

WORLDS, OBJECTS, AND THEORIES OF FICTION

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ABSTRACT. The main aim of this paper is to provide a critical discussion of some key issues concerning the possible-world analysis of fiction. After a review of the most important philosophical questions concerning truth, reference, names and identity, and their bearing on fiction, I outline the possible-world framework, as used by David Lewis (1978) in his analysis, and examine its most important problems. A special interest is granted to the limits of the Lewisian pretense interpretation of fiction that are highlighted by works of cinema. I conclude with an appraisal of the puzzles generated by the attempts to draw borders between and within the worlds of fiction, and emphasize the need for a better mutual understanding of the two perspectives that are essential for a possible-world interpretation of fiction: literary theory and philosophy.

Keywords: *possible worlds, modal logic, modal metaphysics, fiction, David Lewis, Thomas Pavel.*

1. Introduction

This paper discusses some important issues concerning the philosophy of fiction, relating to two main sources of the contemporary debate, one coming from the field of literary theory, Thomas Pavel's *Fictional Worlds*, and the other from analytic philosophy, namely David Lewis' *Truth in Fiction*; both are pioneering works in the development of the possible-world approach to the study of fiction. My main

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aims are to dispel some confusions that may appear in the extra-philosophical use of the possible-world framework, but also to (re)assert the importance of a better understanding of the nature and characteristics of fictional works in literature and cinema for philosophical (metaphysical, logical, etc.) analysis. Many times, the use of philosophical notions in literary theory is muddled or metaphorical, while the understanding of literature in philosophical accounts may seem narrow and simplistic.

In what follows, I will discuss the main problems that a possible-world analysis of fiction encounters: truth and reference in fiction, names and identity, the limits of the pretense interpretation of fiction, and the insufficient or confused understanding of the philosophical notion of possible world in some accounts from literary theory. A short chapter of the paper will be devoted to the difficulties that cinema raises for the possible-world framework. Finally, I will discuss the interplay of modal metaphysics and the philosophy of fiction, and conclude on the most substantial reasons for a better integration of the literary and the philosophical perspective. This critique is not to be interpreted as a rejection of the possible-world framework altogether, but rather as a step further in connecting the intellectual resources of analytic philosophy to other fields that might benefit from their use.

2. Who is speaking?

Classical philosophical accounts from the analytic tradition treat fictional statements as false (or failed, or vacuously true, at best). The analysis of fictional statements varies according to the theory, but traditional accounts are, in Pavel's terms, *segregationist*, that is, they posit a strict separation between the realms of reality and fiction.¹ Fictional names (i.e., names for fictional characters or objects) fail to refer, which in Russell's view, makes fictional statements false. Now, the type of philosophical accounts I will discuss here, and which are also discussed by Pavel in his work, diverge from the basic Russellian analysis. The trouble with the Russellian analysis is that it cannot explain adequately the difference between fiction and other types of purportedly non-referential discourse, such as ordinary statements with names that fail to refer, lies, etc. One of the most influential analytical approaches to fiction has been the theory of fiction as pretense, proposed initially by John Searle.² Pretense theories are also segregationist, as Kripke's changing views on fiction make clear. In a first instance, Kripke treats statements containing fictional

¹ Pavel (1986: 11).

² Searle (1975).

names as actually false, but possibly true.³ Sherlock Holmes doesn't exist at our world but may exist at other possible worlds. Subsequently, Kripke will change his perspective on fictional objects, treating them as abstract objects that may exist at our world or some other world, but only inside a certain story, that is created as pretense.⁴ Kripke's theory concerning fictional objects is a form of fictional realism, that is, he holds that fictional objects exist in the actual world, but not as persons. According to the view Kripke espouses in his later work, given that Sherlock Holmes didn't really exist, Sherlock is not a possible person at all, only an abstract object that is part of a fictional account.

The trouble with pretense accounts is that some statements in fictions (whether uttered by characters or by the narrator) are put forth with no basic pretense intention. They purport to be true statements about the actual world. This trouble seems most pressing when it is the characters that speak, that is, when an abstract/inexistent being utters something that is true at the actual (i.e., real) world. However, as a matter of principle, it is just as worrisome when the narrator makes true statements about the actual world (e.g., "London is the capital of the United Kingdom"; "Marriage is a test of every virtue known to man", etc.), if we follow a pretense account of fiction. It seems quite clear that some fictional statements are about the real world and destined for the real world. So, who is speaking? About what? To whom? And what other assumptions does he/she use?

