



Fictionality and Mimesis: Between Narrativity and Fictional Worlds

The concept of fictionality has been undermined by developments in two distinct areas of research in recent years: on the one hand, the interdisciplinary ambitions of narrative theory have tended to conflate fictionality with a general notion of narrativity that encompasses nonfictional narrative; on the other hand, fictional worlds theory, in response to philosophical and linguistic concerns, has sought to disarm fictionality by literalizing fictional reference. Dorrit Cohn, in *The Distinction of Fiction*, has made a case against the former tendency in the interest of her own reassertion of a generic focus upon fiction as “nonreferential narrative,” although this involves no confrontation with fictional worlds theory, which does not contest the generic integrity of fiction (12). My concern here is somewhat different, in two respects: I want to allow a little more force to those narratological perspectives that tend to merge the concept of fictionality with that of narrativity; and I want to distinguish more sharply between my own understanding of fictionality and the way it is framed by the philosophical and linguistic perspectives of fictional worlds theories. These differences arise because in my view the concept at stake is not fiction as a generic category, but fictionality as a rhetorical resource. By identifying what is excluded by the perspectives of a generalized narrativity and fictional worlds theory, I hope to make some progress toward a fuller characterization of the rhetorical nature of fictionality. This undertaking will lead me to a reconsideration of the concept of mimesis in relation to narrative fictions, from which vantage point I want to draw an analogy between “fiction” and “exercise” that I think captures something of the distinctiveness of the fictional use of narrative.

The idea that fictionality and narrativity are in some sense coextensive is perhaps most strongly associated with a historian, Hayden White, although similar views are widespread among narrative theorists for whom fiction itself is the primary

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concern.¹ Such views have more abstract and more fundamental implications than the mere questioning of the generic borders between (for instance) fiction and history. The force of the equation between narrativity and fictionality derives from the recognition that very little of the meaningfulness of narrative can be seen as independent of the artifice of narrativization. The significance of narrative is not latent in the data of experience, or of imagination, but fabricated in the process of subjecting that data to the elemental rhetoric of the narrative form itself. The categorical difference between real and imagined events is overwhelmed by the artificiality of narrative representation in either case: all narrativity, from this point of view, shares in the properties of fictionality. The ontological status of the events themselves (and hence, according to Cohn, the generic basis for reserving a distinct concept of fictionality) comes to seem of marginal interest at best: the theoretical fusion of narrativity and fictionality is formal and rhetorical rather than referential, so a referentially-based generic distinction such as Cohn's does not gain much purchase upon it.

Referential criteria are irrelevant to this line of argument because its horizons are discursive: its appeal is to that characteristic poststructuralist impulse to subvert dualistic hierarchies, by overturning fiction's supposed parasitic dependence upon nonfictional narrative discourses. It allows nonfictional narrative genres to be reconceived as restricted modes of narrativity (or fictionality), constrained by rules of authentication (documentation, testimony) and negatively defined against the ideal plenitude of fictional genres. The Platonic hierarchy is overthrown: fictions are not twice removed from the realm of ideal truth because, at least with regard to the forms of narrative, they generically define it. Fiction is no longer seen as narrative with certain rules (of reference) in abeyance; rather, nonfictional narrative is seen as narrative under certain supplementary constraints (connoting historicity, objectivity, etc.) that serve to establish a rhetoric of veracity.

Nonetheless, if the distinctiveness of nonfictional narrative genres is rhetorical, this process of rhetorical self-definition, precisely because of its oppositional character, must project and renounce a rhetoric that is specific to fiction's cultural role. Whether or not the distinction between fiction and nonfiction can be grounded upon referential criteria, this difference in the rhetorical ends or effects projected by the two regimes itself demands a distinct concept of fictionality. Moreover, the concept of fictionality is not, from a rhetorical perspective, merely the negative foil for nonfictional narrative's claim to referential authority (a view which says nothing about fiction's own purposes); it is a concept that articulates the positive cultural role nonfiction must renounce in making such referential claims, and which fiction plays by virtue of its fictional status.

