The Aesthetic Experience of Truth in Fiction

Abstract

It seems true to say that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, despite there being no Sherlock Holmes. When asked to explain this fact, philosophers of language often opt for some version of Lewis's (1978: p. 38) view that sentences like 'Sherlock Holmes is a detective' may be taken as "abbreviations for sentences carrying the prefix "In the Sherlock Holmes stories..." ". I present two problems for this view. First, I provide reason to deny that these sentences are abbreviations. In short, the supposed abbreviations have aesthetic properties that we should not expect of abbreviations. Second, I argue that the apparent truth of these sentences would not be explained, even if they were abbreviations. An alternative, based on Walton's (1990) theory, is presented which avoids these problems, while also filling a gap in Walton's original explanation.

Keywords: Truth, Fiction, Possible Worlds, Aesthetic Experience.

1 Truth and Fiction

1. Nicola Sturgeon is female.

This sentence seems true. Why is that? The obvious answer is that the sentence *seems* true because it *is* true. The name 'Nicola Sturgeon ' picks out

Nicola Sturgeon . The predicate 'is female' assigns her the property of being female. The sentence is therefore true if Nicola Sturgeon is female. Because we know how the sentence is constructed and we know that Nicola Sturgeon is female, we know that the sentence is true.

Compare the following sentence.

2. Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

This sentence also seems true. Why is that? Following the previous example, we might suggest the name 'Sherlock Holmes' picks out Sherlock Holmes, the predicate 'is a detective' assigns him the property of being a detective, and the sentence is therefore true if Sherlock Holmes is a detective. Because we know that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, we know that the sentence is true. The problem is that there is no such individual as Sherlock Holmes for the name to pick out. Nor is it true that Sherlock Holmes is a detective. If Sherlock Holmes were a detective, then there would be a detective named 'Sherlock Holmes' but there is not.

Lewis (1978: p. 38) offered an explanation that brings 2 back in line, to some extent, with the explanation of 1. Sentences like 2 *seem* true because they are "abbreviations for sentences carrying the prefix "In the Sherlock Holmes stories..."."[1] 2, for example, is an abbreviation of 3.

3. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

3 seems true. Why? Because it is true. What semantic theory explains its truth? We might say that 3 is true if and only if 2 is true in the world of Sherlock Holmes. Of course, the Sherlock Holmes stories don't specify a complete world. The stories are silent, for example, as to Holmes's birthday. Lewis therefore

[1]Lewis is explicit that this analysis doesn't apply to all uses of 'Sherlock Holmes'. It doesn't apply, for example, when we say 'Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character', nor should we take it to apply to the sentences that compose the stories. This paper follows Lewis in excluding these cases.

construes 'the world of Sherlock Holmes' as a set of complete worlds. Each world in the set specifies one way the world might be, according to the stories. Holmes is certainly a detective, so Holmes is a detective at all worlds in the set. Holmes's birthday might be any day of the year, however, so there will be worlds at which his birthday is 1st January, worlds at which his birthday is 2nd January... and so on. 3 is true if and only if 2 is true at every world in the set. The name 'Sherlock Holmes' doesn't actually refer, so 2 is not actually true,[2] but the name will refer at any world consistent with the stories.

So 3 is true if and only if 2 is true at any world consistent with the Sherlock Holmes stories. Which worlds are included in the set? As a starting point, Lewis considers the worlds at which the fiction is told as known fact. The fiction is told just as it is at our world but the events in the fiction are not *pretended* to be true, as they are here; they are *known* to be true. At all of these worlds, there will be a detective answering to 'Sherlock Holmes' who is known by the storyteller to have gone on the adventures recounted in the stories.[3]

Much is true in a story that isn't explicitly said. Holmes wears shoes, even if this is never written. Lewis accounts for this through the overt beliefs of the community in which the story is written. As it was an overt belief in Conan Doyle's community that people of Holmes's stature wear shoes, shoes Holmes wears. Lewis suggests that we should consider the worlds at which the Holmes stories are told as known fact and which adhere, as closely as possible, to the overt beliefs of the community at which the story is written.[4]

[2] "we may abandon it to the common fate of subject-predicate sentences with denotationless subject terms: automatic falsity or lack of truth value, according to taste" (Lewis, 1978: p. 38).

