

TRUTH IN FICTION: THE STORY CONTINUED¹

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Narrative fiction, with which I shall exclusively be concerned here, contains many falsehoods. There is no such person as Sherlock Holmes, no such place as Lilliput, no community of talking rabbits on Watership Down or anywhere else, and there never has been, nor ever will be, such a sustained sequence of horrors as those Sade catalogues in *120 Days in Sodom*. But all these actual falsehoods are true in their respective fictions.

In the first part of this paper I criticise the accounts of truth in fiction which have been proposed by David Lewis² and Gregory Currie.³ In the second part I offer a rival account.

I

What is the problem? Why not identify what is true in a fiction with what is explicitly stated in the fiction (or follows deductively from what is explicitly stated)? Well, in some fictions there are deluded narrators, and so they speak falsely. Therefore the proposal does not give a sufficient condition. But it does not give a necessary condition either. There are many truths in fiction which are not explicitly stated, and are not entailed by what is explicitly stated. It is true in the Holmes stories — as Lewis pointed out — that Holmes does not have a third nostril, and that he never visited the moons of Saturn. However, neither of these propositions is explicitly stated in the stories, or entailed by what is explicitly stated.

I shall take for granted that an account of truth in fiction should not invoke fictional objects. It is true in the Sherlock Holmes stories that Holmes took cocaine. But 'Holmes took cocaine' is not true *simpliciter*, for there is no such person as Holmes. Instead, in the normal context of utterance, the sentence 'Holmes took cocaine' is implicitly understood to be prefixed by the sentential operator 'It is true in the Holmes stories that . . .'. Our task, then, is to give an account of the truth-conditions of statements of the form 'It is true in fiction F that p' or, equivalently, ' ϕ is true in fiction F'.

Both Lewis' and Currie's accounts are along these lines. Lewis' theory started the ball rolling. Let us begin with it.

¹ For many helpful comments and suggestions, I am very grateful to Susan Bernofsky, Fiona Cowie, David Lewis, Dick Moran, and two anonymous referees for the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. Versions of this paper were read at the 1991 AAP conference in Melbourne, and at the California Institute of Technology. I am indebted to both audiences for discussion.

² 'Truth in Fiction' reprinted with postscripts in D. K. Lewis, *Philosophical Papers, Vol. I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

³ *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Lewis offers us a choice between two analyses. The first one is as follows:

Analysis 1

ϕ is true in fiction F iff ϕ would have been true had F been told as known fact.⁴

As Lewis notes, there are a number of significant problems with this attempt. One concerns contingent facts that are not widely known. To take Lewis' example, in *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, Holmes claims that the murder victim was killed by a Russell's viper which had climbed down a fake bell-rope (and back up again). But a Russell's viper cannot, in fact, climb a rope (it is not a constrictor).⁵ As Lewis puts it, 'there are worlds where the Holmes stories are told as known fact, where the snake reached the victim some other way, and where Holmes therefore bungled. Presumably some of these worlds differ less from ours than their rivals where Holmes was right and where Russell's viper is not capable of concertina movement up a rope.'⁶ Therefore, according to Analysis 1, Holmes failed to solve the case after all. That cannot be right.

Again, it has been argued (in effect) that if *A Study in Scarlet* had been told as known fact, the (incompletely described) blood test Holmes discovers therein would have used crystalline sodium hydroxide and a saturated solution of ammonium sulphate.⁷ But this is surely an example of implausible detail, like the exact number of socks Watson ever owned. It is not true in the fiction — or so I suggest — that the blood test uses these chemicals, but neither is it false.⁸

In order to overcome this type of problem, Lewis suggests the following amended account.

Analysis 2

ϕ is true in fiction F iff the counterfactual ' ϕ would have been true had F been told as known fact' is true in every *belief world* of the author's community.

A *belief world* of some community is a possible world where all the overt beliefs of the community are true. And 'a belief [is] overt in a community at a time iff more or less everyone shares it, more or less everyone thinks that more or less everyone shares it, and so on.'⁹

This analysis copes with the *Speckled Band* and blood test examples, for the rele-

⁴ Lewis states this using his analysis of counterfactuals in terms of possible worlds, but this is not essential to his account (although it certainly adds to its explanatory value). My objections do not turn on whether Lewis' account of counterfactuals is correct.

