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## Truth in Fiction Reconsidered

*Christer Nyberg*

### *Abstract*

Possible and narrative worlds are traditionally the most influential tools for explaining our understanding of fiction. One obvious implication of this is considering fiction as a matter of pretence. The theory I offer claims that it is a mistake to take truth as a substantial notion. This view rejects possible worlds and pretence as decisive features in dealing with fiction. Minimalist theory of fiction offers a solution that gives a way to combine a philosophical theory of meaning and views of literary theory. Narrative worlds approach saves its usefulness since its focus is more in the psychological process of reading. Minimalist theory of fiction is based on the minimal theory of truth and the use theory of meaning. The idea of language games as a practice of constructing contextual meanings is also decisive. A sentence is not true because it corresponds to a fact but because it is used in a right way in certain circumstances. The rejection of the possible worlds approach is thus based on the idea that understanding fiction is essentially about recognizing the constant interplay between different texts and contexts. Better understanding makes different interpretations possible.

Keywords: Truth, Fiction, Possible worlds, Narrative worlds, Minimal theory of truth, Use theory of meaning

### *1. Is the story true?*

Following the philosopher and mathematician Gottlob Frege's thoughts/ideas it may be tempting to think that when we merely want to enjoy poetry we do not care whether, for example, 'Odysseus' was a real-life person (Frege 1980, 63). Such a question interests us when we ask whether the story is true. "In hearing an epic poem...we are interested only in the sense of the sentences and the images and feelings thereby aroused." In Frege's words our concern is with the "aesthetic delight" not with the scientific worry on truth. Frege thus seems to ignore the possibility that a poem might tell something about the world we live in. In chapter 9 of the *Poetics* Aristotle was aware of this idea in remarking that poetry is something more philosophical and worthier of serious attention than history, for while poetry is concerned with universal truth, history deals with particular facts.

In literary theory, e.g. Thomas Pavel (1975, 1986) has suggested that possible worlds are autonomous worlds in which we become immersed when reading a story. Fiction is thus thought to be about possible events, possible worlds. The boundary between reality and fictional or possible worlds is puzzling. Difficulties in evaluating truth values show this. Possible worlds approach admits of different versions but generally also consider possible worlds to be necessarily linked to the actual world. The boundaries of what is possible are defined by the accessibility relation between actual and possible (Ryan 2013).

In this paper, I aim to show that the previous attempts to explain the function of truth in fiction fail<sup>1</sup>. From the point of view of literary theory this means that narrative worlds are not interchangeable with possible worlds and while narrative worlds save their usefulness possible worlds should be rejected. As the title of Richard J. Gerrig's book<sup>2</sup> says, narrative worlds are used to demonstrate the psychological process of reading. This does not mean that truth is irrelevant in that context. Truth is important but the focus of narrative worlds is in the psychological process of making a story coherent. Possible worlds are more about truth, necessary and possible truths<sup>3</sup>. My rejection of the possible world approach is based on the idea that understanding fiction is essentially about recognizing the constant interplay between different texts and contexts. Recognizing truth in this process is a feature, possible worlds cannot explain. Theories like Pavel's (1986) that take into account those multiple links rely too much on salient structures i.e. independence of fictional worlds. In addition, they are similarly with other theories of fiction relying substantial

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I concentrate my attention more on showing the benefits of Minimalist theory of fiction in contrast to possible worlds and pretence theories. Equally important attempts to deal with fictional objects are offered by theories following Alexius Meinong's (1981) theory of objects. Admitting non-existent and impossible objects to existence offers an account of intentional and linguistic reference. The leading contemporary Meinongians, are Terence Parsons (1980) and Edward Zalta (1983). More exhaustive account of my theory is offered in Nyberg 2016 (Forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> *Experiencing Narrative Worlds, On the Psychological Activities of Reading*. Gerrig 1993.

<sup>3</sup> The modal operators in possible world semantics are interpreted as quantifiers over possible worlds.

“Nec A sentence of the form [Necessarily,  $\varphi$ ] ( $[\Box\varphi]$ ) is true if and only if  $\varphi$  is true in every possible world.

Poss A sentence of the form [Possibly,  $\varphi$ ] ( $[\Diamond\varphi]$ ) is true if and only if  $\varphi$  is true in some possible world.” (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2016)

theories of truth. In my view better understanding of a story means recognizing different language games played at the same time. Narrative worlds rely essentially on psychological process of reading while questions on truth are often unnecessarily avoided. Minimalist theory of fiction (MTF) offers a way to unite these two.