[3] Not all stories have a Watson figure who is recounting the tale. Lewis (1978: p. 40) is aware of this and welcomes the "pragmatic paradox akin to contradiction in a third-person narrative that ends "...and so none were left to tell the tale." " See Proudfoot (2006) for some criticisms of this aspect of the account.

[4] "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

As one of the dominant accounts in philosophy of language, Lewis's view has faced much criticism. But critics often accept that the apparent truth of 2 can be explained by the actual truth of 3, disagreeing with Lewis only about the precise functioning of the implicit operator.[5] In the following section, I present two problems aimed at the core of the theory.

Lewis's view consists of two claims. First, that sentences like 2 are abbreviations of sentences like 3. Second, that sentences like 3 are true due to the truth of sentences like 2 at some set of possible worlds. I discuss these claims in turn. First, I argue that sentences like 2 should not be viewed as abbreviations of sentences like 3 because the two evoke very different aesthetic experiences. Second, I argue that the apparent truth of 2 cannot be explained in terms of any particular set of possible worlds. I present an alternative that is superior to Lewis's view on both counts. The account is based on that of Walton (1990). It goes beyond Walton's account, however, in that it outlines an interpretive process that explains the apparent truth-values of sentences like 2.

2 Problems for Lewis's Account

2.1 The Aesthetic Experience of Fictional Truth

Lewis identifies statements like 2 as abbreviations of statements like 3. How does their status as abbreviations explain their intuitive truth-values? Consider an abbreviation like 'John works for UNICEF', which abbreviates 'John works for the United Nations Children's Fund'. Here, there is a metasemantic relation between the abbreviation and the sentence it abbreviates. 'UNICEF' refers to the United Nations Children's Fund because it abbreviates the proper name

worlds where f is told as known fact."(Lewis, 1978: p. 45)

[5]For an overview of some criticisms, see Woodward (2011) and Sainsbury (2011: pp. 78-80). See Badura and Berto (2019) for a recent attempt to refine Lewis's view by appeal to impossible worlds. Others have offered broader criticisms. Proudfoot (2006) is an example.

'the United Nations Children's Fund'.[6] There is a metasemantic order of explanation, with the denotation of the term, and so the truth-value of the sentence, flowing from the abbreviated sentence to the abbreviation.

This explanation won't do for Lewis, who denies that sentences like 2 have truth-values.[7] Lewis doesn't specify what he means by an 'abbreviation' but it is clear that he takes us to evaluate the truth of the proposition expressed by 3 when we assign a truth-value to sentence 2. But if we are really evaluating the proposition expressed by 3 then we would expect other features of this proposition besides truth-value to be carried over.

Consider the following plaque that apparently sits in St Bartholomew's Hospital:

> At this place New Years Day, 1881 were spoken these deathless words: "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive." by Mr. Sherlock Holmes in greeting to John H. Watson, MD. at their first meeting.

The plaque seems true. Holmes did meet Watson in that location on New Year's Day, 1881. According to Lewis, the plaque seems true because it abbreviates a statement prefixed with the operator 'In the Sherlock Holmes stories...'. When we evaluate the truth of the plaque, we actually evaluate the truth of the proposition expressed by the abbreviated sentence. The problem with this explanation is that it focuses entirely on alethic aspects of interpretation, while ignoring its equally important aesthetic aspects. If we were evaluating the proposition expressed by the abbreviated sentence, we would not have the aesthetic experience that we in fact do.

[6] Standardised abbreviations like 'UNICEF' may have become proper names in their own right. The point may be clearer if we consider ad hoc abbreviations that have not (and never will be) standardised.

[7] See footnote 2.

The plaque is written as though it commemorates a true historical encounter and this is no accident. The plaque is formulated to evoke a particular aesthetic experience. When reading the plaque, we feel connected to Holmes, Watson, and to their initial encounter. The feeling is rather similar to the feeling one might get when standing at the site of a true historical encounter. Standing at the site of the Academy, we can marvel at the fact that, had we only been there at the right time, we could have seen Plato converse with Aristotle. Reading the plaque generates a similar romantic feeling (at least for those invested in the stories). We feel that we stand where Holmes and Watson actually met and that, had we only been present at the right time, we could have witnessed this historic encounter. The plaque presents the meeting of Holmes and Watson as though it took place, not merely in some fiction, but in the actual world. Of course, we are not intended to believe that Holmes actually met Watson. The plaque is only playfully to be treated as though it documents a true historical encounter but we miss something central to the purpose of the plaque if we cannot explain the aesthetic experience that it is intended to provoke.

