iii) If nonactuals have haecceities and can differ numerically without differing qualitatively, then it ought to be possible for us to have a particular nonexistent in mind, or to have a propositional attitude toward that object, without having in mind a qualitative twin; yet that does not seem possible.² (iv) It is hard to maintain that a nonexistent can be an element of a singular proposition. An ordinary haecceity requires and introduces the actual existence of its owner. (v) Even if we can coherently think of a world just like this one save for the switching of Obama and Gingrich, we simply cannot distinguish two nonactual worlds which differ only in the switching of the alleged haecceities of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, or (Adams (1981)) two worlds which differ only in the switching of two nonactual electrons.³ (vi) It is not easy to say how an *unexemplified* haecceity differs from a Meinongian nonexistent possible (if we are concerned to avoid association with Meinong).

And, (vii) (here I will quote myself, because we shall revisit this argument below):

[C]onsider a single possible world containing two planets qualitatively identical to each other—say, each planet contains a replica of Conan Doyle's Victorian England and in particular a Sherlock Holmes figure. What conceivable ground could there be for choosing one of the two Holmes figures and deciding that it is the real Holmes while the other is only its qualitative duplicate? To attach a Holmesian haecceity to either figure would be entirely arbitrary. (p. 119)

3. Nonetheless I defended Haecceitism. My central argument was based on Alan McMichael's (1983a, 1983b) observation that not only fictional individuals but other mere possibilities have modal properties that take the form of iterated unrealized possibilities. Consider Mrs. Hudson, Sherlock Holmes' longsuffering landlady. Might she instead of being a landlady have gone into service in a great household, or become a poet, or emigrated to New Zealand and run a lucrative dairy farm?

Remember that fictional individuals do not have only the properties explicitly ascribed to them in their native works, but also those which may fairly be extrapolated or assumed on the basis of the text and its setting (Lewis (1978))⁴. Now, the original Mrs. Hudson is (in the story) a woman. Presumably she has knees, even though we never see them or hear of them and even though there is no specific circumference that they have. Similarly, she had parents, though we know nothing about them and can infer only a bit more. By the same token, she has the everyday sorts of modal properties that ordinary women have as well. Every actual working woman is such that she (metaphysically) might have pursued a different occupation, so doubtless the same is true of Mrs. Hudson.

But if we grant that she might have joined a different trade, it seems we are saying that at a world other than that described in Conan Doyle's stories, Mrs. Hudson does go

into dairy farming or whatever instead of keeping 221B Baker Street. And this conflicts with any assumption we might have made about a qualitative essence for her. If her being a landlady is not a reliable transworld identifying mark, the same can be said of any other feature attributed to her by Conan Doyle; and so it seems we must award her a haecceity, just as if she were actual.

The point is reinforced by a more general argument of McMichael's that is not tied to fiction but is based on plain real-world iterated modalities. Again (almost) indisputably, there might have been someone having such-and-such a property F that also had but might have lacked a further property G; for example, Mary Lycan and I might have had a foster daughter—distinct from our actual Jane and from our actual foster son Devin—who went into philosophy but who might instead have gone into arbitrage. Thus on anyone's possible-worlds semantics, fiction completely aside, it seems there is a world w containing the extra Lycan daughter and a further world w' also containing that very woman but at which she goes into arbitrage instead of philosophy—not because of any work of fiction but simply because the envisaged possibilities seem genuine, in the real world. Thus we are forced to consider transworld identity conditions for McMichael-individuals.⁵

For that matter, the foster daughter need not have been a foster daughter, nor ever have borne any interesting relation to the Lycans. Here no extrinsic essence is ready to hand; all we know about the foster daughter is that in w she is one, of ours, but her being one is not essential to her. So it seems we must award her an haecceity of some sort; we must grant that there is a property of *being N*, where N is a proper name of our imaginary foster daughter, that persists from world to world despite variation of all her ordinary features.

4. What of the foregoing seven arguments for the Conservative position? In *M&M* (Ch. 6, sec. 7) I rebutted them seriatim, but here I shall merely describe my general line, and then turn to the alternative position furnished by Kripke's *R&E*.

Most of the arguments stem from the fact that nonactual individuals stand in no causal relation to us and are known only by description. But it is possible to frame a Causal-Historical theory of referring, even for empty singular terms, that affords a finer-grained individuation scheme. Consider Mrs. Hudson again. At least part of what make her the person she is are the circumstances of her character's creation.⁶ We might say that a fictional person qualifies as being (=) Mrs. Hudson if and only if the relevant use of that person's name is connected in the right historical way with Conan Doyle's original act of writing (in the real world).

This idea accommodates intuitions about several sorts of cases: coincidental authorship, spinoffs, revisionary sequels and such (*M&M*, p. 120). As can readily be checked, it also takes care of arguments (i)-(iii) above. And I argued that, perhaps less easily, it also at least staves off (iv)-(vii). For example, regarding singular propositions ((iv)), the causal-historical element at least helps identify the particular haecceity corresponding to the relevant fictional character; and we do not have to grant that that haecceity exists in the absence of its owner, for at the relevant nonactual world, the owner does exist. (The presence of the haecceity and the existence of the owner there are one and the same state of affairs.)

As I said, we shall return to (vii), once we have introduced Kripke's *tertium quid*.