The Minimalist Theory of Fiction I promote gives a new way to deal with truth in fiction. The solution rests essentially on two things. Firstly, in order to understand a story, it might be essential to recognize whether a sentence is true in reality, in another context or in another fiction. Consider for example a fictional story about an actor in Star Wars movies. The whole idea of the story might be to play with the events of Star Wars movies and real-life events of making the previous movies. Better understanding of the story thus depends on prior knowledge and recognizing intertextual links. Secondly my theory rests on minimal theory of truth which states that calling a sentence true is the same thing as repeating that sentence. It is the correct use of the words that counts<sup>4</sup>. This approach rejects possible worlds. The rejection of possible worlds goes together with the rejection of pretence theories. Make-believe is not a decisive feature in dealing with fiction.

Frege's way of thinking resembles that of modern pretence theories of fiction. The concept of pretence has been popular in analysing the position of fictional characters. Frege (1980), Gareth Evans (1980), Gregory Currie (1986), David Lewis (1980), Kendall Walton (1990) etc. consider in a way or another that we only pretend to refer or make assertions when we talk about fictional characters. According to Kendall Walton "It is not the function of biographies, textbooks, and newspaper articles, as such, to serve as props in games of make-believe" (Walton 1990, 70). They are used to claim truth for certain propositions rather than to make propositions fictional. Instead of establishing fictional worlds, they purport to describe the real world. We read *New York Times* to find out what actually happened "in the world of the *Times*". Walton admits that some works blur the difference. Historical novels are sometimes trying to get readers to believe the propositions they state and some history books or biographies can be read as novels. An author may also claim truths for what he

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<sup>4</sup> Minimal theory of truth goes together with the use theory of meaning.

writes despite his claims being false. What Walton does not admit is that it is justified to claim that newspapers and other texts meant to describe the real world similarly serve as props in make-believe games. As Gerrig 1993, 7) puts it,

we enjoy many activities that are explicitly designed to prompt experiences of narrative worlds: novels, newspapers, movies, television programs, history books, representational artworks, and so on. In each case I suggest, we should be able to find some common core of processes that are the implementation of being transported.

Gerrig intends narrative worlds to be neutral with respect to the issue of fictionality. He explicitly comes to the conclusion that there is no psychologically privileged category of “fiction”. This discussion about immersion is extensive but what it shows is that the focus is in the psychological process of getting emotionally involved in narratives. The framework is thus essentially different than in philosophical discussion of understanding and judging fiction. However, truth is still involved.

Is there any reason to think that process of ‘being transported’ is somewhat different in reading fiction than in reading a newspaper or a history book? I think not. What this observation suggests, besides questioning the idea of make-believe, is that the ‘worlds’ of literary theorists and philosophers are for different purposes. They are not interchangeable. The ideas of being *transported by* a narrative by virtue of *performing* that narrative are misleading if they are mixed with other than narrative worlds of literary theorists. ‘Being transported’ reminds us of the words of Frege; ‘we are interested only in the sense of the sentences and the images and feelings thereby aroused...’ This immersive feature means getting ‘lost in a book’ or being emotionally moved by a movie or a museum exhibition. The reality and fiction are intermingled. This needs not to rule out immersive features. Images and feelings are dependent on prior knowledge and understanding. Knowledge and understanding are essentially connected to truth.

How useful possible worlds are in dealing with different modal operators applications to fiction are facing insurmountable problems. David Lewis's (1980) account of truth in fiction is an illuminating example. If the focus is in constructing a narrative world we get a picture of something separate, a world we create. That resembles the philosophical ideas of possible or fictional worlds. The difference is the relation to the concept of truth. It is maybe too harsh to claim that literary theorists are not interested in truth but maybe it is justified to claim that it is interpretation that counts more for literary theorists than truth. A sign of this is the effort to secure the autonomy of fictional worlds (e.g. Pavel 1986).

It is the constant interplay with other 'worlds', 'contexts' or texts<sup>5</sup> that is challenging the traditional attempts to deal with fiction and also showing the limitations of possible or fictional worlds. The solution I offer provides a possibility to build a bridge between philosophy and literary theory in giving a common ground theory of understanding fiction without the one-world-models or structuralist approaches. This means adopting the Minimalist Theory of Fiction (MTF). An important thing to notice is that I am not focusing on defending my background theories. Such a defence is of course an extensive one<sup>6</sup>. I am using my background theories to develop MTF. However, MTF as such is an argument supporting them.