Lewis explains the apparent truth of the plaque by suggesting that we actually evaluate the proposition expressed by a prefixed version of the plaque. Were we evaluating this proposition, however, we should expect a very different aesthetic experience. To see this, consider a version of the plaque with the Lewisian prefix made explicit: 'In the Sherlock Holmes stories, at this place New Years Day...'. This version evokes a very different experience from 2. It is quite true that, in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes and Watson met at that place and time but we no longer feel connected to that encounter. We have taken a work of aesthetic significance and transformed it into a mundane description of the contents of a story. The initial encounter between Holmes and Watson is now explicitly fictional and it is clear that we could not have witnessed it,

even if we had been at the right place and time. We are separated from the encounter, not only in spacetime, but in modal space.

This modal distance is clear from the shape of Lewis's semantics. In a proposition of the form 'In the fiction f, ϕ', the prefix functions to shift evaluation of ϕ from the actual world to some other worlds determined by the fiction. In Lewis's case, this is the set of worlds w closest to the overt belief worlds of Conan Doyle's community such that the fiction is told as known fact at w. Those details are not import here, however. The problem arises for any view which takes statements like 2 as abbreviations of statements like 3 and treats the implicit prefix as an operator that shifts evaluation from the actual world to some other set of worlds determined by the fiction. This treatment of the prefix is central to Lewis's explanation of the apparent truth of statements like 2. For Lewis, the actual plaque seems true because we evaluate the proposition expressed by the prefixed version of the plaque but this proposition makes it explicit that the embedded sentence is only true in the fiction. Were this the proposition we were evaluating, we would expect to have a very different aesthetic experience.

There are certain aesthetic features that we wouldn't expect to transfer from abbreviated sentences to their abbreviations. Most obviously, rhythm and rhyme will not transfer. 'Wear a cummerbund at the United Nations Children's Fund' has a rhyme and rhythm that isn't shared by 'Wear a cummerbund at UNICEF'. Note, however, that the alethic and aesthetic features of the prefixed version of the plaque both stem from the prefix. The prefixed plaque is true because the prefix shifts evaluation from the actual world to the world(s) of the fiction and it is precisely this shift that diminishes the aesthetic experience.

The aesthetic experience evoked by the plaque is not unique to statements *about* fiction. Part of the pleasure of the Holmes stories comes from their setting within Victorian London. They are set within the *actual* Victorian London, not

some merely counterfactual version of that setting. The Holmes stories are of course fiction and are not intended to be *believed* but there is a clear difference between the experience of reading the Holmes stories, which can be interpreted *as though* they told us facts about the actual world, and the experience of reading a story like *The Man in the High Castle*, in which the counterfactual setting is central to the experience the book wants to evoke. Some works go further, intentionally blurring the line between fact and fiction. *The Da Vinci Code*, for example, contains many facts about works of art and architecture, and many falsities drawn from conspiracy theories, but doesn't clearly indicate where fact ends and fiction begins. Some fictions seem to attempt and fail to do what the Sherlock Holmes stories do so well: to locate themselves within the actual world. Star Wars begins 'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away', which stipulates our spatiotemporal connection to the events in the movie. Yet, I doubt that many viewers feel any such connection.

This experience of fictions as taking place in the actual world is also of more direct philosophical importance. Philosophers often present thought experiments in the form of short fictions and it is sometimes important that these fictions are interpreted as taking place within the actual world. One such example is given in Lewis's own paper and is presented as a counterexample to Analysis 1.

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.

Analysis 1 is intended to explain why various propositions seem true in fiction, despite never being stipulated in the works that compose the fiction.