⁵ The example is perhaps a little unfortunate. Although the balance of scholarly opinion is apparently for identifying the snake as a Russell's viper, it is never explicitly said to be one in the story. And if this identification is correct, then Conan Doyle made other factual errors about the snake. See Alvin E. Rodin and Jack D. Key, "'The Speckled Band': Poisonous Snakes and Evil Doctors' in Pj Doyle and E. W. McDiarmid (eds), *The Baker Street Dozen* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1989).

⁶ Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

⁷ See Christine L. Huber, 'The Sherlock Holmes Blood Test' reprinted in Philip A. Shreffler (ed.), *Sherlock Holmes by Gas-Lamp* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

⁸ Cf. Lewis' example of the psychoanalysis of fictional characters, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

⁹ Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 272.

vant facts about snakes and chemistry were not matters of overt belief in Victorian England.

However, Lewis' whole approach — analysing truth in fiction in terms of *possible* truth — has a significant cost, as Lewis himself has pointed out. Simply, impossible propositions cannot be true in fiction. Lewis' latest suggestion for coping with contradictory fictions is that they may be divided into consistent fragments, with truth in such fictions being identified with truth in at least one fragment.¹⁰

Currie has complained that if we deny that impossible propositions can be true in fiction, this does too much violence to our ordinary concept. This criticism seems to me decisive. As Currie observes, a story which has as its central theme the hero's refutation of Gödel is not well treated on Lewis' proposal.¹¹ For intuitively we want to say that it is true in the fiction that the hero refutes Gödel, even though that is impossible. The whole point of the story would be lost if the refutation were taken out. Nor would we want to replace the refutation by a surrogate, for instance a very convincing but subtly invalid 'proof' which deceives the hero and the other characters. The moral of *this* sort of story might be quite different!

Again, for all we know, various forms of essentialism might be true. There are numerous stories in which animals have human characteristics: a donkey talks, a mole and a rat have a mystical experience, a pig leads a revolution. It is simply not true (in some of these fictions at any rate) that the animals are humans in animal shape. Peter Rabbit is unquestionably a *rabbit*. There are also countless tales of unicorns, dragons, phoenixes and the like. But a case can be made for the view that donkeys are *essentially* incapable of talking, or that unicorns are *essentially* mythological.¹² Other equally troubling examples are not hard to find.

Must we suspend judgement on what is true in such fictions? Surely we cannot wait for *philosophers* to tell us what is true in Beatrix Potter's stories - children seem to manage this without difficulty. Fiction is stranger than truth. I conclude that the price for a Lewis-style analysis of truth in fiction in terms of possible truth is too high.

Let us now turn to Currie's account, which is as follows.¹³

Analysis 3

It is true in fiction F that p iff it is reasonable for the informed reader to infer that the fictional author of F believes that p.

This account can cope neatly with impossible fiction: although some impossible proposition cannot of course be *true*, it can nonetheless be believed.¹⁴

The 'informed reader' is 'a reader who knows the relevant facts about the com-

¹⁰ Lewis, *ibid.*, Postscript B.

¹¹ Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 69. Of course, the hero must refute Gödel's *actual* proof.

¹² The latter was suggested by Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁴ This is in fact problematic, especially on an analysis of belief in terms of possible worlds. But, although we lack an adequate explanation of how it is possible, I think we are entitled to assume for present purposes that impossible propositions can be believed. To pursue this further would be to get into very deep waters indeed.

munity in which the work was written'.¹⁵ That is a little vague, but intuitively clear. What of the 'fictional author'? This is Currie's explanation.

As readers, our make-believe is that we are reading a narrative written by a reliable, historically situated agent (the fictional author) who wants to impart certain information. Historically situated as he is, the fictional author speaks to an audience of his own time and, most likely, of his own culture. He cannot, of course, tell us everything he knows that is relevant to his story — it would take too long and the attempt would dissipate our interest. But he knows that he does not need to tell us everything. He can rely on a shared background of assumptions, telling us only those things that deviate from or supplement that background, or those things that belong to background and that he feels a need to emphasize. Because the teller — the fictional author — is a fictional construction, he has no private beliefs, no beliefs that could not reasonably be inferred from text plus background. His beliefs are not discovered by a reading (a rational and informed reading) but *constructed* by it.¹⁶

A serious problem with this account is that Currie gives us few clues how to identify the fictional author. The fictional author is not the *author* nor, as we will soon see, is he the explicit narrator (if there is one). The fictional author is a calculation-bound entity, his identity determined by the text and background assumptions. To see how this account is supposed to work, we need to examine some of Currie's examples.