5. So far we have assumed that a fictional person such as Holmes or Mrs. Hudson is a possible individual residing in a nonactual world. Kripke rejects that assumption, on each of several grounds. First, naturally, he scouts Russellian description theories of fictional names, on grounds similar to those he had (1972) wielded against description theories generally. That alone would leave open Haecceitism, but, second (*R&E*, Lecture 2), he takes a radical position regarding the coinage and use of fictional names: that such names are not *really* names, but only pretend names, part of the author's overall pretense of narrating real events. Indeed, there is no need to offer a semantics for them, since they are not actually being used as names; that they have some nameish semantics or other is only part of the pretense.⁷ If they are not really names at all, then a fortiori they do not name possible individuals. Indeed, Kripke says, sentences containing them do not express propositions; there are only "pretend propositions" putatively expressed by the author's pretended factual assertions.

I shall discuss pretense theories below. For now I want to address a third argument of Kripke's, that is related to (vii) above; call it the "plurality argument." He writes (*R&E*, pp. xx29-30xx):

[W]hy shouldn't one say that such a situations [sic] is a situation in which Sherlock Holmes would have existed? I mean, someone might have performed these exploits, and Conan Doyle might have written of him. So why not suppose, as is being done by the modal logician, that Sherlock Holmes is some possible but not actual entity?

The problem is that of course it's possible that someone might have done things just like this. For example Charles Darwin, who lived in the appropriate period and country, might if he had decided to embark on another career have preformed exploits of precisely this kind; and so might Jack the Ripper, and many other people; let alone the fact that there might have been people, who weren't in fact born, born and doing these exploits. And Conan Doyle might have written about any one of them, had he chosen, and he might have called him 'Sherlock Holmes.' But which of these hypothetical people is supposed to be the one designated by the name 'Sherlock Holmes'? If one says that Sherlock Holmes might have existed and performed precisely these exploits, which hypothetical person is one talking about? Not some extra entity. On the contrary, the person who did these things might, as I say, have been Darwin; it might have been Jack the Ripper; it might have been anyone. None of these situations, I think, has a special title to be called '*the* situation in which Sherlock Holmes would have existed.'

The fact is that in introducing the name 'Sherlock Holmes' we name a particular man who would have done certain things, not just any old man who did these things. It will be part of this story of Sherlock Holmes that, of course, he may not be uniquely called forth to do these things. Holmes might remark to Watson that, had he not been such a great detective, his brother would have been equally good, but not wishing to be a rival, he went into another field. So 'Sherlock Holmes' doesn't designate the person, any old person, who did these things: it's supposed to be a

name of a unique man. And there is no unique man being named, nor is there any possible man being named here.

Spoken like a good Haecceitist, up to the concluding pair of sentences; the “Holmes” role could have been occupied by any number of indisputably different men. And Kripke could also have invoked the McMichael argument. But as before, his purpose is to reject Haecceitism as well as the Conservative position: “there is no unique man being named.” If ‘Holmes’ does not designate just any old person who should fit the stereotype, but it does not designate a particular person or haecceity either, then it simply does not designate, not even a possible man. To put the thesis shockingly, it is not and was never possible for Holmes to have existed.⁸

That thesis can be downplayed, and at the same time it can be up-played. To downplay it, notice Kripke grants that there are countless possible worlds answering perfectly to the Conan Doyle canon, in each of which the detective is named ‘Sherlock Holmes.’ Of course there are. What is denied is just that any of those figures would *be Holmes* in whatever sense attaches to that term in our present actual language.⁹ Perhaps that is not a large issue.

But to make more of it: If Holmes is not a possible being, is he then an impossible one? Kripke does maintain that it is *not possible* that Holmes ever have existed, poor fellow. Those of us who believe that there are impossible worlds in just as robust a sense as that in which there are merely possible ones (however robust or not that sense may be)¹⁰ would at first conclude that Holmes is an impossible individual and inhabits each of a number of impossible worlds. Yet it seems Kripke’s argument if sound would iterate to impossible worlds. (The impossibilist could simply insist that in such a world, the individual in question would just both be Holmes and not be Holmes, but that seems to miss Kripke’s point, which is that no nonactual *of any sort* could genuinely be Holmes.) If Holmes inhabits neither any possible world nor any impossible world, “he” inhabits no world of any sort at all, and that is Kripke’s claim—supported independently, of course, by his pretense view.

6. But now it is time to see whether my reply to argument (vii) extends to cover Kripke’s plurality argument as well. It ran:

Here again we rely on Kripke’s [1972] seemingly justified penchant for stipulation of the identities of individuals at other worlds. Which “Holmes” really is Holmes depends on our stipulation in the real world, provided that our stipulative act is connected in the right historical way with Conan Doyle’s writing of the Holmes stories.... If our stipulative act is *not* connected in that way with Conan Doyle’s fictive act, then we cannot attach Holmes’ haecceity to either of the “Holmes”’s, and we are not describing a world containing the authentic Sherlock Holmes at all.