There are no purple gnomes in the Sherlock Holmes stories, for example, even though this is never made explicit. Analysis 1 explains that there are no purple gnomes in the stories because there are no purple gnomes in the actual world. 'In the Sherlock Holmes stories, there are purple gnomes' is false because (roughly) the worlds that are consistent with the explicit text of the fiction and have no purple gnomes are more similar to the actual world than the worlds that are consistent with the explicit text and are inhabited by purple gnomes.[8]

But what if, Lewis (1978: p. 44) asks, there are actually purple gnomes living secretly in a secluded cabin on the banks of Loch Ness?[9] According to Analysis 1, this bizarre fact will carry over into the Holmes stories. Given that purple gnomes actually exist, worlds with purple gnomes are more similar to the actual world, all else being equal, than worlds without purple gnomes. For this thought experiment to establish its conclusion, we need to imagine, not only that there is some possible world at which purple gnomes reside by Loch Ness but that purple gnomes *actually* reside by Loch Ness. Here, it is not only important for aesthetic, but for philosophical reasons, that the purple gnomes are thought of as residents of the actual world.

Where do the purple gnomes live? The purple gnomes live by Loch Ness. According to Lewis's analysis of fiction, the previous sentence strikes us as true (when talking about Lewis's short fiction) because it is interpreted as 'In Lewis's fiction, the purple gnomes live by Loch Ness', where the implicit prefix leads us again to shift evaluation of the embedded sentence from the actual world to some set of non-actual worlds. It is certainly true that the gnomes reside by Loch Ness *in worlds consistent with Lewis's fiction* but this isn't what the

[8] As per footnote 4 above, Lewis would later replace similarity to the actual world by similarity to the overt belief worlds of the community in which the fiction originated.

[9] We might quibble as to whether Lewis presents the Scottish gnomes as a fiction, as a hypothesis, as a supposition, or something else. Hypotheses and fiction are not mutually exclusive but whatever the fact about Lewis's presentation, it is clear that he *could have* presented the gnomes in the form of a short fiction, giving them names, a backstory, and so on.

thought experiment requires us to imagine; we are supposed to imagine that the gnomes reside by Loch Ness in *the actual world*.

Lewis intends to explain the alethic properties of statements like 2 by treating them as abbreviations of statements like 3. But if we actually evaluate the proposition expressed by a statement like 3 when faced with statements like 2, we should expect them to evoke similar aesthetic experiences. They do not. This suggests that statements like 2 are not in fact abbreviations of statements like 3. I turn now to a further problem: even if these statements were abbreviations, this would not explain their apparent truth.

2.2 Indeterminate Indeterminacy

Lewis explains the apparent truth of statements about fiction by taking them as abbreviations of literally true statements carrying an 'In the fiction' prefix. In order for the account to succeed, we need an explanation of why the prefixed statements are true. Lewis presents a complex semantic analysis[10] but my target here encompasses any account on which sentences like 2 are assessed for truth relative to a set of worlds determined by the fiction.

The problem with such an account is that it assumes an implausible level of determinacy regarding fiction. If the truth of 'In the Sherlock Holmes stories, ϕ' depends on the truth of ϕ at every world in some set, there are three options: ϕ is true at all worlds in the set and the complex sentence is true, ϕ is false at all worlds in the set and the complex sentence is false, or ϕ is neither true nor false at all worlds in the set and the complex sentence is indeterminate. Let's demur from a three-valued logic, and unify the categories of *indeterminate* and *false* into a single category: *untrue*. According to Lewis's account, 'In the Sherlock Holmes stories, ϕ' must be true or untrue for any ϕ. There are many cases, however, in which 'In the Sherlock Holmes stories, ϕ' is neither true nor untrue.

[10] See footnote 4.

Just which sentences these are can be expected to be contentious. The reader may come up with their own examples. I suggest the following:

4. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, H. H. Asquith was Prime Minister.[11]

Suppose that Interpreter A judges that 4 is true. As H. H. Asquith was actually the Prime Minister in 1914, during the events of *His Last Bow*, and no alternative Prime Minister is specified, Interpreter A judges that this fact carries over to the stories. Interpreter B, however, judges 4 to be untrue (i.e. either false or indeterminate) because Conan Doyle explicitly specifies that Lord Bellinger was Prime Minister in 1888, during *The Adventure of the Second Stain*, when the actual Prime Minister was Robert Gascoyne-Cecil. As some facts about the identities of Prime Ministers are explicitly different in the Holmes stories, Interpreter B judges that no facts about the identities of Prime Ministers carry over from the actual world to the fiction.[12]