As we saw, there are many truths in a fiction which are not stated explicitly in the text. To take another example of Lewis', it is true in the Sherlock Holmes stories that Holmes lives nearer to Paddington than to Waterloo Station, but Watson never says this, or even anything which deductively implies it. Lewis' account handles this problem elegantly, and Currie claims his theory also delivers the right results. He explains how it achieves this as follows.

[The fictional author] writes about events he is acquainted with, many of which take place in London and into which London's actual buildings and other landmarks are incorporated. Someone who knew these things would probably also know the locations of the main railway termini. So it's reasonable to conclude that he believed Baker Street to be closer to Paddington than to Waterloo. So it's true in the stories that it's closer to Paddington than to Waterloo.¹⁷

The beliefs that the fictional author has need not be explicit. It is true in the Holmes stories that Holmes does not have a third nostril, and that he never visited the moons of Saturn, but the fictional author presumably does not explicitly believe these things. But, I presume Currie would argue, he believes them implicitly, just as

¹⁵ Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

(to borrow an example of Fodor's) you or I believe implicitly that no grass grows on kangaroos.

However, Currie's proposed solution to the problem of inexplicit truth in fiction is incorrect. I have lived in London for a number of years, and am fairly well acquainted with that city. It would be reasonable of you to infer that I have roughly correct beliefs about the location of the main railway stations. But it would also be reasonable of you to infer that I have important gaps in my knowledge, and some seriously incorrect beliefs about the relative locations of the landmarks. If you tried to reconstruct London from my beliefs it would look rather odd. I am not, I think, particularly unusual in this respect. But then Currie's account immediately delivers the result that the London in the Holmes stories has a significantly different geography from the real London, although we cannot specify just how it is different. For it would be reasonable to think that the 'historically situated' fictional author has some incorrect and incomplete beliefs about London's geography. This consequence is quite unintuitive.

Watson is the explicit narrator of the Holmes stories.¹⁸ But Watson is not the fictional author. As Currie puts it, '[i]t is true in the Holmes stories that Watson is less intelligent than he thinks he is, but we could not work this out by inferring that Watson believes himself to be less intelligent than he thinks he is.'¹⁹ In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the explicit narrator — Huck himself — evidently believes that the first line of Hamlet's famous soliloquy is 'To be, or not to be; that is the bare bodkin'. Huck also believes that handling a snake skin brings misfortune. But it is not true in the fiction that the text of *Hamlet* differs from the actual text, nor is it true in the fiction that snake skins have occult powers.

What is the relation between Watson, Huck, and their respective fictional authors? Is it that the fictional author of the Holmes stories has found Watson's papers, and the fictional author of *Huckleberry Finn* has talked to Huck or, more likely, is in possession of his manuscript?²⁰ Currie has, I think, something like this in mind. In the case of an unreliable narrator he says that the fictional author 'tells a story he knows to be true by speaking with the voice of one of the (unreliable) characters in the story'.²¹ So it seems that the fictional author of the Holmes stories come across Watson's papers, is well acquainted with Victorian England, and would now like to tell us the story in Watson's own words. We then have to work out what the fictional author believes to find out what is true in the fiction.

But, if this is right, we obviously cannot build into the account that the fictional author believes that Watson's story is completely true. Watson may be unreliable in certain respects, perhaps about his own mental powers. And Huck is certainly unreliable. So how does the fictional author come to believe that some of the narrator's beliefs are false? Perhaps — and some of Currie's remarks seem to suggest this — it is true in the Holmes stories that Watson is mistaken about his own mental powers because the following counterfactual is true: if someone with knowledge of

¹⁸ More exactly, of all bar four.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124. In my view, this is very unfair to Watson.

²⁰ The book ends 'YOURS TRULY, HUCK FINN'.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 125. The quotation directly concerns Currie's main example of an unreliable narrator, Kinbote in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*.