I had envisaged a single world incorporating two molecularly identical Doylean planets. To say which of the two “Holmes” figures is Holmes at that world, I maintain I am free to stipulate. Compare (cf. Kripke (1972, 1980)): Newt Gingrich might have been an acrobat, in particular one of a troupe called the Flying Republicans. Suppose there are two molecularly indistinguishable worlds, in each of which the Republicans are sitting on a circus bench awaiting their cue. Which acrobat in which of the worlds is Gingrich? The

answer is that we are free to stipulate. In one world, Gingrich is the second man from the left end of the bench, while in the other, he is the third. (In this, Kripke goes against the “telescope” view widely attributed to Lewis (1986), the idea that to identify an individual at another possible world we should have to look at that world as through a telescope and accomplish our identification solely on the basis of the qualitative properties we detect there.) So too, I can stipulate which “Holmes” figure in the double-Doylean world is Holmes, and which is merely his molecular twin.

Will my stipulatory model extrapolate to Kripke’s *R&E* plurality scenario, that involves two worlds? The task is to pick out and discuss a world containing a nonactual person who is the authentic Holmes. According to my model, I need only to be in a referential state of mind that is (“in the right way”) causally-historically descended from Conan Doyle’s act of introducing the Holmes character, and stipulate that the world I am about to talk about is one containing Holmes himself, not Darwin or Jack the Ripper or, more to the point, any nonexistent other than the authentic Holmes.

An immediate objection would be that, while we are indeed free to offer stipulations about Newt Gingrich’s locations in various nonactual worlds (so long as those worlds are reasonably supposed to be possible), that is because we already have a reality-supported practice of referring to the actual Gingrich; we have no such practice of referring to Holmes, as Holmes is no denizen of our world @. –But, I reply, we do have a reality-supported practice of using the name ‘Holmes,’ that which derives by causal-historical chain from Conan Doyle’s introducing of that name.

Kripke further objects, “None of these situations, I think, has a special title to be called ‘*the* situation in which Sherlock Holmes would have existed.’” From the telescope point of view, that is so, but I think only from the telescope point of view. In the same vein, one could say of my Flying Republican worlds that neither has a special title to be that in which Gingrich is second from the left as opposed to third, or vice versa; but no special title is needed, so long as a proper stipulation can distinguish the two possibilities at the outset.

Would my Holmes stipulation be a proper one? Not, of course, if the appropriately shaped causal-historical chain were not in place; but assuming it is in place, is there a further objection? I daresay, but I do not see it offhand.

7. A ramified plurality argument for Kripke’s position might be based on the idea attributed to him (1972, 1980) that a person’s genetic code is that person’s distinctive essence.¹¹ The “Holmes” figures in all the different Doylean worlds would all have different genetic codes, hence (according to the present idea) cannot be the same person across worlds; and as always none is identical with any actual person. Yet as before, it would be entirely arbitrary to pick one of the many genetic codes and insist that it to the exclusion of the others was that of the authentic Holmes; therefore none of the figures is the authentic Holmes, and there is no such individual.

An obvious ground on which to reject this ramified argument is simply to deny the genetic-essentialist premise. I know of no good argument for it, and, after all, identical twins and clones are cases in which numerically distinct people share the (as near as matters) same genetic code. But like the original plurality argument, the ramified version also seems to succumb to the method of stipulation. As before, why may I not

simply stipulate that I am about to describe a world containing Sherlock Holmes, and that in that world he has such-and-such a genetic code? (Even if we granted genetic essentialism, it would follow only that the “Holmes” figures who do not share that code are not Holmes.)

If my model can save Haecceitism from Kripke’s plurality objections, then his case against Haecceitism must rest entirely on his pretense view.

PRETENSE THEORIES

8. Here is Kripke’s first statement of the view (1972b/2012).

What happens in the case of a work of fiction? A work of fiction, generally speaking of course, is a pretense that what is happening in the story is really going on. To write a work of fiction is to imagine—spin a certain romance, say—that there really is a Sherlock Holmes, that the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ us used in this story really refers to some man, Sherlock Holmes, and so on. It is therefore presumably part of the pretense of the story that the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is really a name and really has the ordinary semantic function of names. If one mistakenly believed the name to be non-empty rather than empty, it would be part of the mistake that this is a name having the ordinary semantic function of names. This principle I have roughly stated here, just as applied to works of fiction, we can call the pretense principle. What goes on in a work of fiction is a pretense that the actual conditions obtain. (p. 58)¹²

As a characterization of many kinds of mainstream fiction, this is hard to fault.¹³ But we must ask how far it generalizes, in each of two directions. First, does it show that *every* putative use of a fictional name is only a pretend use, and that we need say nothing semantical about such names? Second, does it extrapolate to empty names of other sorts?

On the first point, Kripke (1973/2012) begins with a bold, sweeping statement:

The existence of, say, fiction is a powerful argument for absolutely nothing: it cannot settle the question as between the Russellian theory and the Millian theory, nor can it settle the question between Mill’s theory and any other theory. It couldn’t settle anything at all. (p. xx15xx)

Here again, the idea is that just as the fictional names are only pretend names, they have only a pretend semantics and it is left to the reader’s imagination; we can infer nothing about the semantics of actual names. That is why fictional names show nothing about names.