Interpreters A and B disagree about the truth of 4. A considers the sentence true and B considers it untrue. Both interpreters have perfectly adequate justifications for their interpretations and there are no further facts that show one interpretation to be superior to the other. If Lewis's view were correct,

[11]Further examples: 'In *The Final Problem*, Sherlock Holmes dies'. Disregard the later stories and ask whether this was true at the time of publication. There is evidence of a struggle that ended in Holmes falling to his death. Is the evidence strong enough to establish Holmes's death? Watson certainly thinks so, as did many readers at the time and many commentators today. The body is never found, however, so there may be room to treat Holmes's death as indeterminate. 'In *Blade Runner*, Deckard is a replicant'. The movie (or at least some cuts) allows for the interpretation on which his humanity is left indeterminate and for the interpretation in which he is clearly shown to be a replicant. 'In *A Feast for Crows*, the gravedigger is Sandor Clegane'. There are some clues as to the identity of the gravedigger. We might think that these clearly establish the gravedigger's identity or that it leaves their identity indeterminate. 'In *Inception*, Cobb is is reunited with his children'. The ending might be left open, or there might be enough hints to establish that Cobb sees his children again. Some of these are famous debates (at least within certain circles) but, as the Asquith example shows, we can formulate more mundane cases. My thanks to Mark Thakkar, Tom Hunter, and Martin Jonathan Philip Hendry for some of these examples.

[12]Lewis's analysis would, by the way, consider the example sentence true when prefixed, as the identity of the Prime Minister was an overt community belief when the book was written. See footnote 4. The example therefore strikes me as a counterexample to Lewis's view, not because the sentence is untrue, but because it is neither true nor untrue.

however, then the truth of 4 would be determined by the truth of the embedded sentence at every world in some set. The embedded sentence would either be true at every world in the set, rendering 4 true, or it would not be true at every world in the set, rendering 4 untrue (i.e. false or indeterminate). If Lewis's view were correct, therefore, either Interpreter A is right and Interpreter B is wrong, or Interpreter B is right and Interpreter A is wrong. Neither Interpreter A nor Interpreter B is uniquely right, however, so Lewis's view is not correct.[13]

If the problem were restricted to statements like 4, then perhaps we might ignore it. Lewis's theory is only intended to explain the apparent truth of statements like 2, which seem clearly true or clearly untrue. The problem is not restricted to contentious sentences like 4, however, but extends to every single sentence that Lewis wants to explain. Everyone agrees that 2 seems true. Lewis suggests that 2 *seems* true because 3 *is* true and that 3 is true because 2 is true at all worlds in some relevant set. Even in this uncontroversial case, the explanation of the seeming truth of the statement relies on the assumption that there is a unique set of relevant worlds and so that there is a unique set of fictional truths. Lewis's view is therefore committed to a unique set of fictional truths and so either to the view that 4 is true, or the view that 4 is not true. The status of this sentence is not a fringe problem that can be set aside but infects the explanation of even the least contentious cases. If 3 is true for the reasons Lewis gives, then either Interpreter A or Interpreter B must be uniquely correct. Neither of them is uniquely correct, so Lewis's explanation cannot be right.

[13]The problem is related to one considered by Proudfoot (Proudfoot, 2006: pp.25-6), who considers the difficulty of identifying the bounds of a bounded representation. Proudfoot's concern is that they may be no non-circular way of identifying the boundary, if we are using the boundary to determine what is true in the fiction. The concern here is that the boundary should not be identifiable, for then the disagreement between A and B would be in principle decidable, which it is not. Yet an identifiable boundary is a consequence of any theory along the lines of Lewis's.

3 An Alternative Account

3.1 Walton on Fiction

In this section, I present an alternative account which avoids the problems identified in the previous section. The account builds on Walton's view of fiction as make-believe, filling a lacuna in Walton's presentation with some of the possible worlds machinery utilised by Lewis.

For Walton (1990), we engage with fiction by indulging in games of make-believe. Make-believe is presented as an extension of children's games. A child can play with a doll in various ways; they might pretend that the doll is a baby, or pretend that it is a pillow. These two games differ in that only the first is the *authorised* game. The function of a doll is to represent a baby, rather than a pillow.[14] When the doll is used to represent a baby, we are playing an authorised game. When it represents a gun, we are not.