## *2. Minimalist Theory of Fiction*

The Minimalist Theory of Fiction is essentially grounded on minimalism on truth. The minimal theory of truth belongs to the family of deflationary conceptions of truth. Deflationary conception of truth admits different versions and the biggest difference between them is that some versions hold the view that deflated truth may still be useful. These theories usually go under the names "minimalism" or "disquotationalism". Advocates of "Redundancy theories of truth", e.g. F. P. Ramsey (1931) and A. J. Ayer (1936) maintain that truth is a

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<sup>5</sup> I consider these other contexts as language games where meanings are constituted. The idea of language game originates from Wittgenstein (1999).

<sup>6</sup> The debate on deflationary theory of truth is an extensive one. Equally debatable theories are the use theory of meaning and the idea of language games. The burden of defense of these theories lies on the shoulders of prestigious developers of these theories. However I consider MTF as a strong argument for their support.

fully redundant notion and thus always eliminable. Truth is thus not considered as a property. Sometimes this view is labelled as “disappearance theory of truth” because truth is taken as eliminable from all occurrences. A common feature for all deflationary theories is that truth is considered to add nothing substantial to sentences and every sentence specifies its own condition for being true. In general, I favour Paul Horwich’s (1998a) version which he calls the minimal theory of truth. I will mostly follow his terminology. In his theory the function of the predicate ‘true’ is defined implicitly by its use. This implies that the deflationary account of truth is not credible without assuming the use theory of meaning.

According to the use theory of meaning<sup>7</sup>, the meaning property of a word is reduced to its use regularities. This means that explicit knowledge is not needed in order to use the word correctly. Understanding a word or a sentence is thereby a form of knowing *how* instead of knowing *that*. A member of a language community knows implicitly what the word means when her use of the word stems from the word having certain use property in the communal language. (Horwich 1998b, 44-45). An important aspect of this is that understanding is a matter of degree ranging from minimal understanding to an expert’s full knowledge on the use of the word (Horwich 1998b, 16-18). This is also a crucial characteristic in understanding fiction.

According to the minimal theory of truth saying that ‘snow is white’ is true, is equivalent to simply saying that snow is white. It is the use of the words, our prior knowledge and social cues that give further information about meanings in a particular context. The ultimate meaning is thus constructed in contexts i.e. in language games<sup>8</sup>. There is thus no further question whether it is true in fiction. ‘Dogs bark’ is true if and only if dogs bark. Thus in contrast to traditional theories, deflationism makes truth independent of metaphysical questions.

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<sup>7</sup> Mostly I follow Paul Horwich’s account on use theory of meaning (Horwich 1998b). The idea originates from Wittgenstein (1999)

<sup>8</sup> The idea of language game goes together with Wittgenstein’s idea of use theory of meaning. Meanings are constructed in language games.

The MTF implies that the unsatisfying solutions to problems underlying understanding fiction are due to philosophical confusion caused by considering truth and meaning as dependent on worldly entities or corresponding structures of language and world. Truth is still an essential tool but in a different way than traditionally assumed. As W.V.O Quine brought up, truth works as a logical tool and a device for semantic ascent (Quine 1970) which is essential in connection to metacognitive procedure in better understanding fiction. Referential semantics along with the substantial notion of truth leading to complicated ontologies or possible world semantics are thus rejected. This view implies also that make-believe theory of fiction is no longer valid. Make-believe or pretend may still be involved but their role is similar in both fiction and informational text.

The idea of the use theory of meaning is that the meanings not only stem from use: meaning *is* use. As the meanings develop in use, so does knowledge on meanings. Some readers have read Holmes stories having a belief that Holmes was a real life person, and their knowledge on the name “Sherlock Holmes” is thus not the one of an expert. A reader with better knowledge on the use of the word is able to use it correctly in metafictional and other contexts. There is no need to pretend the existence of objects of thoughts, since understanding is a matter of knowing the right use of the words. Mental images, situation models etc. may well describe the psychological process of what happens when reading a narrative, fiction or an informational text (Gerrig 1993, 6-7).