3. The problem of identity. The theory of proper names. Laws and rules for possible worlds

Theories of rigid designation for proper names, of the type Kripke had proposed in *Naming and Necessity*, may also be endorsed in the case of fictional names.⁵ Pavel argues that the fact that names as linguistic entities are separable from any descriptive content (as in any anti-descriptivist causal theory of naming) is naturally extended to names of fictional characters.⁶ At this point, we must already note that a view such as Kripke's theory of fiction, wherein names for fictional characters are names of abstract objects, makes this extension quite problematic. Let me make this point clearer. In the case of names for concrete objects or natural kinds, causal theories posit that there is a moment of reference

³ Kripke (1963: 85).

⁴ Kripke (2011, 2013).

⁵ See Kripke (1980).

⁶ Pavel (1986: 31-36).

fixing, an initial baptism, whereby the name acquires its reference. The name and its reference are subsequently transmitted in the community of speakers through a chain of reference linking to the initial act of naming. The connection between name and referent typically survives changes in the object's properties and changes in the knowledge we have of that object's properties. That explains how the same character can die and be reborn or enjoy different fates in different fictions. Now, the question is what kind of abstract object we are talking about. Are fictional objects much like mathematical *abstracta*? But then the link between a certain name and the abstract object it refers to may not survive outside that theory. Names for mathematical kinds or entities, such as 'set', 'class', 'group', 'ring', etc., don't refer to the same objects outside mathematical contexts. If the analogy works, even within certain limits, then fictional names should also be tied to (confined within?) a context (even if that context is a story, and not a theory).

At the same time, Pavel suggests – against the essentialist metaphysics of Kripke – that there are cases where imagination goes beyond the restrictions provided by essential properties (e.g., a statement such as “If only I were the son of Rothschild.”).⁷ Kripke and many other philosophers of the same persuasion argue that there are essential properties of objects (such as origin, composition, and others). While Pavel's anti-Kripkean stance could be the best attempt at explaining in a theoretically sound manner why we are able to recognize the same character in very different circumstances, from book to book and even from author to author (on the basis of name usage), it seems to run counter to other modal intuitions we have in the specific case of fictional objects. I have argued elsewhere for the view that variable limits for (modal) imagination are the general case, not only in fiction⁸ – but I also hold that fictional contexts sometimes limit the range of possible characteristics, actions and situations for *important* or *well-known* characters. We may not be able to specify a description or set of descriptions that are inextricably associated with Sherlock Holmes, but could Holmes have been the queen of a Stone Age tribe? It appears some information is tied to the character in every fictional context. It is hard to tell if that information is enough to form a uniquely-specifying cluster of descriptions, as in cluster theory, but it is also quite clear that a character's being recognized in a certain fiction is dependent on some basic set of properties, and relative to authorial intentions and the readers'/viewers' image of the character. Perhaps the fans of Sherlock Holmes would accept a story in which Sherlock Holmes was a railroad man born in Kent, and not a peculiar genius detective from London, but it would be hard to accept Holmes as an Argentinean footballer with no abilities

⁷ Pavel (1986: 36).

⁸ Rusu (2018).

for solving mysteries, or as a Roman emperor, in a story where no time travel incident had occurred, even if that story were written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

As an additional note, while one may find it hard to resist Kripke's anti-descriptivist arguments, deferential descriptivism remains untouched. That is, descriptions of the form "the individual known as 'Socrates'" (for Socrates) or "the man that is credited with the proof of the incompleteness of arithmetic" (for Gödel) may provide us with acceptable versions of descriptivism. Pavel proposes an example in which a character named Ugolo is only mentioned by characters in a play but never appears in that play. In a second play it is revealed that Ugolo is an imprisoned dwarf and the character finally makes his appearance. The audience will naturally think that he is the same Ugolo that was mentioned in the first play.⁹ Now, Pavel takes his example to show that you can name and individuate a character independently of any description, but fails to see that a deferential description is available automatically from the way he fleshes out his story, e. g., "the character that is mentioned as 'Ugolo' in the first play" or "the character mentioned by the queen in the first act, scene four of the first play", assuming there is such a mention.