Works of literature are also used in games of make-believe. Again, games can be authorised or unauthorised. In the authorised game, we treat the Sherlock Holmes stories as the journals of Dr John Watson, pretending that they recount the actual adventures of an individual from Victorian London named 'Sherlock Holmes'. As an example of an unauthorised game, we might pretend that the works are ancient tomes containing hidden wisdom that we have uncovered in an expedition to the most remote corners of the Amazon. That would be a perfectly fine game to play; it just isn't the authorised one.

We engage in games of make-believe both when we read the stories and when we evaluate statements like 2. Again, games can be authorised or unauthorised.

[14] We needn't subject the notion of *authorisation* to serious investigation here. The function of the dolls might be set by the intentions of the maker, or societal expectations, or whatever. I am tempted to deny that there is any objective grounding of authorisation. As it happens, we tend to agree on which games to treat as authorised but when difficult cases arise, different members of the community can reasonably disagree, with no means of adjudicating the disagreement. Is it part of an authorised game that the doll is now two years old, having been played with for two years? It doesn't seem to me that there is any significant answer here.

How do we engage with 2 when we play the authorised game? We pretend that 2 is true, certainly, but it won't do to suppose that it is true on just any interpretation. The sentence is true if 'Sherlock Holmes' is interpreted as referring to detective Raymond C. Schindler but this pretense isn't part of the game authorised by the stories. Walton agrees with Lewis that 'Sherlock Holmes' doesn't refer to anyone. We can't be pretending to assert the proposition that Sherlock Holmes is a detective, therefore, because there is no such proposition (Walton, 1990: p. 402).

Rather, Walton suggests that we engage in a complicated kind of pretense that is difficult to describe in purely descriptive terms. Roughly, we pretend to refer *de re* to an individual called 'Sherlock Holmes', to whom we attribute the property of being a detective. Walton (1990: p. 402) recognises that this falls short of specifying the precise conditions for engaging in an authorised pretense but takes the pretense to be defined ostensively by the very act of uttering the sentence. By uttering 2, I engage in a particular kind of pretense, call it K, and thereby demonstrate the kind of pretense that is authorised by the stories.

Though 2 semantically expresses no proposition, it can be used to make truth-conditional assertions. When someone mistakenly says 'Sherlock Holmes is a policeman', we can correct them: 'No, Sherlock Holmes is a detective'. Here, we are showing our interlocutor what kind of pretense is authorised by the works. The maker of the plaque, likewise, is, showing readers how to play the authorised make believe played with the works: we pretend that Holmes met Watson here, in St Barts, on a certain date. These utterances are therefore truth-evaluable; 2 is true just in case this kind of pretense is part of the authorised game of make-believe established by the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Walton therefore suggests the following paraphrase of 2:

5. The Sherlock Holmes stories are such that one who engages in pretense

of kind K in a game authorized for it makes it fictional of himself in that game that he speaks truly.[15]

Like Lewis, Walton explains the apparent truth of 2 by associating it with another statement that is literally true. Unlike Lewis, however, Walton doesn't take 2 to be an abbreviation of 5. For Lewis, we evaluate the proposition expressed by 3 when presented with 2. Walton (1990: p. 404) is explicit, however, that we don't have anything like 5 "specifically in mind" when we utter a sentence like 2. What do we have in mind? Simply 2 itself. How, then, does 2 acquire the truth-conditions of 5? The account must meet two criteria: it must explain why the utterance is true if and only if Walton's suggested paraphrase is true and it must allow that the sentence is interpreted directly, without the audience deriving the suggested paraphrase.

3.2 Supplementing Walton's Account

I suggest that we can capture the kind of interpretation that Walton points to by employing a view similar to, but importantly different from, Lewis's. Lewis suggests that 2 is an abbreviation of 3. 2 *seems* true because 3 *is* true. This manoeuvre is clearly problematic for other cases of apparent truth. Consider someone who mistakenly takes the Holmes stories for works of history rather than fiction. For this individual, 2 seems true. Following Lewis's method, we might attempt to explain this apparent truth by taking 2 to be an abbreviation of some sentence that the interpreter can recognise as true. Perhaps

6. According to my beliefs, Holmes is a detective.

The operator 'According to my beliefs' works like the 'In the fiction' operator, prompting interpretation of the sentence, not relative to the actual world

[15] Walton (1990: p. 400)

but relative to worlds consistent with the interpreter's mistaken beliefs. This analysis faces a problem similar in form to the problem of aesthetic experience from section 2.1. The mistaken interpreter believes that 2 is *actually* true, not only that it is true according to their beliefs. However well the account does at explaining the apparent truth of the embedded sentence, the account is unable to explain why they feel as though the sentence as *actually* true, rather than just *believed* to be true.