9. In *M&M* I acknowledged the view that fictional individuals are not possible and do not inhabit worlds, but without having considered the pretense argument. I gave three brisk reasons for rejecting it (p. 112): (a) Fictional individuals have always been used as paradigmatic examples by partisans of nonexistent possibles. (b) Novels and stories generally seem to say things that could have been true even though they are not; so if possible-worlds semantics constitutes our standard device for handling modal statements, then sentences occurring in fictions are true at worlds other than our own and the fictional individuals they mention exist at those worlds. (c) Fictional individuals have modal properties, and that too seems to show that fictional individuals somehow inhabit worlds.

But a pretense theorist can easily knock those points aside. In reverse order: (c) is false; that Mrs. Hudson had modal properties is just part of the pretense, as in the case of her other alleged properties. (b) is true if we ignore fictional uses of names; as noted above, of course there are worlds containing Holmes figures named 'Holmes' that conform perfectly to the stories. But it does not follow that any denizen of any of those worlds is Holmes or Mrs. Hudson. (a) Theorists who have offered Holmes, Pegasus, Hamlet et al. as paradigm cases of nonexistent possibles have just been wrong, understandably misled by the undisputed possibility of the Doylean worlds just mentioned. The pretense view is not even scratched by my *M&M* arguments.¹⁴

10. Kripke's bold, sweeping statement bid to clear the air. But in Lecture 3 he takes it back, realizing that not every use of a fictional name is safely impacted within the fiction. First and foremost, literary critics and commentators talk about fictional *characters* as such and in their own right:

Other examples which might give us trouble are these. First kind of example: 'Hamlet was a fictional character.' Second kind of example: 'Hitler admired Iago' or 'admired Siegfried' - actually the first is probably more realistic, though the second more appropriate to character -; 'this literary critic admires Desdemona, and despises Iago'; 'the Greeks worshipped Zeus'; and so on. That's the second kind of example, a sort of relational intentional predicate with an empty name in object position. (p. xx44xx)

These sentences have two important features. (i) They are or purport to express real-world truths, not pretend truths. Hamlet really was, and is, a fictional character. A literary critic really does admire Desdemona. (It is not true *in the play* that Hamlet is fictional, nor in *Othello* that any literary critic so much as exists.) (ii) Accordingly, such sentences do not yield to a "story operator" approach.

Kripke's solution:

Everything seems to me to favor attributing to ordinary language an ontology of fictional entities, such as fictional characters, with respect to which ordinary language has the full apparatus of quantification and identity. I say 'full apparatus': well, we may not be able to make every possible statement; but both notions, at any rate, apply to these entities. 'Ah,' so it's said, 'so you agree with Meinong after all! There are entities which have only a secondary kind of existence.' No, I don't mean that. I mean that there are certain fictional characters in the actual world, right here in the ordinary concrete world. (p. xx50xx)

A fictional character, then, is in some sense an abstract entity. It exists in virtue of more concrete activities of telling stories, writing plays, writing novels and so on, under criteria which I won't try to state precisely, but which should have their own obvious intuitive character. It is an abstract entity which exists in virtue of more concrete activities the same way that a nation is an abstract entity which exists in virtue of concrete relations between people. (p. xx52xx)

So a fictional character is an actual though abstract literary entity, ontologically on a par with a story or a novel itself.¹⁵ In one sense characters are proper constituents of novels and stories, and are open to description and evaluation of the same sorts as are their containing works themselves: A character may be admired by this critic or that one, well-drawn or a two-dimensional cardboard pinup, vital or inessential to the plot, more ingeniously or less creatively conceived than Conan Doyle's detective, a faithful realization of the author's original intention or an unexpectedly evolved departure, popular or unpopular with readers, and the like. Such things cannot (except metaphorically) be said of real flesh-and-blood people; no more can they be said of fictional flesh-and-blood people.

(Lest he mar his pretense picture, Kripke is at pains to deny that the author *coins* a name for her/his own fictional character. As always, the author coins nothing, but only pretends to. The real-world use of a fictional name to designate a fictional character is an analogical spinoff creating a paronymous use, or rather what would be a paronymous use had the author's original inscribing of the name been a use.

One might say here that language does allow a certain grammatical transformation. While on one level a name such as 'Hamlet' might be said to designate nothing, or only to pretend to designate something, one also now speaks of it as designating a fictional character. (p. xx52xx)

The introduction of the ontology of fictional characters is in some sense a derivative or extended use of language, at least on the picture that I was presenting. When one originally introduces the term 'Hamlet' there is merely a pretense of reference, and there is no referent, period. But then language, so to speak, supplies a referent by inventing this ontology of fictional characters,... (p. xx58xx))

Kripke's distinction has become standard,¹⁶ and it is both intuitive and ontologically helpful. Kripke also points out insightfully that whether a fictional *character* exists in its fiction may be controversial (p. xx43xx): Shakespeare scholars may disagree about whether Hamlet's father's ghost really is a character in the play or is (in the play) merely a figment. Gonzago, the victim in the play-within-the-play, is *not* a character in Hamlet, but only in *The Murder of Gonzago* (which play is itself a character in *Hamlet* but only that).