3.1. Transworld identification

The problem of transworld identification was formulated starting from Kripke (relational) semantics for modal logics, to which a certain philosophical interpretation/explanation was added, that is, modal truth is explained as truth in (some, all) possible worlds. If the meaning of modal notions is given with the aid of possible worlds (i.e., modal truth is evaluated at possible worlds), then the question is how we manage to recognize the same object from world to world. How do we know that the Donald Trump from our world is the same person as the ill-tempered, loudmouth red-haired president of the USA (possibly named 'Donald Trump') from another world? Kripke regards transworld identification as a minor problem at best.¹⁰ We can simply find the objects we consider in other possible worlds through stipulation and through extending the normal use of proper names. If one agrees, however, that there is a problem of transworld identification, one must concede that the case of fictional characters is not much different. Naturally, imagination-based epistemologies of modality encounter a problem whenever it has to be explained how it is that we can imagine objects not having their purportedly essential properties/having other essential properties than the ones they actually

⁹ Pavel (1986: 37).

¹⁰ Kripke (1980: 52-53).

have (e.g., the prince of Wales being actually the son of Charlie Chaplin). One way out of this conundrum is to submit that these are only appearances of possibility, fictions with no modal importance whatsoever. But what happens when fiction itself is treated within this framework?

3.2. *Just a little bit of modal logic*

The use of relational semantics for analyzing the use of expressions in fictional contexts should consider a very basic caveat: model-theoretic semantics were proposed for interpreting *modal inferences* that are codified in formal modal languages. Fictional discourse is largely non-inferential. However, as long as we consider truth a central notion, there is a common ground for treating fictional discourse in a possible-world framework (albeit very carefully in what regards philosophical implications).

Let us have a brief look now at some of the notions of relational semantics for modal logics. Standardly, the main notions are defined in the following way:

- Kripke frame - $\langle W, R \rangle$, where:

$W = \{w_1, w_2, \dots, w_n\}$: w_1, w_2, \dots, w_n are nodes or maximally consistent sets of propositions (i.e., the set is consistent and for each proposition p , either p or its negation is a member of the set) – intuitively, w_1, w_2, \dots, w_n are possible worlds where the propositions that are members of these sets are true.

R – relation of *accessibility* (*compossibility*) between the nodes, which will help us define the following (relational) modal notions:

$\Diamond p - T(\text{true})$ at w_n iff there is at least one world w_m accessible from w_n where p is T .

$\Box p - T$ at w_n iff p is true for all w_m accessible from w_n .

- Kripke model - $\langle W, R, V \rangle$, based on a Kripke frame to which we add the *valuation* function, that assigns truth values to propositions.

3.3. *Laws/ rules of possible worlds*

David Lewis' account of fiction remains one of the most influential for contemporary treatments of the topic.¹¹ According to Lewis, fictions lend themselves to

¹¹ Lewis (1978).

a possible-world analysis, more precisely, to a version of counterfactual analysis (in terms of possible worlds very close to ours). In his paper, Lewis proposes two analyses of truth in fiction, as follows:

Analysis 1: A sentence of the form "In the fiction f , φ " is non-vacuously true iff some world where f is told as known fact and φ is true differs less from our actual world, on balance, than does any world where f is told as known fact and φ is not true. It is vacuously true iff there are no possible worlds where f is told as known fact.¹²

Analysis 2: A sentence of the form "in the fiction f , φ " 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 φ is true differs less from the world w , on balance, than does any world where f is told as known fact and φ is not true. It is vacuously true iff there are no possible worlds where f is told as known fact.¹³

The gist of Lewis' treatment is that truth in fiction is to be analyzed much in the same way Lewis proposed to analyze counterfactuals. Statements about fictional entities, such as "Holmes enjoyed playing the violin", are not to be taken at face value, but rather as abbreviations of prefixed sentences that determine a certain fictional context: "In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's writings, Holmes enjoyed playing the violin." That is why we have "in the fiction f , φ " as the form for fictional sentences. There is, however, more than the statements that compose a certain fiction or the ones that can be inferred thereupon. Lewis thinks we also carry certain facts from our world into certain fictions, such as geographical or historical facts regarding the settings of the stories. Statements containing background facts should also be evaluated, as counterfactual statements are, not at all possible worlds (in relation to the actual world), but at the worlds that are closer to ours (in structure, nature, history or whatever we deem important). Lewis insists on the pretense nature of fiction, but also on the fact that the worlds that are relevant to the truth of fictional stories are the worlds where fictions are told as facts. There are two significant effects of this theoretical choice. First, our world is excluded from the worlds that are tested for the truth of fictional statements, because fiction is make-believe. Even if there were a detective from London named Sherlock Holmes that verified all the traits and deeds from Conan Doyle's stories, Conan Doyle would still be a pretender at our world.¹⁴ Second, fictional storytelling is nevertheless treated as factual, more precisely, as pretending to convey known facts.