The important categorical distinction, then, is rhetorical rather than generic: it is the quality of fictionality rather than the genre of fiction that provides for the distinction's theoretical integrity, which is the integrity of a functional orientation rather than a formal essence. With this in mind, it is not difficult to address arguments that conflate fictionality and narrativity by appeal to the various kinds of narrative, especially recent narrative, that blur generic borders.² There are indeed many specific texts, or generic hybrids, from nonfiction novel to fictional memoir, in which the rhetorical scope of fictionality is curtailed: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* confines

its use of the rhetoric of fictionality to certain stylistic and narratorial liberties; Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* uses fictionality primarily as an exemption from the factual accountability that an autobiographical contract would entail. Arguments that take such texts as evidence of an undifferentiated continuum of narrative kinds, however, treat the conceptual distinctiveness of fictionality as if it were empirical and taxonomic. The literary marketability of these kinds of writing can certainly be seen as symptomatic of the intellectual currency of a broad sense of narrative artifice, but the diminished role of fictionality here in no way compromises the specificity of its rhetorical regime; nor, in fact, are the full resources of fictionality likely to be invoked by any genre or text, or any interpretation of a given text.

Closer attention should be paid to another kind of argument, which works in something like the opposite direction by treating fictional texts as if they were a kind of embodied theory. The form of contemporary fiction that has attracted most interest from theoretical enthusiasts of narrativity now generally goes under the name of "historiographic metafiction," and in contrast to the hybrid forms I have already mentioned, is not a case of atrophied fictionality, but of fictionality redoubled: as metafiction, it not only invokes a rhetoric of fictionality, but invokes it (in part) to address the operation of just that rhetoric at one discursive remove. *Historiographic metafiction* has a special relevance to the issue of narrativity that is, of course, thematic. The self-consciousness of such texts about the artifice inherent in all narrative invites a general, symptomatic reading in which historical skepticism, relativism, or revisionism is advanced via the exploration of historiography's narrativity. But readings that thematize metafictional self-reference in order to understand these works generically, as subversive of the distinction between history and fiction, do so at the expense of the specific effects of a given text, beyond any such generic theme. The focus of attention moves prematurely to a level of thematic abstraction at which a novel like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, for example, is read as itself a contribution to theoretical arguments about historiography, precisely inasmuch as it can be classified as a historiographic metafiction. Such interpretations somewhat recklessly pass over the possibility that Rushdie might be more interestingly engaged with India and the experience of Partition in particular, and that his means of doing that are integral to the novel's rhetoric of fictionality, which encompasses and inflects its narrative self-consciousness as well as its story. One of Linda Hutcheon's comments on the novel provides what I take to be a representative instance:

Rushdie's paradoxically anti-totalizing totalized image for his historiographic metafictional process is the "chutnification of history." Each chapter of the novel, we are told, is like a pickle jar that shapes its contents by its very form. The cliché with which Saleem is clearly playing is that to understand him and his nation, we "have to swallow a world" and swallow too his literally preposterous story. But chutnification is also an image of preserving: "my chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings. . . . Memory, as well as fruit, is being saved from the corruption of the clocks." In both processes, however, he acknowledges inevitable distortions: raw materials are

transformed, given “shape and form—that is to say, meaning.” This is as true of history-writing as it is of novel-writing. (Hutcheon 65)

Two kinds of elision occur in this passage: first, the status and rhetorical stance of the author, Rushdie, is elided with that of his fictional narrator, Saleem Sinai (so that “novel-writing” becomes coextensive with fictional autobiography); second, fictionality itself (which surfaces unassimilably in “his literally preposterous story”) is reduced to the “inevitable distortions” of narrativity. What is lost is any sense of the specifically fictional nature of the novel’s engagement. In a subsequent passage, Hutcheon compounds this reductiveness:

Saleem parodies the historiographical drive toward causality and motivation through his reductive, megalomaniacal exaggeration: “This reason or that or the other? To simplify matters, I present two of my own: the war happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers; furthermore, I remained impure, and the war was to separate me from my sins.”