### *3. Understanding fiction*

There is a lot of research on narrative comprehension that suggests that knowledge in a given domain facilitates the acquisition of new domain information (Gerrig 1993, 41). High knowledge subjects recall more information after hearing a narrative and seem to remember more relevant details than low-knowledge subjects. In addition, enhanced knowledge enables readers to direct attention toward the more informative aspects of narratives. These aspects show that knowledge, truth and connections to



other texts are necessarily involved. Recognizing right contexts or language games depends thus on how much knowledge we have of the uses of words.

The way how the information is represented to readers explains why readers do or do not access appropriate knowledge. In order to make sure the appropriate knowledge is available; the knowledge should be represented in a way that is accessible to readers. For example, the word “hammer” comes available when “board game pounded together with nails” is mentioned instead of “mallet”. These are natural likelihoods since associations depend on personal experiences. (Gerrig 43-44) Some associations may thus be rarer; they may require expert knowledge which means that only some readers recognize certain intertextual links. In my view associations are connected to meanings since they form in their own part the acceptance properties of a word. In MTF understanding is a matter of a degree which means that better understanding of a word, sentence or a story means recognizing different interpretations, i.e. relevant meanings. This will be highlighted in what follows.

It is often claimed that fictional characters are vague and thus there is no way we can give a scientific account whether Holmes could have solved A.B.C murders sooner than Poirot. However, we have no way to find out whether Eliot Ness could have solved Jack the Ripper case either. We may gain more information on the right uses of the names like Holmes or Eliot Ness and some people have the best understanding. For example, in case of an assertion concerning fictional characters it is a matter of understanding, i.e. having the skill to use the words in question in order to give enlightened judgement. In literary criticism, it is the community of literary theorists that has got the best knowledge on the use of the concepts in question.

The possible world approaches and pretence theories have great difficulties in taking into account the complexity of fictional texts and works of art in general. An illuminating image of this totality is Julia Kristeva’s account on intertextuality. The notion of intertextuality has changed its shape during the decades but in Kristeva’s words any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (Kristeva 1982). Many other poststructuralists, like Roland Barthes made the

same point. It is evident that all literature has implicit or explicit references to other texts. This makes it problematic to consider a world of fiction where a certain sentence is true. “In the story” is one context where a sentence may be true, but inside the story there might be other contexts, for example created by references to other texts. Stories also contain references to the real world when knowing the truth e.g. in scientific context might be crucial. My claim is that understanding requires recognizing these different contexts and this interplay with other contexts is constant.

The concept of pretence has been popular in analysing the position of fictional characters. Frege (1980), Evans (1982) Lewis (1978), Walton (1990), Currie (1986) etc. all consider in a way or another that we only pretend to refer or make assertions when we talk about fictional characters. According to this view e.g. Conan Doyle only pretended to make assertions about Sherlock Holmes. This is illustrated in David Lewis’s classical article which promotes both possible worlds and pretence account of fiction. According to Lewis, the sentences about Holmes may be considered together with a prefixed operator: “In the Sherlock Holmes stories...” which is an intentional operator that may be prefixed to a sentence of fiction to form a new sentence. Lewis’s account is on the right track in underlying a context but from the point of view of MTF it is just one context or language game among other relevant ones.

In order to show how MTF works in practice let’s consider a familiar problem posed by contingent facts not widely known. In the Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, a murder is carried out by sending a poisonous snake to a room. The snake climbs down and back up a fake bell rope. The story contains several false assertions on snakes. Snakes can’t hear whistles, they don’t drink milk and they cannot be trained to climb down and up a rope. Holmes calls the snake a “Swamp Adder” but it hasn’t been easy to find a snake that has been called with that name or a snake that matches the description “a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles”. The analysis offered by Lewis (1982) suggests that there are different possible worlds depending on interpretation. Thus, in some possible world, Holmes stories are told as known fact and the snake reached the victims in some

other way. This suggests an interpretation that Holmes failed to solve the case. Such an interpretation is very unlikely to be correct.

A further amended account offered by Lewis considers the following condition:

$\emptyset$  is true in fiction F iff the counterfactual ‘ $\emptyset$  would have been true had F been told as known fact’ is true in every belief world of the author’s community.