¹² Lewis (1978: 42).

¹³ Lewis (1978: 45).

¹⁴ Lewis (1978: 40).

Here is a list of fictional sentences Lewis deems true according to his account:

Holmes lived in Baker Street.

Holmes lived nearer to Paddington Station than to Waterloo Station.

Holmes was just a person—a person of flesh and blood.

Holmes really existed.

Someone lived for many years at 221B Baker Street.

London's greatest detective in 1900 used cocaine.¹⁵

3.4. Some problems for Lewis' account

The primary criticisms that can be levelled against Lewis' theory aim at its perspective of fiction as pretended factual discourse. Any form of metafiction, that is, any literary/cinematic device that draws attention to the work's artificial or fictional character, poses a strenuous problem for Lewis' analysis. Borges', Fowles' or Pynchon's works are only a few masterful examples of self-conscious 'fictionalizing' that show the limits of the account I have just described.

In cinema, there are countless examples of breaking the fourth wall, more (*The 400 Blows*, *The Nights of Cabiria*) or less (*Alfie*) subtly. Breaking the fourth wall means that a fictional character addresses directly or engages with the audience, an action that is also encountered in theatre. Obviously, this poses the same problem for the pretense factual character of fiction (we wouldn't want to think that every character that speaks directly into the camera is mad, the only way we could probably salvage Lewis' view). In addition, if counterfactual analysis is supplemented with Lewis' metaphysics, i.e., modal realism, breaking the fourth wall goes against an apparently nifty consequence of these two.¹⁶ According to modal realism, worlds are totally separated causally, and that should include fictional worlds (in relation to ours and with each other). But it appears that the worlds of cinema (and any spectacular form of fiction) cannot be separated causally from our world, or else the characters breaking the fourth wall would have no one to speak to.

All this seems to show that Lewis' possible-world analysis is too reductive. But couldn't we just fix the account a little, so as to eliminate the "told as fact" part, and preserve the apparent usefulness of possible worlds?

¹⁵ Lewis (1978: 38).

¹⁶ For more on Lewis' modal realism, see Lewis (1986).

3.5. *The (general) trouble with possible worlds*

While being one of the pioneers of applying the theoretical apparatus of possible worlds to fiction, Pavel uses this conceptual framework in an anti-essentialist and critical manner. Pavel is aware of the limits of possible-world analysis inasmuch as he contends real world, stylistic and cultural constraints are more important for understanding fiction than a modal framework. Moreover, fictional worlds are inherently incomplete, whereas the possible worlds from logic are, at least in theory, complete (in the sense that they are maximally consistent).¹⁷

Possible-world analysis is indeed insufficient for understanding fiction, but the main reasons for this are different. First, cultural (stylistic, interfictional) constraints can easily be incorporated as rules/laws that govern the worlds of fictions – to take Lewis' *Threepenny Opera* example, the world of this work appears as a world where every human being is deceitful, but that may be simply posited as one of the universal truths of that world. In addition, it is useful to note that possible worlds are complete just in theory: we don't even have a complete description of our world. We live in many (epistemically) possible worlds, so to say. The same for fictional worlds: Sherlock Holmes doesn't live in just one possible world – it is a system of worlds that 'branch off' the truths that are established inside the given work (we can just complete the description of the world with whatever is available).

The more comprehensive problem of the possible-world framework, and this applies not only to the theory of fiction, is precisely that the worlds are already deemed possible. The concept of possibility is dealt with in advance. But then this is not very illuminating for mapping the type(s) of possibility that are involved in fictional accounts. Possible from what standpoint, and in relation to what criteria?