11. Notice that Kripke's distinction gives rise to ambiguities: "Hitler admired Iago"—Does that mean that Hitler admired the *character*, as conceived and constructed by Shakespeare and manifesting the Bard's deep understanding of human nature, or does it mean that Hitler admired Iago himself, the duplicitous person portrayed in the play? "Holmes was created by Conan Doyle"—The character was, but Holmes the man was brought into existence by his parents in the traditional way. "Holmes was a better detective than Charles Paris"—That could mean, a better-drawn fictional detective *figure* than Simon Brett's detective character (and is open to dispute); or it could be a direct and indisputable comparison of prowess as between the two flesh-and-blood detectives as they are shown in the respective fictions.¹⁷

It would be nice for the pretense theorist if all extra-fictional references to fictional beings could be taken as naming characters as opposed to fictional people or other individuals. But no such luck. Brock (2002) divides the relevant sentences into three

groups: “fictional statements,” meaning, reports on what holds in the relevant fiction (e.g., “Holmes lived in Baker Street,” “Othello was jealous,” “Lear very foolishly tried to divest himself of all his kingly responsibilities while retaining his kingly prerogatives”); “critical statements,” i.e., candidates for being truths about fictional characters in the Kripke-van Inwagen sense; and “existential statements” positive and negative. But if we look at his examples of critical statements, we find not merely ambiguous ones as above, but anomalous cases, in that they are real-world true but *cannot* be taken to be about characters as opposed to people: “Holmes would not have needed tapes to get the goods on Nixon” (Lewis (1978)); “Anna Karenina is less neurotic than is Katerina Ivanovna” (Howell (1979)); “Things would be better if certain politicians who (unfortunately) exist only in fiction, were running this country instead of the ones we now have” (Parsons (1980)). No abstract entity can accomplish legal feats (with or without tapes), or is neurotic to any degree, or could run the country at all.¹⁸

It gets worse. As Kripke himself anticipates, there is a problem about fictional statements. He is at first inclined to think they are true in virtue of tacit story operators, but as a pretense theorist he is not entitled to hold that view. For according to him, fictional statements outside the scope of story operators do not express propositions; there is nothing to be true even “in the story,” and so the application of a story operator would not help. If ‘Hamlet’ is not a name to begin with and leaves a hole in any would-be proposition its containing sentence purports to express, then “In the play, Hamlet asks Ophelia to pray for him” does not express a proposition either. Note that that is not a problem only about fictional statements themselves; it affects “metafictional” statements such as the one just mentioned, that incorporate story operators and so are intuitively just plain, real-world true.

(For that matter, what would be the semantics of the story operator itself? Normally we should expect that “In the story, P” is true iff P is true at every world consistent with the story.)

12. Kripke has several options. One is to understand the utterer of a fictional statement as just falling in with the pretense; the sentence uttered does not after all express a proposition, much less have a literal truth-value, though in the context of the pretense game we can count it as “true,” since of course it is pretend-true. A little more ambitiously, Kripke appeals to an extended use of predicates applying to names of fictional characters. Using the character name, one cannot literally say “Othello was jealous,” because an abstract entity is not capable of emotion and has no behavioral dispositions. But, Kripke says, we can analogically stretch the predicate “was jealous” to incorporate a story operator, so that it means “was, in the story, jealous”—or rather, since it is being applied to the name of an abstract entity, it means something more like “is described in the story as being jealous” (p. xx53xx).¹⁹

That “described in” relation would need some unpacking. It is not that the abstract entity is literally described in the story (at all). Nor is it that the fictional being named in the story corresponds to the abstract entity, since on Kripke’s view there is no such being whatever. Kripke’s present idea is to finesse the problem of the utterly nonreferring name by attaching the story operator to the predicate; but predicates, even intensionally enhanced ones, still have to attach to subjects if they are to figure in meaningful sentences. And the only subject candidate Kripke has allowed us is the fictional character.

For that reason I suggest that he backtrack to the “falling in” view, according to which the utterer of a fictional statement participates in the pretense and so her-/himself expresses only pretend propositions. As before, it would be perfectly appropriate for interlocutors to respond “That’s true,” or for that matter “That’s false,” *so long as* they too are merely playing the game. This applies to grade-school pupils taking true-false tests (p. xx43xx).

How plausible is that “falling in” view? For now I do not see how it can be refuted, but I think it is impugned by an argument I shall produce below (sec. 15). It should not be confused, however, with any version of the story operator position, nor allowed to draw specious support from the undoubted plausibility of that position. As Kripke himself emphasizes, it is not a semantic proposal.

13. But now to existential statements. Positive ones do not raise much of an issue. Of course there exist fictional characters, the abstract entities. But what of a citizen who believed (as some did) that Sherlock Holmes, the person, was a real detective working in London, and who would have asserted, “Holmes really exists”? On Kripke’s view, that person’s belief and assertion lacked truth-value and indeed was not propositional at all. That is counterintuitive, but it is salvaged by the fact that the person has the closely associated false beliefs—that there is a great detective named ‘Holmes’ who did all the canonical things as faithfully reported by Dr. Watson. (Whoops, no, strike that last phrase: No belief about “Watson” is to be propositional either.)

The big problem is negative existentials—as Kripke is the first to grant, in Lecture 6:

The thing which has most boggled people, and confuses me still to this day, is how to analyze a singular negative existential statement. The problem becomes more acute rather than less so on my view. Why do I say that? The original problem is: what can someone mean when he says that Sherlock Holmes does not exist? Is he talking of a definite thing, and saying of it that it doesn’t exist? The reason the problem becomes somewhat more acute on my view is that it is universally regarded in the literature as unproblematic to make a negative existential statement using a predicate. (p. xx104xx)

But here Kripke misidentifies the reason. Never mind natural-kind terms or other predicates; what could someone mean in saying “Holmes does not exist,” if ‘Holmes’ is a name? Not that the fictional character does not exist, because the fictional character obviously does. But neither on the story-operator analysis nor on the pretense theory is there anything left to mean: In the stories, Holmes does exist, and if we fall in with the pretense, we must say “Of course Holmes exists.”