Victorian England had found papers with the text of the Holmes stories, and read them, he would have believed that the stories were genuine records of actual events, but that Watson was mistaken about his own mental powers.

But this counterfactual is patently false. If such a person had come across such texts, he would have been extraordinarily gullible had he believed they were not fictional. And certainly someone like Huck could not have written the text which he fictionally wrote.

It would not help to insist that the fictional author believes that the story he recounts is largely true – the narrator may be so unreliable that (in the fiction) the story is largely false.²²

Finally, let us now turn to what I regard as the most serious problem. Both Lewis' and Currie's accounts share a common feature. They are both *idealist* accounts of fiction. Just as Berkeley thought there could be no unperceived trees, so Lewis and Currie think there can be no untold tales. On either of Lewis' analyses it immediately follows that, for any fiction F, it is true in F that F is told as known fact. And it would evidently be reasonable for Currie's 'informed reader' to infer that the fictional author of F believes that he, the fictional author, is telling his tale as known fact. So Currie's account also has the consequence that it is true in F that F is told as known fact.

Currie recognises that he has a problem with what he calls 'mindless fiction' – 'fiction in which there is no intelligent life'²³ and so no one to tell the tale. We might live with idealist accounts of fiction if this is the only price we have to pay. But it is not. There are numerous novels with infallible narrators. For the sake of a concrete example, consider any Iris Murdoch novel written in the third person, say *The Book and the Brotherhood*. The impersonal narrator in this fiction is evidently infallible, and has a quite astonishing insight into the mental lives of the characters. Is it fictionally true that the text was written by a 'reliable, historically situated agent'? Surely not. How did this agent find out all this information about the characters' mental states? How is it that this agent cannot be mistaken? It would be absurd to suggest that it is true in the fiction that the characters were interviewed or psychoanalysed by the fictional author. The most natural thing to say is that the events the novel describes are true in the fiction, but that it is not true in the fiction that the events are described. The novel contains an excess of intelligent life, but the infallible narrator is not part of the story.

Lewis' and Currie's analyses not only have the unwelcome result that there can be no untold tales, but they also deliver extremely implausible detail about the teller. If *The Book and the Brotherhood* had been told as known fact,²⁴ either someone would have had supernatural epistemological powers, or else an incredibly detailed investigation would have taken place. And Currie's fictional author would presum-

²² In Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince*, there are five explicit narrators (minus the 'editor'), at most one of whom is entirely reliable.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 125. Currie is prepared to bite the bullet because he claims that the true semantics of fictional names gives us independent reason to suppose that all fictions have fictional authors (p. 126 and section 4.7). That argument has been well criticised by David Conter ('Fictional Names and Narrating Characters', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1991) pp. 319-328).

²⁴ The difference between Analysis 1 and Analysis 2 need not concern us here.

ably believe this. But, in the fiction, there was plainly no such investigation, and no one in the fiction has supernatural epistemological powers, or at any rate not the kind of supernatural powers needed to tell the story.

Enough has been said, I think, to motivate the search for an alternative account of truth in fiction.

II

Let us start by considering non-fiction.²⁵

Oscar, let us suppose, is an expert on poisonous snakes. Oscar has a conversation on the subject of Russell's viper; he conducts a seminar on Russell's viper; he lectures about Russell's viper. The transcript of the lectures is published. Oscar writes an exhaustive study of Russell's viper.

These are all cases of communication. Apart from the notorious loathsome serpent, what do they have in common? In all these cases what is communicated is radically underdetermined by what is literally spoken or written. The underdetermination is more apparent (and since Grice's work, almost too obvious to mention) in the case of conversation, but it is also prevalent in the most carefully written textbooks. Suppose Oscar's written account of his zoological trip to India includes this passage.

We trapped four adult males, which the villagers helped us to bring back to the tents. They had the usual markings of longitudinal reddish brown spots, but the characteristic black and white rings were surprisingly dull. The specimens were later taken back by Pan-Am.