Of course, this explanation was very unnatural to begin with. There is little temptation to posit an unpronounced operator to explain the false belief case. The case is very simply explained by the fact that the interpreter is wrong about the state of the actual world. The interpreter tries to evaluate 2 for truth at the actual world but they end up evaluating it relative to the way they mistakenly take the world to be. Though it is actually untrue, the interpreter will judge the sentence to be actually true.

The apparent truth of 2, for the mistaken interpreter, is not explained by taking it as an abbreviation but in terms of the worlds against which they evaluate the truth of 2 itself. I suggest that we explain the apparent truth of 2 in similar fashion for interpreters who understand that the statement concerns fiction. When interpreting a statement like 2, we do playfully what the mistaken interpreter does in all seriousness; we interpret the sentence as though it were true at the actual world. The assessor's interpretation of the Holmes stories can be represented as a set of worlds and it is relative to this set of worlds that a statement like 2 is evaluated. As Holmes is a detective at all worlds consistent with my reading of the Sherlock Holmes stories, I judge 2 to be true. As Walton suggests, 2 is interpreted directly, without first deriving an alternative paraphrase.

How does this explain the truth-conditions that Walton identifies in their

paraphrase 5? The utterance will be judged true just in case it is true at all worlds in the set I use to evaluate it, but the worlds themselves are not arbitrary. Just like the mistaken interpreter, the worlds are selected with a goal in mind. The mistaken interpreter intends the set of worlds to characterise the actual world. They are mistaken precisely because the actual world is not included in this set. The knowledgeable interpreter's behaviour is also goal-directed: they intend the set to characterise the 'world of the fiction', that is, they intend to play the game authorised by the Sherlock Holmes stories, which requires them to evaluate the sentence relative to worlds that are consistent with the world described by the game. In this, they can also be mistaken. One gets it wrong, in terms of the game authorised by the Holmes stories, if one doesn't evaluate the sentence relative to an appropriate set of worlds, where an 'appropriate set of worlds' is one at which (among other things) Holmes is a detective. The utterance is treated as true, therefore, only if the sentence is true relative to worlds that are consistent with the game authorised by the fiction.

Consider again our interlocutor who says 'Holmes is a policeman'. They evaluate that sentence relative to a set of worlds W at which Holmes is a policeman. They might be playing some inventive and nonstandard game but if they are trying to play the authorised game then they are not doing it properly. They pretend to speak truly—they pretend that the worlds W are actual and the the sentence they utter is true relative to the worlds W—but they do not speak truly in the game authorised by the fiction. To do that, they would have to pretend that a different set of worlds is actual: a set of worlds at which 2 is true. We correct them: 'No. Holmes is a detective'. In so doing, we pretend that a different set of worlds is actual and thereby speak truly within the game authorised by the fiction. By demonstrating the kind of pretense that is authorised within the game, we communicate the truth 5.

3.3 Avoiding the Problems Faced by Lewis's Account

The view just outlined fills a lacuna in Walton's theory by explaining how we interpret utterances like 2 without taking them to be abbreviations of more complex sentences, while also explaining how they come to have the truth-conditions that Walton suggests.

The view avoids the problems raised in the section 2. There are many different ways to play the game authorised by the Holmes stories. To speak truly within the game, we have to treat the right kind of worlds as actual, but there is no single set of worlds that fits the bill. It isn't clear, for example, whether 4 should be considered true or untrue. Different interpreters might, therefore, evaluate sentences relative to different sets of worlds while still playing the same game. As long as the contentious sentence doesn't come up, the difference won't even be noticed and we can continue playing.

Compare playing with a doll. I imagine that the stony-eyed doll blinks intermittently, while you do not. Despite this difference in our pretence, we can engage in the same game perfectly well. It's only when this difference is made explicit ('Hang on! The baby hasn't blinked! We need to take them to the doctor!') that this difference is even noticed. When the difference is noticed, one party can relent, adopting the pretense of the other ('You're right! Let's go to the doctor.') or they can dig in their heels ('No, she's OK. Look: she just blinked!'). If both parties dig in their heels, the whole game can come apart.