There are many theories of negative existentials, and a great virtue of Russell’s Theory of Descriptions was that it afforded an initially plausible one; too bad *R&E* refuted it (Lecture 1). I believe my own theory (*M&M*, Ch. 7) is the least bad of the lot, but space does not permit my touting it here. I am concerned only to argue that the pretense view is indeed without resources as regards negative existentials.

14. Kripke continues his discussion by admitting a liability additional to the one just noted.

It seems that in some sense the analysis of a singular existence statement will depend on whether that statement is true. And this, of course, seems in and of itself to be absolutely intolerable: the analysis of a statement should not depend on its truth value; or so at any rate might be our prejudice.
(p. xx106xx)

Yes, bad start. If not absolutely intolerable, to be avoided if at all possible. (The reason the analysis depends on actual truth-value is that a false negative existential regarding an actual individual, say “Napoleon never existed,” expresses a singular proposition about its subject, while a true negative existential containing an empty name as usual expresses no proposition at all.)

Kripke adverts to “that”-clauses containing fictional names, such as belief complements. He suggests that what such believers believe is that *there is* a true proposition about (e.g.) Holmes. Similarly for the Vulcan-friendly astronomer (p. xx112xx); Kripke adds, “[I]n ‘The astronomer believes that there is a [true] proposition about Vulcan, saying of Vulcan that it is red’ ‘about Vulcan’ is a special sort of quasi-intentional use.” The astronomer is wrong because there is no such proposition. And, not knowing whether Holmes or Vulcan exists, a skeptic can still believe that there is no relevant true proposition, leaving it open whether there is a false proposition or none at all. (Never mind for now that ‘Vulcan’ as used by the astronomer was not a fictional name; I shall return to this in the next section.)

Accordingly (p. xx113xx), to believe the positive existential is to believe that there is a true proposition that Holmes or that Vulcan exists. (But in reality, to believe that Obama exists is just to believe of Obama that he exists—nothing about propositions.) And to believe the true negative existential is to believe that there is no true proposition that Holmes, or that Vulcan, exists. “[W]e lump the two cases [false proposition and no proposition] together, and it’s our ability to do so which gives the negative existential its use” (p. xx114xx).

But this is puzzling, because Kripke is still trafficking in “that”-clauses. His calling his locution “a special sort of quasi-intentional use” does not help, because ‘Holmes’ and ‘Vulcan’ are still supposed to be only pretend names, not names. If they are not names, then of course there is no proposition “that Holmes exists” or “that Vulcan exists,” but there is also no proposition that there is no such proposition, either, and so still nothing for any wielder of a negative existential to believe.²⁰ This will not do.²¹

15. The example of ‘Vulcan’ as juxtaposed with that of ‘Holmes’ is unsettling, because ‘Vulcan’ was not a fictional name. Those who posited a planet called that, in order to explain perturbations in the orbit of Mercury, were not writing fiction and were not engaging in pretense of any sort; they were theorizing, and they certainly did assert the (actual) existence of Vulcan, and they meant what they said, even though they were mistaken. Kripke writes (p. xx21xx):

Here the astronomers were, on my view, under a mistaken impression that they had named a planet when they introduced the name; and when they

uttered sentences containing the name ‘Vulcan’ it was a *mistake* to suppose that they expressed propositions, rather than a case of pretense. And most of what I say about pretense, though not perhaps all (you can check it out for yourselves), will apply *mutatis mutandis* with the term ‘mistake’ in place of ‘pretense.’

Let us indeed check it out for ourselves. According to the pretense theorist, (i) the fiction writer does not actually use the names s/he makes up; (ii) s/he asserts nothing, at least when pseudo-using a fictional name; and (iii) there is no need to give a semantics for fictional names, because they answer only to a pretend semantics. But none of these things is true of ‘Vulcan’. Kripke may have his own reason for denying that sentences containing ‘Vulcan’ express propositions, but it cannot be that the sentences were not really used to make genuine assertions, and he cannot say that they need no semantics. That the astronomers were mistaken does not even suggest either of those things.²²

There is a spectrum of cases running between pure deliberate fiction and erroneous beliefs. (i) Myths: presumed false, but not just made up by a single author. (ii) Legends: like myths but not so strongly presumed false; in some cases, such as those of Moses, King Arthur and Robin Hood, we do not know whether the stories (true or false) are about a single real person. (iii) Sometimes we are sure that a name has at least one real-world referent, but we are not sure that only one person answers to it. I am told it is now controversial whether the musical works attributed to Josquin des Prez were all written by him; “Josquin” may be ambiguous. (iv) Posits, like Vulcan, which may at the time be quite confident. (v) Hallucinatory individuals, such as the friend character “Charles” played by Paul Bettany in the movie *A Beautiful Mind*.²³ –I would say that the pretense theory applies at most to the first of those.