Various doubts have been raised about the utility and adequacy of the possible-world framework for the study of fiction. The most radical critique of possible-world analysis is to be found in Ruth Ronen's 1994 book, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*. Ronen focuses on the differences between literary approaches and the philosophical concept of possible world. She argues that in the field of literary theory, the use of possible worlds is naïve and metaphorical.¹⁸ Now, it is true that theoretical rigour and an adequate philosophical understanding lack from some literary scholars' use of possible-world theories. One can understand just by surveying the reasons given in this chapter why we would do better to restrain our enthusiasm regarding this approach. Adversaries of the possible-world analysis should take issue with the fact that the philosophical notion is used unsystematically and

¹⁷ Pavel (1986: 71-72, 95-113).

¹⁸ Ronen (1994: 7).

obscurely inside philosophy, too. Naturally, this should add to the critics' reservations, rather than limit them. Nevertheless, the works of Doležel, Maître, Ryan, and Martin, among others, provide ingenious and sophisticated examples of how the framework of possible worlds can be adapted to literary theory, and how various limitations, such as incompleteness, metaphorical character, or lack of rigour can be explained and integrated, if not overcome, in a possible-world approach.¹⁹

Applications of the possible-world framework to literature have been numerous in recent years, but clearly this doesn't mean that the more technical problems have been solved or that it is the same concept that is used in both philosophy and literary theory. One of the difficulties that we examined seems, however, most pressing. To wit, it appears that philosophical accounts of fiction in the analytic tradition have adopted the perspective of fiction as pretense factual narrative. In addition, for the most part, applications have been proposed in relation to the field of literature, with its many ways of building up a fictional world. Possible worlds are comparatively much less used in the study of the characteristics of film fiction. The following part of this paper is devoted to the contribution that the cinematic perspective may bring to understanding the usefulness of possible worlds, with an eye to the possible applications of the framework to film fiction. The insights will be mostly critical/negative, but this is not to be taken as a rejection of possible worlds as conceptual tools for defining and redefining the nature of fiction. Being aware of the multiple limitations of the approach is essential if further progress is to be made in this line of study.

4. Film and possible worlds

At first glance, cinema seems to vindicate a Lewisian analysis of fiction. Real-world constraints appear to be unavoidable, at least in conventional cinema, which makes a counterfactual-type approach (more precisely, an appeal to worlds close to ours) unavoidable. Nevertheless, filmmaking practices raise some questions about Lewis' analysis.

The most obvious problem for Lewis' account is that it is too tied to literary storytelling. According to Lewis, there should be a narrator telling the story as fact at a possible world very similar to ours. But, simply put, there is no such narrator in most movies (even where such a voice-off exists, it is surely not necessary, as it happens in epic literature). Of course, the problem affects theatre as well. Perhaps other film species may provide us with a solution? We may submit that what is at

¹⁹ Doležel (1998), Maître (1983), Ryan (1991), Martin (2004). For more details, see Ryan & Bell (2019).

our world a fictional film is at similar worlds a documentary with factual content. This is evidently not a viable option. Even when historical scenes are reenacted in documentaries, they are assumed to have a fictional element. They are fictional inserts that attempt to make the documentation of reality more graphic and palpable. Otherwise, participants in documentaries are normally aware of all the technical gear surrounding them and of the testimonial nature of their contribution. Even when they are not aware, documentary participants are clearly not playing a dramatic role, as actors do in a fictional movie. Only a small number of fictional movies are mock documentaries or have a documentary-like approach. This should point out once again, as the discussion of metafiction did, that not all fictional creations pretend to present facts, and this applies to literature as well. The fundamental issues consist in differences in modes and styles of presentation that fulfill different artistic functions and not in the truth-value of modal and non-modal statements in (or regarding) fictional contexts.

Furthermore, "impossible" fictions are not adequately representable in cinema. In literature, one can contrive a story in which the metaphysical, logical or natural laws are violated. A writer may create a story about, say, a mathematician that discovers a square that is circular or about a universe without gravity. In film, these impossibilities can be represented only metaphorically. The worlds of the cinematic medium appear to be less than and different from the worlds of literature.

In a postscript to "Truth in Fiction", Lewis discusses a problem for his account: the puzzle of the Flash Stockman, which is encapsulated in the following verse.