This means taking a belief world of some community as a possible world where all the overt beliefs of the community are true (Byrne 1993). Byrne takes this as convincing analysis but MTF is not about beliefs but about the correct use of words. An enlightened reader recognizes the belief world of the author’s community which means recognizing the limitations of the uses of words in that community. The efforts to get through such basics of interpretation makes it clear how narrow the possible world approach is in this context. What gets the possible worlds approach to more serious troubles is its incapability to deal with impossible propositions. Lewis has suggested that contradictory fictions may be divided into consistent fragments with truth in such fictions being identified with truth in at least one fragment. Such a complicated account does not give common sense account on our understanding of quite common features of fiction. Many science fiction stories include contradictory features. Gregory Currie (1990) claims that a story about a hero who refutes Gödel’s theorem is not compatible with Lewis’s solution. The idea of the story would be lost if the refutation of Gödel’s theorem is ruled out.

Gregory Currie suggests the following condition:

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.

An informed reader is a reader who has the relevant knowledge on the community where the story was written. This aspect, in my opinion, highlights the semantic ascents made. An informed reader may at the beginning recognize that a sentence is not true in a scientific context. Then, having the relevant information on the community where the story was written, the reader infers that it is true in the story. And further, it may later

in the story turn out to be the case that the author has better knowledge on the matter and argues the opposite. This account makes it clear how it is a matter of knowledge on the meanings of words to achieve a better understanding of a story. It also reveals the limitations of possible worlds.

Currie also introduces the idea of a fictional author. By this he means a fictional character constructed within our make-believe whom we consider to be telling us the story as known fact. This fictional author's belief set is a set of propositions that make up the story. According to Currie, building a belief set of a fictional author is like interpreting real people. (Currie 1990, 76) This suggestion seems to nicely solve the problems stemming from the fact that many apparent truths in the story are not explicit. A reader is supposed to fill the missing parts by constructing a belief set of a fictional author. Thus the London of Sherlock Holmes stories is presumably very alike to how London was in the late 19th century and it is also allegedly true in those stories that Holmes never visited the moon yet these things are not explicitly told.

As Byrne points out, it is problematic to construct London from some person's, fictive or not, beliefs. Our belief sets are very limited and such a construction of London would look very odd. In my opinion, this fictional author is considered to have some kind of a perfect belief set of e.g. a person who lived in 19th century London. In some cases, this fictional author takes a voice of some character in a story, like Watson or Huckleberry Finn. In those cases, the narrator may be unreliable. Gregory Currie's account on fiction thus follows Lewis's idea of prefix operator.

From the point of view of MTF fictional author's perspective is one language game going on in a story. Some readers are able to recognize the way this game is played better than others. The MTF makes it possible to deal with truth in contexts and the concept of truth works similarly in all contexts, fictional and scientific alike. The sentence 'Sherlock Holmes solved the riddle of Baskerville' is true in the story. The minimal theory of truth implies that the sentence 'Sherlock Holmes solved the riddle of Baskerville' is true if Sherlock Holmes solved the riddle of Baskerville. Sherlock Holmes solved the riddle of Baskerville and thus the sentence is true. The one who

recognizes the context and thus knows that Sherlock Holmes solving the riddle of Baskerville didn't happen in real life, has better understanding of the story. The view I am promoting leaves thus ontological questions unanswered and this is because of the way language is used. This is not to deny the importance of the knowledge of whether the objects have real life existence or not. It might be important in order to get a better understanding of a story.

#### *4. Rejecting pretence*

From the point of view of MTF it is thus not the pretend play that is essential. What actually happens is that the words in question are used in a different way than usually. Using the word "apple" in the presence of a wooden block is a radically different use of the word. If the word is not used in a "customary" way it is more challenging to understand what is going on. The word in question does not appear alone. It is used in a context that includes numerous clues that help in using the word right way in that context. This process is a language game. In order to recognize the context, it is essential to have enough knowledge on the meanings of the words and skills to grasp the contextual clues and rules. However, the knowledge in question is not explicit since those who knowingly take part in the game, have some contextual clues that help in that task. Playing the game is easier than talking about the game. Those who engage in the game start to follow the rules and they don't need to articulate the different uses of the words. It is enough to master the rules in order to play the game.