Such a perspective may be the only possible response left to a world where “[n]othing was real; nothing certain.” (Hutcheon 75)

Saleem doesn’t parody here, Rushdie does; nor does this reading take any account of Saleem’s figurative significance as the archetypal “midnight’s child,” born at the moment of India’s independence, whose life is a particular embodiment of the abstract nation’s subsequent fortunes. In general, self-consciousness in fiction is awareness of narrative artifice (insistence upon it, celebration of it, perhaps ironic despair at it), but beyond that it is also necessarily the incorporation of such artifice within the purview of its own rhetoric, as grist to its own mill. Metafiction invites particular attention to its imaginative scope, yet it is collapsed into indifferentiation by a reductive thematics that contrives to understand metafictionality only as a knowing double negative (“this fiction is not not historiography”) rather than as fictionality raised to a higher degree. There remains, after all, a meaningful distinction between the rhetorical stance of a novelist’s historiographic metafiction and that of a historian’s hypothetical counterpart (“metafictional historiography”?), and this distinction cannot be captured by the concept of narrativity.

The need for a distinct concept of fictionality does not, however, lead inexorably in the direction of fictional worlds theories. It is certainly the case that, while poststructuralist accounts of narrativity have blurred the concept of fictionality, fictional worlds theories have insisted upon a categorical opposition between fictional and nonfictional discourses. But because the basis of this opposition is ontological and referential, it has hardly anything to say about the rhetorical force of fictionality. The distinctive rhetorical set of fictionality may have been carelessly appropriated and diffused in the name of poststructuralist narrativity, but in the context of fictional worlds theory it has been almost entirely ignored.

Fictional worlds approaches to fictionality emerged in reaction against structuralist accounts of language on the one hand, and mimetic theories of fictional rep-

resentation on the other. Their primary concern has been the linguistic and ontological problem of fictional reference, a problem evaded by the bracketing of reference in the structuralist tradition, and obfuscated, at least, by the mimetic view of narrative fiction as one of the imitative arts. The solution is elegant and simple: fictional worlds, literally understood as non-actual other worlds, rather than as imitations of this one, resolve the problem by providing for literal reference in fictional texts. The world to which a fictional narrative refers is a textual construct, to be extrapolated from the sentences of the text itself in the broad context of our knowledge and understanding of the real world, supplemented by a framework of inference rules and qualified by generic and specific deviations from real-world norms (Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*). A fictional world is dependent upon a text's language and its interpretative context, but that does not compromise the theoretical objective: reference actually occurs, and the use of language in fiction is shown to be continuous with its use elsewhere.

While the appeal of this in logical and referential terms is clear enough, though, its value in explaining the rhetorical relation between fictions and our understanding of life is not. The reaction against mimetic accounts of this relation is understandable—mimesis is undoubtedly a problematic concept; but if it has proven durable nonetheless, this is testament to the need for some explanation of the relevance of fictions. The concept of mimesis is, if nothing else, a cipher for the purposeful relation between fiction and the real, or the already known. From a literary critical perspective fictional worlds theories need to do more than address philosophical and linguistic concerns about reference: they must also offer an alternative account of the rhetorical use of fiction. Readers cannot be content merely to construct fictional worlds, as if this in itself were endlessly satisfying; they must also be concerned to evaluate them, to bring them into relation with the larger context of their own experience and understanding. But fictional worlds accounts of the process of interpretative mediation between fictions and life seem to be tautologous. The immediate objective of interpretation, in the fictional worlds model, is to extrapolate the fictional world to which the text refers, and which becomes available to evaluative scrutiny insofar as such reference is achieved. The representational function for which mimesis has traditionally been invoked is reconceived as an exercise in comparison between worlds. Yet every aspect of narrative understanding to be derived by contemplating the emergent fictional world in relation to the real one has necessarily been presupposed in the interpretative process of constructing that world. If the reader sets the world of the text beside the real world and observes points of correspondence and divergence, this merely unpicks the work this reader has already undertaken in defining the fictional world against real-world default assumptions in the first place. True, fictional worlds theories need not insist upon this model of evaluative response: it is not necessary to an account of fictional reference. But by the same token, it should be recognized that the redundancy inherent in such a model is only the reflex of the redundancy of fictional reference itself to the issue of fiction's rhetorical efficacy.