Embedded in an obvious context, it is perfectly clear what Oscar is saying. He is saying that *his team* trapped four (and *no more* than four) *snakes* (not people or tigers); that the *snakes* (not the villagers or the tents) had spots; that the *snakes* were marked with black and white bands of less than expected brightness (not that the local jewellery was uninteresting); that the *snakes* were *flown to the United States* (not that Pan-Am recovered its rightful property, or returned the snakes to their original habitat). Let us say that these propositions are *asserted in* Oscar's non-fiction. And this information, which we generally have no difficulty in recovering, is not entirely linguistically encoded in the text. Sometimes it can be recovered solely by disambiguating a sentence: assigning referents to pronouns, to ambiguous names and descriptions, and so forth. We recover the information that *Oscar's team* trapped four *snakes* in this way. In the terminology of Sperber and Wilson, this is an example of an *explicature*.²⁶ But the information that Oscar's team trapped *no more* than four snakes goes beyond what any sentence says, even after such a process of disambiguation. In the terminology of Sperber and Wilson, this is an example of an *implicature*.

It is very plausible to think that Oscar's book about Russell's viper is a limiting

²⁵ I should say that in this section I am very much indebted to Currie's account of fiction as communication (*op. cit.*, ch. 1).

²⁶ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) p. 182.

case of Oscar's conversation about Russell's viper — a one-way conversation at a distance. In general, there is much truth in non-fiction which is not explicitly stated, and this sort of information is recovered by a process of inference similar to that employed in conversation. That is, we reason on the assumptions that the author will not write falsely, that he will be relevant, that he will avoid superfluous information, and so on. Exactly how to systematise these tacit maxims governing communication is of course a large and difficult problem, and one which I cannot address here.²⁷

We can distinguish two authors of Oscar's book about Russell's viper. The first is Oscar himself, and the second is someone whom we will call 'the Author'. The Author is an abstract entity, a logical construction using pragmatic principles. Oscar may have intended to say that the tents had reddish brown spots, or that samples of the local jewellery owned by Pan-Am were returned to that airline. If so, then Oscar failed dismally. But the Author did not intend to say this. The Author intends to say precisely what the ideal reader — whom we will call 'the Reader' — thinks the actual author intended to say. The Reader constructs the Author.

But who is the Reader? This is tricky. The Reader should not want for pragmatic skills. But what about her beliefs? We obviously cannot make the Reader omniscient. Nor can we restrict her beliefs to what is mutually believed in the actual author's society. Oscar may have written his work for specialists, and presupposed much arcane reptilian lore. But we dare not make the Reader the actual author's intended reader: Oscar may have intended to write for laymen, ending up instead writing a book which could only be understood by herpetologists.

Instead, I think we have to reach the Reader in stages. Our knowledge of the circumstances of the text's production will vary from case to case, but let us suppose that in the case of Oscar's book we have little such knowledge. We might then reach the Reader in this way. We first make the obvious assumption that the text is to be interpreted as English. We then infer that the text purports to communicate information about a certain kind of snake; that the assumption that the text presupposes knowledge of Indian geography and molecular biology results in plausible interpretations, and so on. We then provisionally take the Reader to be a competent speaker of English, with a knowledge of Indian geography and molecular biology. Such a Reader will deliver further interpretations of the text, which we test for intelligibility and coherence. The Reader's beliefs are adjusted as appropriate, and the process continued. The more obscure or dubious the beliefs we have to attribute to the Reader in order to find that a certain proposition is asserted in the non-fiction, the less inclined we will be to make such an attribution. With minimal ingenuity, we could of course make the text, *qua* syntactic object, mean anything we please. But the more incredible the interpretation, the more incredible the Reader's beliefs.

A complicated business! But not a vicious circle: we do not need to discover everything the Author is saying before we can identify the Reader. The process is a virtuous spiral.

All this is evidently connected with Davidson's writings on radical

²⁷ For the state of the art see Sperber and Wilson, *ibid.* See also Lewis, 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game' reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers, Vol. I.*

interpretation.²⁸ It is often pointed out that the device of the Radical Interpreter is quite empty, unless we specify his data and his powers. I have just been sketching how we might determine the data and the powers of a similar character: the Reader. As the Radical Interpreter tells us what Kurt means by 'Es regnet', so the Reader tells us what the Author means. There is an important difference between the two, however. The Radical Interpreter has no initial knowledge of the language spoken by those he interprets. He does have extensive knowledge of the circumstances in which utterances are made. But the Reader has comparatively little of this second type of knowledge, and so we must give her knowledge of the Author's language. A mere list of well-formed formulae contains precious few clues to its meaning.