That of course does not show that the theory is not true of deliberate fiction. It does show that the theory is no solution to the general problem of empty names.

16. I argued that my stipulatory model saves Haecceitism about fictional characters from Kripke’s plurality objections, and that his case against Haecceitism must therefore rest entirely on his pretense view. But the pretense view does not work either. Haecceitism survives.

References

- Adams, R.M. (1981). "Actualism and Thisness," *Synthese* 49: 3-41.
- Berger, A. (2002). *Terms and Truth*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Björman Pautz, A. (2008). "Fictional Coreference as a Problem for the Pretense Theory," *Philosophical Studies* 141: 147-56.
- Brock, S. (2002). "Fictionalism about Fictional Characters," *Noûs* 36: 1-21.
- Carney, J.D. (1977). "Fictional Names," *Philosophical Studies* 32: 383-91.
- Chisholm, R.M. (1967). "Identity through Possible Worlds: Some Questions," *Noûs* 1: 1-8.
- Currie, G. (1986). "Fictional Names," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 66: 471-88.
- Donnellan, K. (1974). "Speaking of Nothing," *Philosophical Review* 83: 3-32.
- Fine, K. (1984). Critical review of Parsons' *Non-Existent Objects*. *Philosophical Studies* 45: 95-142.
- Frege, G. (1897). "Logic," in *Posthumous Writings*, ed. and trans. H. Hermes, F. Kambartel, and F. Kaulbach. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Howell, R. (1979). "Fictional Objects: How They Are and How they Aren't," *Poetica* 8: 129-77.
- Kaplan, D. (1973). "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice," in J. Hintikka, J. Moravcsik and P. Suppes (eds.), *Approaches to Natural Language*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Kraut, R. (1979). "Attitudes and Their Objects," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8: 197-217.
- Kripke, S.A. (1972a). "Naming and Necessity," in D. Davidson and G. Harman (eds.), *Semantics of Natural Language*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Kripke, S.A. (1972b/2012). "Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities," in Kripke (2012). (Originally delivered at the 1972 Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy under the title "Vacuous Names and Mythical Kinds.")
- Kripke, S.A. (1973/2012). *Reference and Existence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kripke, S.A. (1980). *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kripke, S.A. (2012). *Philosophical Troubles: Collected Papers, Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kroon, F. (1994). "Make-Believe and Fictional Reference," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52: 207-14.
- Lewis, D.K. (1978). "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15: 37-46.
- Lewis, D.K. (1986). *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Lycan, W.G. (1994). *Modality and Meaning*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers (Studies in Linguistics and Philosophy series).
- Martinich, A.P., and A. Stroll (2007). *Much Ado about Nonexistence*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- McGinn, C. (1976). "On the Necessity of Origin," *Journal of Philosophy* 73: 127-35.
- McMichael, A. (1983a). "A Problem for Actualism About Possible Worlds," *Philosophical Review* 92: 49-66.
- McMichael, A. (1983b). "A New Actualist Modal Semantics," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 12: 73-99.
- Parsons, T. (1980). *Nonexistent Objects*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

- Proudfoot, D. (2006). "Possible Worlds Semantics and Fiction," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 35: 9-40.
- Salmon, N. (2011). "Fiction, Myth, and Reality," in A. Berger (ed.), *Saul Kripke*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwayder, D. (1976). "Reflections on Kripke," in A.F. MacKay and D.D. Merrill (eds.), *Issues in the Philosophy of Language*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Searle, J. (1958). "Proper Names," *Mind* 67: 166-73.
- Segal, G.M.A. (2004). "Reference, Causal Powers, Externalist Intuitions, and Unicorns," in R. Schantz (ed.), *The Externalist Challenge*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Thomasson, A. (1999). *Fiction and Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Inwagen, P. (1977). "Creatures of Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14: 299-308.
- Walton, K. (1978). "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy* 75: 5-27.
- Walton, K. (1990). *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wiggins, D. (1967). *Identity and Spatiotemporal Continuity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Wilson, N.L. (1959). "Substances without Substrata," *Review of Metaphysics* 12: 521-39.
- Yagisawa, T. (2009). "Possible Objects," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2009 Edition)*, E.N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/possible-objects/>>.

Footnotes

¹ This second supposition is stronger in spirit than the first formulation (whether it is stronger in letter depends on one's view of properties). From the fact that Obama might have lacked any of his familiar properties and still have been Obama, it does not follow that he could have lacked all or even most of them. Searle (1958) and Wiggins (1967) insisted that an individual must preserve at least a vague preponderance of its familiar properties overall; at some imprecise point in the switching process, Obama would cease to be Obama and Gingrich would cease to be Gingrich. I rebut that contention in *M&M* (pp. 97-99).

² Kraut (1979, p. 213) notes the peculiarity of someone's claiming to want *Pegasus* but denying that s/he would be satisfied by just any winged horse that was ridden by Bellerophon etc. etc.

³ Currie (1986) makes the point in terms of Ramsey sentences, claiming that to grasp a Ramsification of a story is "all there is to understanding" the story.

⁴ For a great and very sophisticated improvement on Lewis' own view, see Proudfoot (2006).