By speaking of the quality of fictionality, I am framing the argument at one remove from the generic distinction between fiction and nonfiction per se, but fiction-

ality is certainly an attribute of all fictions in that sense, since it is applicable to all narratives deemed fictional (as distinct from false): as such it is an interpretative frame that inflects and transforms the entire process of narrative comprehension. In saying so, I am claiming that fictionality is not contingent upon ontological-referential criteria, and cannot be adequately accounted for by reference failure or reference to fictional worlds; nor does it necessarily follow from any set of textual criteria for genre membership. A rhetorical definition of fictionality is pragmatic, in that its criteria are not ultimately inherent in the narrative itself, but are contextual. The rhetoric of fictionality is brought into play whenever a narrative is offered or taken as fiction, regardless of issues of form, style, or reference. Of course it is the case that most fictions do in fact exhibit characteristics indicative of their fictional status, in the form of transgressive narratorial situations such as omniscient narration, or stylistic features such as free indirect discourse; but these are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions of fictionality. This is not just because of the historically variable status of such indicators, although some have indeed been accepted in past ages as conventional marks of historicity: for example, certain effects of narratorial omniscience, such as the unwitnessed monologue, were accepted manifestations of authority in heroic history (Scholes and Kellogg 266). Even within terms of the familiar, modern fictional contract, though, fictionality has no determinate relation to features of the text itself. For example, fiction may very well do without free indirect discourse; and nonfiction (a biography, say) may resort to it. The presence of free indirect discourse in a nonfictional narrative will probably strike contemporary readers as a liberty, but this does not make the text a fiction (in fact, it confirms their interpretative orientation towards it as nonfiction). For the same reason, the dissociation of fictionality, in principle, from any textual indicators may be extended to matters of reference. If a narrative offered as historical is shown to be inconsistent with documented evidence, even to the point of reference failure (if it had interpolated a non-existent character into the narrative, for instance), then precisely because this error or subterfuge is held accountable to criteria of historical falsifiability, it confirms that the text in question is not fiction, but compromised history.

The categorical distinctiveness of fictionality does not imply an all-or-nothing view of a narrative's relation to verifiable fact. Fictions are often not entirely fictional, and in principle may not be fictional at all. There are various circumstances in which nonfictional material, whether avowed (the historical novel), surreptitious (the *roman à clef*), or entirely adventitious, may inhabit a fictional narrative. But these circumstances, and the compound motives implied by the first two, are consistent with a narrative's final claim to be received and interpreted under the regime of fictionality. Similarly, a pragmatic approach to fictionality does not tie the categorical absolute to any ahistorical essence: not only are the conventional forms of fiction subject to change, but the rhetorical scope and import of fictionality itself are both historically and culturally variable.

Fictionality is the product of a narrative's frame of presentation, of the various possible elements of what Gérard Genette has described as the paratext. The distinction between fiction and nonfiction rests upon the rhetorical use to which a narrative is put, which is to say, the kind of interpretative response it invites in being presented

as one or the other. And the distinction is categorical, not because there are any defining attributes inherent to either, but because the interpretative operations applicable to a narrative text are globally transformed, one way or the other, by the extrinsic matter of the discursive frame within which it is received. This does not make fictionality dependent upon such uncertain or inscrutable contingencies as authorial intention or reader response: rather, it depends upon the concrete evidence of the several kinds of ancillary text, proximate and remote, that mediate between a narrative and its cultural context. This is evidence to be interpreted, of course, and some of it may itself be fictional or deceptive, but if the text is to work as fiction there must be some frame that situates it as such, beyond any fictional paratext or behind any deceptive paratext (for some readership, if not for all).