What is the point of introducing the concepts of the Author and the Reader? Well, the intuitive idea is that the Author provides the standard by which the actual author's success in communication can be judged. If the actual author succeeds perfectly, then he is perfectly represented by the Author. He fails in proportion to the difference between himself and the Author. That is not to say that the Author can have no failings. The Author can be unclear, or make mistakes.²⁹ That will usually be a sign that the actual author is not perfectly represented by the Author, for actual authors do not usually want to be unclear, or to make mistakes. But some do. If their Authors make the mistakes they want to make, or are unclear on the matters they want to be unclear, then the actual authors cannot be criticised for failing to get across what they meant. (Of course they may be criticised on *other* grounds.)

Similarly — to an extent — for the actual readers. An actual reader fails in her reading of the text in proportion to the difference between herself and the Reader. Unlike the Author, however, the Reader cannot make mistakes.

The Author of Oscar's book about Russell's viper asserts various propositions. The Author of a work of fiction may indeed also do this,³⁰ but most of the time he does something else. What he does, I suggest, is to invite the Reader to make-believe that certain propositions are true.³¹

What is make-believe? Clearly something like imagination, fantasy, and day-dreaming, but that is not so helpful. It would take us too far afield to investigate this here. But any account of fiction will need something like this notion, and I leave the term as a placeholder to be filled out by an appropriate theory.³²

Now what the Author invites the Reader to make-believe may not be explicitly stated in the text. But just as implicit assertions in non-fiction can be recovered by pragmatic inference, so can implicit invitations to make-believe in fiction.

We have a use for a concept of truth in non-fiction which goes beyond our con-

²⁸ See especially Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation' reprinted in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁹ Watson's shifting war wound is an example.

³⁰ Two disparate examples: in *The Lord of the Flies* William Golding asserts that Mankind is fallen; in *The Day of the Jackal* Frederick Forsyth asserts that in 1963 it was one of the easiest things in the world to acquire a false British passport. Or so I think. I hope to examine this phenomenon in more detail elsewhere.

³¹ I take this more or less intact from Currie, *op. cit.* Cf. 'The author who produces a work of fiction is engaged in a communicative act, an act that involves having a certain kind of intention: the intention that the audience shall make believe the content of the story that is told' (p. 24).

³² For some suggestions, see Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), and Currie, *op. cit.*, section 1.5.

cept of assertion in non-fiction. For example, we might work out that Oscar's snake collecting expedition must have taken place at full moon, or started out from Jaipur, by inference from the description Oscar provides and our knowledge of astronomy and geography. But it could be that these propositions are not asserted in the non-fiction (and Oscar may not even believe them himself). Nonetheless, they are of some interest to us, for we want to know what actually happened, not just what Oscar tells us happened.

I do not see how we (Holmes aficionados excepted) have a use for an analogous concept of truth in fiction, which goes beyond what the Author is inviting the Reader to make-believe. I therefore propose that the propositions which the Author invites the reader to make-believe are exactly what is true in the fiction. Stating this more precisely, we have:

Analysis 4

It is true in fiction F that p iff the Reader could infer that the Author is inviting the Reader to make-believe that p .³³

Let us see how this works. Suppose we provisionally settle that the Sherlock Holmes Reader³⁴ is a literate member of Victorian England living in London. The Reader might begin to reason along the following lines.

In the Sherlock Holmes stories the Author invites me to make-believe that I am reading an account of actual events, as recorded by a certain John H. Watson, M.D., who is a reliable witness. I know this, in the first place because Watson says he is recording actual events, and he claims to be a respectable member of the medical profession. That creates a presumption that Watson is indeed (in the fiction) reliably recording actual events. And in the second place I find nothing in what Watson says that indicates that the Author is inviting me to make-believe that Watson is lying or deluded. Now in fact I believe that if anyone had purported to recount events in Watson's manner then he would have been lying through his teeth. But it is a matter of overt belief that it is difficult to tell an exciting story through the eyes of one of the characters such that if the story had been told as alleged fact, it would have indeed *been* fact. More than likely, the teller would have been a deceiver or deluded. Now as an attempt at a series of convincing and exciting tales, the stories are a creditable effort. Moreover, as I can recognise that the stories are a creditable effort, the Author will believe that I can. So if the Author were inviting me to make-believe that Watson was deluded, he could not have reasonably expected me to recognise that this was his intention. Hence, as the Author never fails in com-

³³ I therefore adopt, in effect, Currie's solution to the problem of impossible fiction. As it stands, the theory (like Lewis' and Currie's) is incomplete without an account of fictional names. But that must be left for another time. (However, see Conter, *op. cit.*, for some pertinent remarks.)