The idea of pretence is often defined as acting in a way that is contrary to how the world is. According to developmental theorists the pretence emerges during the second year of life which is generally considered puzzling. It is a very early stage when children are learning to construct their own concept of world and reality<sup>9</sup> (Randell & Nielsen 2007) E.g. Garvey (1990) states that pretending by its definition requires acting symbolically or non-literally with objects in a way that is contrary to reality and Lillard (1993) defines pretence as consciously projecting a mental representation onto reality. However, we can question

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<sup>9</sup> See also Nyberg 2015

whether an actor or a reader knowingly projects a (mostly) false proposition onto a real state of affairs. It is obvious that the same propositions can be false in other contexts. Thus there is no reason to exaggerate the non-seriousness and awareness of participating in a game, especially when the participants are two years old. My claim is that it is the participation in the language game that explains how children so young can deal with seemingly “false” statements.

In the following passage Rakoczky (2003, 2) explains further the structure of pretence play:

Thus the real situation and the false proposition have to be coordinated somehow, and in extended sequences of pretence, the implications of the stipulated pretence proposition (“This is an apple”) have to be respected, e.g. “This can be eaten”. Furthermore, in joint pretence one has to understand the other person’s coordination of real situation and false pretence proposition in order to be able to join into the play. Given this logical structure of pretence, and given robust findings from other areas of cognitive development where similarly structured problems are mastered much later, it becomes an even greater puzzle that children from around two years of age seem to comprehend and perform pretend play actions.

One other area of cognitive development relevant here is counterfactual reasoning. Confronted with explicit counterfactual reasoning tasks, such as “Suppose all bears were blue and that Jimmy was a bear. What colour would Jimmy be?”, even school-aged children have considerable difficulties (Dias & Harris, 1988; 1990; Harris, 2000). Yet in pretence comprehension it seems that even very young children do draw such counterfactual inferences, e.g. from “If this were an apple” to “I could eat it”. Another area of cognitive development relevant here is children’s developing understanding of false beliefs. Not until four years of age seem children to understand that one can believe a false proposition (“This is an apple”) to be true of a real situation (“This is a block”) in the world (for a review see Wellman, Cross & Watson, 2001). Yet in pretend play, considerably younger children seem to understand structurally analogous states of affairs: that a person can pretend that a false proposition (“This is an apple”) is true of a real situation in the world (“This is a block”).

Explicit counterfactual reasoning tasks pose problems for even school-aged children. My analysis of pretend play suggests that it is a matter of semantic ascent to be able to do counterfactual inferences. It is not my purpose here to give answers to the deep problem of counterfactuals but a few remarks should be made. Counterfactual inferences like “Suppose all bears were blue, and that Jimmy was a bear. What color would Jimmy be?”, to “Jimmy would be blue”

require metalevel thinking. It actually means that *in a language game in which we use the word “blue” as describing the color of bears, it is true that the bear named Jimmy is blue.* So, in order to do the inference we are actually using the concept of truth. We are thus talking *about* language game. It is the metalevel thinking that makes the inference difficult. We are using “metalanguage” in doing counterfactual inferences. If one takes part in a language game there is no such need for metacognitive skills. It is about knowing how to use words and following the rules of the game. This explains the success of two-year-old children in such games<sup>10</sup>. Counterfactuals require thinking that reality has different properties than it actually has. In MTF “Reality” is one context or language game among others (not actually one coherent unit but in this case considered as such for the sake of an argument) and it may be called e.g. following Frege, as “scientific” context. In addition, the basic acceptance properties of words are decisive since making a difference between uses of words in different contexts is essential. And finally, MTF says actually nothing about metaphysical question of reality.

According to MTF mastering the use of a concept, being an expert, means the ability to recognize the context where the concept can be applied. Some are more abstract or generalizations, which makes their use more difficult but all the same, understanding a concept is mastering its acceptance property.

##### *5. From understanding to interpretation. Enlightened judgements*

According to David R. Olson, the traditional meaning of interpretation was “to reveal” or “render clear and explicit” the meaning of a passage or text but the more modern meaning brings out the subjectivity in considering it as “construing” or seeing in a particular light. Thus, the old meaning is close to the word “understanding”. The verb understanding is described as factive, which means that it entails the truth of the complement and thus understanding a text is to know what it means. In contrast interpreting a text does not require that one knows what it means but only that one thinks that it means certain things. Thus, it is sufficient that some meaning is reached, not necessarily the ultimately right one. The concept of interpretation makes

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<sup>10</sup> In Nyberg 2015, I have defended this idea in more detailed form. The way people with autism spectrum disorders use language supports MTF.