In general, a rhetoric of fictionality depends for its cultural currency upon its functional distinctiveness from nonfictional narrativity. It must be possible to articulate the specific role of such a rhetoric in a way that both distinguishes it from and situates it in relation to the nonfictional narrative regime: but as I've already indicated, the concept traditionally invoked for such a task—*mimesis*—has been compromised by recent theory. *Mimesis* is unacceptable to fictional worlds theories because it offers no satisfactory answer to philosophical and linguistic questions about the reference of fictional texts; but it has also been dismissed from its once-central place in theories of fiction by poststructuralist accounts of narrativity, despite their relative indifference to concerns over reference. In fact the displacement of *mimesis* from its role in fictional representation had already occurred in structuralist narratology; and indeed this state of affairs was a precondition for the theoretical collapse of fictionality into narrativity. Narrative *mimesis*, or the imitation of action (in Aristotle's formula), was incompatible with the terminology through which the structuralist tradition had redescribed the discursive logic of narrative representation. Structuralist *vraisemblance*, and the interpretative mechanisms of naturalization, did not address the relation between a fictional narrative and the world of action, but that between the fictional text and the various nonfictional discourses it echoed or invoked.³ But this was equally true of the operations by which the logic of nonfictional narrative was made intelligible, since both fictional and nonfictional narrative comprehend action within the same network of discourses and *doxa*. The "imitation of action," then, could no longer stand in any meaningful opposition to the report of action.

To the extent that the term *mimesis* itself survives in this context, it survives not as a specific function of fictionality, but under a new guise as the interpretative basis of narrativity in general. It reaches fruition in the work of Paul Ricoeur, who makes *mimesis* in this sense central to his account of narrative. Ricoeur glosses the term as "configuration" rather than as imitation: as such it is the structural foundation of all narrative, irrespective of criteria of reference. And although he offers the term "configuration" in explicit preference to the contemporary broad sense of "fiction" that makes fictionality synonymous with narrativity, he acknowledges that the meaning and scope of *mimesis* in his definition coincides with such usage (1:64; 1:267n1).

Whether in relation to fictional worlds and reference, or to general narrativity, *mimesis* has lost its specific role in accounting for the fictionality of fiction. The con-

cept either disappears entirely, or is redeployed to cover the whole domain of narrative representation: in this respect, it has been a collateral casualty of the literalization or diffusion of fictionality in recent theory. If fictionality nonetheless remains a necessary concept, then this link invites a reconsideration of mimesis as the instrument of its distinct rhetorical purpose. The inevitable starting point for such a task is Aristotle's formulation of the difference between history and fiction: the former is confined to contingent particulars; the latter deals (through the mechanism of mimesis) with general truths. This neat opposition breaks down badly in the modern critical history of mimesis, however. It is true that both the preeminent twentieth-century champions of mimesis, Auerbach and Lukács, understand it in terms of a relation between textual particulars and general truths, but in neither case does this provide for a principled rhetorical opposition between fiction and the historical narratives with which both critics are also concerned. In Lukács's case, the function of mimesis is encapsulated in his concept of "typicality" (*Studies in European Realism* 6). The historical novelist captures the movement of history just insofar as the novelistic particulars typify it: the type negotiates between particular and general as an instance, an embodiment of general propositions. The problem, though, is that Lukács's notion of the type makes sense only in relation to an established concept of the "totality" against which its typicality can be evaluated. As with any theory in which the mimetic function is a matter of correspondence, the model founders upon the assumption that the world (or sociohistorical formation) to which the text corresponds is itself unproblematically available to the critic or anyone else. Lukács does distance himself from the universalizing presumption of bourgeois ideology, by explicitly grounding his sense of totality in a politicized, Hegelian philosophy of history ("Art and Objective Truth"); but this self-awareness only makes more apparent the extent to which the whole process is a formal tautology. The only mediation achieved here turns out to be between a fictional process of instantiation and its own mirror image, a philosophical process of abstraction.