³⁴ I do not mean to claim that we can always precisely identify the Reader, or that there must be a unique Reader. There may be a great deal of indeterminacy in extreme cases. The Reader of *The Cat in the Hat* presents no problem, but the Reader(s) of *Finnegan's Wake* are a little less accessible.

munication with the Reader, the Author is not inviting me to make-believe that Watson is deluded. For similar reasons, it is not indeterminate that Watson is deluded. So Watson is generally reliable.

The Author also invites me to make believe that the action takes place in London, England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I know this because I know that the Author invites me to make-believe that Watson is generally reliable, and Watson mentions places and dates. Watson says at the beginning of *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* that the story is set in early April 'in the year '83'. Even without inter-fictional carry-over³⁵ from the other stories I know that the Author is inviting me to make believe that Watson is referring to the year 1883, and not 1783 or 1983. The former is by far the most salient candidate. For similar reasons I know that the Author is inviting me to make believe that Watson is at this time sharing rooms with Holmes in *London*, even though Watson does not say so. He just says that the 'events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street.'

We should note at this point that pragmatics has delivered some truths in the Sherlock Holmes stories on which Lewis' account is silent. For we need to decide that, for example, 'the year '83' refers in *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* to the year 1883, and that Watson is generally reliable, before we can say what would have been the case had the story been told as known fact.³⁶ So Lewis' account needs supplementation anyway (as, of course, he recognises).

What about the distance between Baker Street and the railway termini? Suppose you are talking with a friend about the future of London's rail termini. He says, 'There will be some major changes because Victoria is the proposed terminus for the Channel Tunnel rail link.' He says nothing about any other major changes. He has not literally said that Waterloo station will not be resited closer to Baker Street, or that Paddington station will not be closed down. But he has strongly contextually implied that this is so. And so it is in the Holmes stories. They are set in London, and therefore this location is highly salient. We would certainly expect to be told if the London of the Holmes stories differs significantly in its geography from London itself.

Here is another example of inexplicit truth in fiction. You might think it is true in the Holmes stories that Holmes lived before the age of computer databases.³⁷ But is the Author of the Holmes stories inviting me to make-believe this? That cannot be, if the Author's historical knowledge stops at the turn of the century. But surely it is not *definitely* true in the fiction that Holmes lived before the age of computer databases. (Unlike Holmes' address: that is *definitely* 221B Baker Street.) We really have a choice of Authors, given just the text of the stories. Some write the stories in the 1990s, some in the 1890s. It matters little which Author we pick. On some choices we get that Holmes lived before the age of computer databases. On

³⁵ I borrow this handy phrase from Lewis, 'Truth in Fiction', *op. cit.*

³⁶ Cf. Currie, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

³⁷ I am grateful to Dick Moran for the example.

others, this comes out false or indeterminate. What is definitely true in the fiction, I propose, is what is true according to any reasonable choice of Author.³⁸ Incidentally, this is also a problem for Currie, because his ‘historically situated’ fictional author would presumably not believe that Holmes lived before computer databases. I offer Currie my solution (suitably adapted), for what it’s worth.

I claimed, *pace* Lewis and Currie, that there were many untold tales. And Analysis 4 can explain how this is possible. The Author can invite the Reader to make-believe that *p* without also inviting her to make-believe that someone is telling her that *p*. That is not particularly mysterious. And the Author usually signals that his story is an untold tale by the device of the impersonal narrator with unexplained and extraordinary epistemological powers.

That brings us to the end of our story. The principles that govern conversation contain the truth in fiction.

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³⁸This is related to Lewis’ ‘method of intersection’. See ‘Truth in Fiction’, *op. cit.*, Postscript B.