⁵ McMichael offered this consideration as an argument against modal actualism in particular, as if it did not apply to the Meinongian or Lewisian "possibilist" who believes that there are nonactual possibilities in a robust and concrete sense. Yagisawa (2009) expands on this theme, calling the objection the "nesting problem" for actualism and arguing specifically that Lewis' (1986) concretist view is not subject to it. I disagree, and argued precognitively that Lewis is indeed subject to it (*M&M*, p. 131n16).

⁶ This will sound odd to anyone who is used to making Kripke's *R&E* distinction between fictional people and fictional characters proper. But I myself rely on that distinction; see below.

A similar suggestion was made by Carney (1977).

⁷ Thus, amusingly, when Kripke maintains that fictional names are not "really" names, he means something quite different from what Russell would have in uttering the same words. For Russell, the slogan meant only that fictional names are not *semantically* names; Kripke's contention is deeper, and emphatically not semantical, though in part metasemantical.

⁸ A similar position was taken by Kaplan (1973, Appendix XI) and by Donnellan (1974). See also Plantinga (1974) and Fine (1984). Salmon (2011) takes these works to have carried the day: "Contemporary philosophy has uncovered that...a name from fiction does not even designate a merely possible object" (p. 56).

As is well known, Kripke (1972b/2012, 2012) takes a similar view of fictional natural kinds. There *could not* have been unicorns, much less bandersnatches or (2012, p. xx37xx) a color called "plagenta." Here I am more sympathetic to Kripke's view than to the same position vis-à-vis fictional individuals, and will not contest it.

⁹ "It would be wrong to identify the language people *would have*, given that a certain situation obtained, with the language that *we use to describe how circumstances would have been* in that situation" (Kripke (1972/2012), p. 57).

¹⁰ *M&M*, Ch. 2.

¹¹ More properly, the pair of gametes from which the person sprang. I do not know how seriously Kripke ever held this view, if at all. But see McGinn (1976).

¹² Kripke notes that a very clear statement of this view is found in Frege (1897).

¹³ However, for the record, it does not quite straightforwardly apply to Kripke's own example of the Holmes stories. Conan Doyle did of course engage in a pretense, but it was not that of (himself) narrating real events. Rather, he assumed the persona of Dr. Watson and had Watson both narrate and participate in ostensibly real events; in the stories, Watson has the official status of an authorized "chronicler."

¹⁴ Martinich and Stroll (2007, Ch. 2) make several quite different arguments against pretense theories (their main target is Walton (1978, 1990)): (i) that much of what a novelist writes may be true and flatly asserted, not merely pretend-asserted, as true; (ii) that there is no univocal notion of "pretense" that applies to fiction writing; and (iii) that pretense theories are incompatible with each of several truths about "the logic of pretending." I do not find any of these arguments terribly convincing, but I shall not discuss them here, nor Martinich and Stroll's own highly original theory of fiction.

¹⁵ Thomasson (1999) usefully compares them to cultural entities more generally; think of symphonies, laws, and marriages.

¹⁶ Mostly due, I believe, to van Inwagen (1977); I developed it from his article before I had had the opportunity to see *R&E*. I think the same is true of Thomasson (1999), though not of Salmon (2011).

¹⁷ Salmon (2011) points out (p. 66) that it is in a way question-begging to call these sentences examples of ambiguity, because according to the Pretense theory, the "person" readings as opposed to the "character" readings are not propositional, and so are not alternate sentence *meanings*. Kripke does allow himself to speak of ambiguity.

¹⁸ Anna Bjurman Pautz (2008) raises an additional problem about coreferring fictional names, as in "Bridget believes that Sherlock Holmes is smart and Caroline believes that he (the same person) is smart" (p. 149), arguing that a pure pretense theory cannot accommodate such coreference. She absolves Kripke on the grounds that he can appeal to abstract fictional characters, but that seems to me a mistake; Bridget's and Caroline's beliefs are about the person, not about the character.

¹⁹ Kripke notes (p. xx54xx) that the first formulation would apply to a real person, such as Napoleon, who was made the subject of a fiction.

²⁰ Salmon (2011) makes a similar point (pp. 63-64). He puts it by saying that Kripke's analysis of a negative existential is itself a negative existential, and so only puts the problem off.

Salmon offers his own pretense theory, according to which fictional names are never empty, but always name fictional characters, the abstract entities; what the author pretends is, not that the names refer, but that the abstract entities are flesh-and-blood people. However, his account of negative existentials is roughly Russellian and owes nothing I can see to the pretense idea.

²¹ Kripke is not happy either: "I do feel very tentative about this complicated and messy view. But I haven't (nor have I seen anyone else) come up with a better one" (p. xx114xx). Certainly he had not seen *M&M*, Ch. 7, which appeared over twenty years later.

Alan Berger (2002) takes a stronger Kripkean line: Even negative existentials containing fictional names fail to express even possible propositions (p. 151-53)! Thus, far from its being true that Sherlock Holmes never existed, it is barely and only by courtesy meaningful to deny that he existed.

That is pretty bad. I would say it is a core datum that Sherlock Holmes never existed. Granted, Berger makes an ingenious start at explaining away that datum, by appeal to speech-act considerations.

²² Schwydler (1976) makes what I think is a similar point, though it is a little obscure.

²³ The real John Nash never had so comprehensive an hallucination; to my knowledge, neither has anyone else in human history.