In Auerbach's case mimesis amounts to a figural relation between the text and its context, in the specific sense that the text realizes the author's experience of a particular historical milieu, and hence is the fulfilment of a view of reality implicit in that milieu.⁴ The concept of "figura" that underpins Auerbach's study refers in the first instance to the Christian view of reality in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. In this view, grounded in biblical exegesis, the relations between remote events are understood as a series of figural anticipations and literal fulfilments that manifest, and are guaranteed by, divine providence. The history of mimesis, for Auerbach, is the history both of the secular transformations of this worldview itself, and of the forms of literary narrative that have realized each of those transformations. Versions of the same mechanism, then, inform the synchronic relation of the mimetic text to its historical milieu, and the diachronic relation of the worldview it encapsulates to past historical paradigms. Furthermore, as Hayden White has argued, the same figural principle becomes the template for Auerbach's own account of literary history, in which forms of realism are understood as fulfilling the promise of previous forms. This self-reflexiveness leads White to characterize Auerbach's theoretical stance as what he calls a modernist historicism ("Auerbach's Literary History"). The logic of

figura, applied to Auerbach's own perspective, ultimately undermines the mediating role of mimesis by disallowing any final historical ground. Without the anchor of Christian teleology, every event has the capacity to be not only itself, but also the fulfilment of an earlier event and the figure for a later one, resulting in a kind of unlimited semiosis. Once the divine overview is relinquished, the figurality of historical understanding itself becomes discursive and literary through and through, and hence subversive of the distinction between fiction and history. Auerbach's mimesis, far from articulating the distinction between fiction and history, appears to expose their fundamental synonymy.

For both Lukács and Auerbach, then, the relation between particular and general ultimately transcends any opposition between fiction and history. Auerbach's sense of mimesis, in fact, seems ultimately to have the same relation to narrativity in general that the term has in Ricoeur's avowedly extended usage. At first sight, Auerbach's key term "figura" seems to be taken up in Ricoeur's account of the three stages of mimesis, which he calls "prefiguration," "configuration," and "transfiguration" (1:53). But actually in Ricoeur's account these terms introduce a crucially different perspective on mimesis. Prefiguration consists in our practical knowledge of how things work and the set of social competences we bring to narrative. Configuration is the making of plot, understood as a systematic synthesis, which is not the reproduction of something already given but creative production: it doesn't operate ahistorically, but paradigmatically, allowing for the possibility of innovation or deviation from narrative norms within a context of "rule-governed deformation" (1:69). Finally transfiguration relates to the activity of the reader, which "accompanies the narrative's configuration and actualises its capacity for being followed" (1:76), and therefore defines the communicative constraints upon the possibilities of configuration.

The new element here is an emphasis upon mimesis as process. Ricoeur sees mimesis as inseparable from *muthos*, the plottedness of narrative, and therefore as an aspect of the construction of narrative rather than of its representational content, or referential world. Mimesis doesn't mediate the narrative content, but the narrative act: the imitation of action is a practice, in which *muthos* is understood less as a copy than as a synthesis—not as "plot," but as "emplotment" (1:34). This is a valuable move, because the shift from "imitation" to "configuration" provides for a coherence theory rather than a correspondence theory of the relation between narrative and (temporal) reality.⁵ But is "configuration" in itself sufficient to the role of mimesis in fiction? If mimesis, as configuration, is the imposition of narrative significance upon given data in the case of nonfiction, it is not quite right to say that in the fictional case it is the imposition of narrative significance upon imaginary data. Fictional particulars, after all, are themselves generated in a reciprocal, dialectical relationship with the general framework of narrative understanding that they both depend upon and produce.