The singer sings this song.
 I'm a stockman to my trade, and they call me Ugly Dave.
 I'm old and grey and only got one eye.
 In a yard I'm good, of course, but just put me on a horse,
 And I'll go where lots of young-'uns daren't try.
 The boasting gets ever steeper: riding, whipping, branding, shearing, ...
 In fact, I'm duke of every blasted thing.
 Plainly, this is fiction. What is true in it?²⁰

The problem that Lewis admits is the following: when the singer pretends to be Ugly Dave *pretending* to tell the truth about himself, this doesn't differ, according to the account, from pretending to be Ugly Dave *really* telling the truth about himself. The account cannot discriminate between fiction and fiction within fiction, as there is no difference between the stock of worlds we appeal to for the inner and the outer fiction.²¹

²⁰ Lewis (1983: 279).

²¹ For a more detailed account of the paradoxes in embedded fictions, see Le Poidevin (1995).

The puzzle of the Flash Stockman seems much more pressing in cinema. Without the presence of cinematic devices or tricks that show the viewer that there is a fiction (or a dream, or a hallucination) within the fiction, cinematic storytelling cannot differentiate between the “realms”. This narrative ambiguity is exploited by Almodóvar (*Bad Education*), Lynch (*Mulholland Dr.*), and many other directors.

5. Conclusion. Are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern finally alive?

Imagine that you are watching a video recording of two of your friends having a heated conversation in a room. The argument escalates and they start hitting each other. Naturally, you become worried. Then, you find out they were actually rehearsing a play or scenes from a film. You may still wonder if the blows were real, because they seemed to be so, and if your friends hurt themselves in the process, but you are relieved. Now remove most of the extra information from the scenario: just imagine you are seeing two people in a heated argument which soon becomes violent. How would you know if what you are seeing is devoid of any pretense, or perhaps is a rehearsal for a film, or is the film itself (or a film within a film, etc.)? The trouble with possible-world theories of fiction is the ever-present possibility of collapse. What follows now is just the sketch of a general problem that appears to affect more than the theories of fiction.

The final question is: how do we know that our world isn't itself fictional? I do not mean this question to be interpreted in a sensationalist/overly relativistic manner, but rather to make a critical point. Of course, we know that “actual footage” appears in many films. On the same note, there are many statements in works of literary fiction that are true *simpliciter* or are intended to be true, not in or about the fictional world of that work, but about our world (take Victor Hugo's description of the Notre-Dame cathedral at the beginning of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame/Notre-Dame de Paris*, with its original title, or many other descriptions of royal courts, historical characters, various places in the world, etc.). Iranian directors, such as Abbas Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf, are known for their masterful and intricate cinematic reflections on the blending of reality and fiction. Fiction, in its turn, seems to make its way in the real world in substantial ways, such as the stories we more or less consciously build for and about ourselves or the others as coping mechanisms. Pavel's view on the issue of the separation of realms is similarly permissive, rejecting segregationism.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead is a well-known absurdist play (and later a movie) by Tom Stoppard that has as its protagonists two minor characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The action takes place in the wings of Shakespeare's play with the two (now) main characters wandering around Elsinore, taking part in

some of the scenes from *Hamlet*, and expressing their perplexity about what is going on around them. While Hamlet's world (as a main character in Shakespeare's play) is impeccably structured, in order to convey the intended philosophical meanings (not that different from the ones in the contemporary play, to be sure), Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's world and their understanding of it are chaotic and confused. This should engender a reflection about the characters' functions in fiction, and shows that something is inescapably lost when one adheres strictly to a pretense factual discourse interpretation of fiction. The same world with the same or at least very similar facts may lead to extremely different fictional retellings thereof.

We should note, in relation to the point above, that some of the problems of modal metaphysics are inherently transferred to the analysis of fiction. A problem that has not been adequately addressed by many possibilist theories, such as Lewis', is the specification of clear demarcations between types of objects. The separation between actual and merely possible objects is simply assumed, as a matter of intuition, but not fully articulated in many cases. According to possibilism, all things exist, including the merely possible ones, and thus fictional objects exist as well. But how do *fictionalia* or *possibilia* exist? What type of evidence or characteristics do we need in order to specify such a distinction? Remember also, for discussion's sake, that fictional entities aren't in possession of any proof that they are fictional; they act as if they were not so, which makes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's tribulations and musings in the contemporary play so meaningful. But then what stops the fictional worlds from collapsing one step back into our world? An incursion into the metaphysics of fiction must provide an adequate answer to this question.

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