Likewise, in the case of fiction, we can continue playing the game even if our interpretations of the work diverge, so long as these differences don't come up. When they do come up, and neither party relents, we can have some very enjoyable arguments ('You're wrong! H. H. Asquith was PM during *His Last Bow* because...'), though we might no longer be playing the game authorised by the fiction.

Interpreters may interpret stories differently without any criticism being possible. That is not to say that anything goes, however. While I agree with Walton (1990: p. 397) that "there is nothing to stop us using a work however we like", people can be criticised on the grounds that they aren't using it as they would like. As noted previously, they will often intend to play an authorised game and, as such, they will be sensitive to certain kinds of evidence. Interpreters intend to interpret fictions in particular ways. If an interpreter thinks that 2 is not true in the fiction, that is likely because they have made some identifiable mistake; perhaps they misread, or forgot what they read in the past. Here, the interpretation on which 2 is false can be criticised without invoking a unique set of fictional truths. Quite generally, whenever someone argues that a certain proposition is true in a fiction, they will appeal to further considerations to justify their opinion. Whatever these considerations be—what is written in the text, what is true at the actual world (as in Analysis 1), or the overt beliefs of the community in which the fiction was produced (as per footnote 4)—we can appeal to these same considerations to criticise and justify interpretations of fiction.

So, the account does not require a unique set of fictional truths, or that 4 be either true or untrue. This account also avoids the deeper problem. Lewis's account relied on the literal truth of statements like 3. The semantics of Lewis's 'In the fiction' operator entailed that every sentence be either true or untrue in the fiction. As that operator is not present in this account, we no longer require that contentious statements like 4 be true or untrue to explain the seeming truth of an uncontroversial statement like 2. The game authorised by the stories can be played equally well, whatever one's view of that sentence.

Let's return now to the problem of aesthetic experience. On Lewis's account, statements like 2 are abbreviations of prefixed statements like 3. The problem

was that some such statements have aesthetic properties that we should not expect them to have if they are abbreviations. On the account offered here, 2 is interpreted as is, devoid of any 'In the fiction' operator. While 2 is assessed for truth relative to the assessor's interpretation of the Holmes stories, the view is not that statements like 2 are abbreviations of statements like

7. According to my interpretation of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

or

5. The Sherlock Holmes stories are such that one who engages in pretense of kind K in a game authorized for it makes it fictional of himself in that game that he speaks truly.

Statements like 2 are interpreted directly, without implicit operators. It is no surprise, therefore, that they should evoke very different aesthetic experiences to sentences like 3.

The experience of reading the plaque is explained by analogy with the mistaken interpreter who believes in the Holmes stories. Though the mistaken interpreter evaluates the plaque with respect to a set that excludes the actual world, they treat this set as though it included the actual world. The aesthetic experience evoked by the plaque is explained by our doing playfully what the mistaken interpreter does in all seriousness: we treat the plaque as though it depicted actuality.[16] This generates the feeling, though not the belief, that we stand just where Holmes actually met Watson. Likewise, when considering Lewis's thought experiment, we treat worlds that incorporate purple gnomes as though they represent actuality, while knowing full-well that they do not. This contrasts with Lewis's account on which statements about the gnomes are

[16]Something like this view is endorsed in Sainsbury (2011). See [redacted for anonymous review] for similar considerations regarding the interpretation of indexicals.

abbreviations of 'In the fiction' statements that explicitly identify worlds with purple gnomes as non-actual.

4 Conclusion

Lewis wants to explain the apparent truth of statements about fiction by taking them to be abbreviations of literally true statements prefixed with an 'In the fiction' operator. I raised two problems. First, the aesthetic experience of statements about fiction suggests that they are not abbreviations of 'In the fiction' statements. Second, their apparent truth would not be explained, even if they were abbreviation. Both of these problems are resolved by moving towards an alternative account on which statements about fiction are directly interpreted relative to a set of worlds determined by the interpreter's understanding of the fiction. This view can be seen as an extension of Walton's (1990) view on which sentences about fiction are used to communicate truths about authorised games of make-believe.

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