The paradoxical nature of the fictional situation is apparent as soon as it is recognized that the conceptual framework of the general must logically precede the determination of the narrative particulars, even as those particulars are supposed to advance our understanding of general truths. This dilemma is implicit already in the *Poetics*: on the one hand, Aristotle's account of mimesis is aligned (in the contrast

between poetry and history) with the articulation of general truths; on the other hand, when he asserts that its responsibility is to the plausible even at the expense of the possible (because a plausible impossibility is mimetically preferable to an implausible possibility), he aligns mimesis with the rhetorical *enthymeme*, and common received opinion (Prendergast 216). Fiction, apparently, is at the same time a vehicle of general truths and a perpetuator of commonplaces, stereotypes, and prejudices. This seems right, actually, and at too fundamental a level for any value-laden definition of mimesis that claims to discriminate between the two, as has been the case throughout the whole history of polemics about realism. As in Ricoeur's tripartite model, a bargain must always be struck between the fundamentally conservative forces of prefiguration and transfiguration, and the innovative, creative faculty of configuration. What is distinctive about the fictional case, however, is that there is nothing to negotiate over but what is conceived for the sake of the negotiation itself.

The fictional instance of the mimetic process, as articulated by Ricoeur, is inflected by radically different rhetorical purposes. If we accept his amendment of "the imitation of action" to "the configuration of action" as valid for narrative in general, then the rhetoric of fictionality requires that the traditional imitative sense of mimesis be overlaid upon that formula, to give something like "the imitation of the configuration of action." But the word "imitation" doesn't quite do the necessary work here. If the general case of narrative mimesis is conceived as a process, the specifically fictional case is not an imitation of that process. Nor is a term like pretence appropriate, notwithstanding its key role in the standard speech-act account of fiction.⁶ The process, configuration, actually occurs; the difference is that it has no object (no data) on which to act other than what it proposes to itself, and so it lacks the direct purpose of nonfictional narrative understanding. Some indirect purpose must be hypothesized, then, for this model of mimesis to be applicable to the rhetorical functionality of fiction. The required element of indirectness is best articulated, I think, by the notion of "exercise": the analogy I have in mind is physical exercise, which is indirectly purposeful in the same way. When you go for a jog you may not be trying to get anywhere in particular, but you are certainly not pretending to run.

Fiction is distinguished from nonfiction, I suggest, as the exercise of our narrative understanding, as distinct from its application. "Exercise" means both "use" and "development": all narratives, in the pursuit of some interpretative dividend, must work with the balance of power between the conservative forces of prefiguration and transfiguration, and the creative scope of configuration; but in fiction that balance of power itself may also be at stake. Fiction is able to undertake a constant renegotiation with the internal logic of mimesis, and so extend the scope of our narrative understanding: not least by appealing to quite different ways of making sense than the causal logic of Aristotle's model of action. But another kind of breadth is also suggested, I hope, by the exercise analogy: it allows for the range and multiplicity of motives for fiction and satisfactions offered by fiction—from the most innate pleasure to the most end-directed seriousness.

To view fictionality in this light is to discover a much clearer basis for its rhetorical distinctiveness. Against the common ground of narrative understanding there emerges a more nuanced distinction between the roles of nonfiction and fiction: the

particular explained by appeal to generality on the one hand; the particular as a way of *thinking* generality on the other. The relation of particular to general in fiction is the dialectical relation of imaginary data to narrative understanding: if it is the particulars that are fictional, mimesis does not reside in these particulars themselves but in their narrative articulation. What we understand, feel, and value may be ultimately grounded in the abstract and the general, but it is not in general terms that we experience understanding, feeling, or valuing it. Fiction enables us to go through that process, for the sake of the experience.

ENDNOTES

1. See chapters one and seven of Cohn.
2. Barbara Foley addresses several kinds of argument arising from just such borderline cases. See also Cohn (ch. 2).
3. This is best explained in Jonathan Culler's synoptic account (*Structuralist Poetics* ch.7).
4. Auerbach discusses the concept at several points in *Mimesis* (73–76, 194–97); see also his essay "Figura" (*Scenes* 11–76).
5. Ricoeur does effectively reintroduce correspondence when he comes to discriminate between fiction and history himself, which he does with reference to truth-claim criteria, but under the heading of transfiguration, not configuration (2:3).
6. By which I mean John Searle's "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" and its legacy.

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