it possible to recognize an interpretation as an interpretation and thus makes a difference between what is said and what is meant. (Olson 1994, 117) MTF does not take understanding as ‘factive’ since it is a matter of mastering the use of words in different contexts and thus also recognizing different contexts. This means that better understanding makes different interpretations possible. The attempts to use ‘literal’ meanings easily get into trouble because they might fail in recognizing the context i.e. being unsuccessful in following the rules of the language game played.<sup>11</sup>

Though I resist the idea of possible “worlds” unless taken somewhat metaphorically, the point is that both fiction and non-fiction require some kind of mental models or situation models in order to carry out complex reasoning with respect to the text. Though the text might be too complex or insufficiently determinate to make such models possible, they are necessary for readers to perform judgements with respect to the text. (Gerrig & others 1993, 6). In my view such models, no matter which account is better, the mental model or situation model, are compatible with having certain knowledge on the use of the words that imply recognizing relevant contexts or language games. When those are recognized the mental model helps to make a judgement concerning the language game or context. There is no difference between fictional or non-fictional text in this respect. Make-believe or pretence is not decisive, since both text types use them.

The argument against Kendall Walton’s and other pretence or make-believe theories is twofold. Firstly, make-believe or pretence is present in reading both fiction and non-fiction, and thus working as a prop in a game of make-believe is no decisive feature of fiction. Secondly the use theory of meaning shows how fiction is a matter of using words in different contexts or language games. Pretence might be involved in a game but it is not decisive since it is the skill to use the word in different contexts that shows better understanding of a language game. For example, the one who knows that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character understands the Holmes story better than the one who thinks that Holmes existed in a scientific sense. Mastering the use of the word “Holmes” includes knowing its applicability in the

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<sup>11</sup> See Nyberg 2015 on autism spectrum disorder and mathematics.



sentence “Holmes is a fictional character”. Ultimately it is the right use of the concept of truth that reveals the semantic ascent to another language game.

Walton claims that linguistic strategies emphasizing semantic properties like denotation and truth lead to confusion. The question of the difference between fiction and non-fiction is more on pragmatic than on semantic grounds (Walton 1990, 76). In this I agree with Walton but pragmatic emphasis does not mean that we can avoid problems posed by truth. In fact the function of truth is necessary in order to understand fiction. Ignoring semantic properties leads to confusion. Walton and other (e.g. Currie 1986, Evans 1982 etc.) pretence theorists can’t avoid the real-fictional problem. Adherents of this make-believe view don’t deny that some sentences occurring in fictional contexts containing real proper names express standard proposition (Kroon 1994, 207-2014). “Baker Street is in London” is a such standard proposition. The sentence “Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street in London” is different. Make-believe theorists claim that a proposition is not expressed, because there is no Sherlock Holmes. There is thus only pretence that a proposition is being expressed or a different kind of proposition. According to Kroon (1994, 207) make-believe theorists think that occurrences of real proper names like “London”, “Baker Street” or “Napoleon” in fictional contexts take their usual reference being thus purely referential. This view appears problematic in metafictional context where real proper names are used. Kroon gives the following example: Consider the following sentence

1. Holmes is much cleverer than Poirot.

Walton’s theory implies that this sentence is true in an unofficial game of make-believe where different stories serve as props. The problem arises in the following example:

Frenchman Pierre has read the novel *Je désire Londres* and claims the following:

2. The London of *Je désire Londres* is much prettier than the London of the Holmes stories.

*Je désire Londres* is a fictional novel in French about London.

The proposition expresses a contradiction since both *Londres* and London refer to real London.

Though Walton offers a few different solutions to this, they prove out to be very complicated and somewhat questionable, the MTF handles such problems very nicely. Words have their basic acceptance properties, but the meanings are created in contexts or in other words, language games. The one who has a reasonable amount of knowledge on real London, *Londres* in fiction and London in fiction, can recognize the differences and different language games and make an enlightened judgement. The concept of truth is a tool for semantic ascent in order to make judgements like. It is true that “The London of *Je désire Londres* is much prettier than the London of the Holmes stories” if and only if The London of *Je désire Londres* is much prettier than the London of the Holmes stories. Those who can recognize the context to which the concept of truth is applied i.e. the context of comparing descriptions of London in different stories may give enlightened judgements on whether the words are used correctly. Thus “The London of *Je désire Londres* is much prettier than the London of the Holmes stories” may be true.

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