2. Fictional worlds.

When possible worlds are seen as finite and "furnished" human constructs, the concept is brought down from the logical pedestal and turned into a tool of empirical theorizing. Literary theorists have been attracted to the concept ever since they discovered its potential for launching an innovative theory of fictionality. By refining the old idea of imaginary worlds, the concept of possible worlds inspires a theory of fictionality which does not rest on isolated, ad hoc selected examples. Fictional entities are treated as constituents of an "emergent" macrostructure, the fictional world. But a possible-worlds theory of fictionality avoids the indefensible identifying of fictional worlds of literature with possible worlds of logic and philosophy. "Fictional worlds of literature are a specific kind of possible worlds. They are artifacts produced by textual poiesis and preserved and circulating in the medium of fictional texts. They constitute a subset in a broader class of fictional worlds constructed by various kinds of creative activities—mythology and storytelling, painting and sculpting, dance and opera, theater, cinema and television.

Fictional worlds are possible worlds in that they are ensembles of nonactualized possible particulars—persons, states, events, and so on. Hamlet is not a man to be found in the actual world; he is a possible person inhabiting an alternative world, the fictional world of Shakespeare's play. By expanding the universe of discourse, possible-worlds semantics gives legitimacy to the concept of fictional reference. The name "Hamlet" is neither empty nor self-referential; it refers to an individual of a fictional world. As non-actualized possibles, all fictional entities are of the same ontological nature. Tolstoy's Napoleon is no less fictional than his Pierre Bezuchov, and Dickens's London no more actual than Carroll's Wonderland. A view which presents fictional persons as a mixed bag of "real people" and "purely fictitious characters" leads to serious theoretical difficulties, analytical confusions, and naive critical practice. The principle of ontological homogeneity is a necessary condition for the coexistence, interaction, and communication of fictional persons. It epitomizes the sovereignty of fictional worlds.

Possible-worlds semantics of fictionality is in opposition to the ancient and stubborn doctrine of mimesis that derives fictional entities from actual prototypes. In critical praxis, vulgarized mimesis is used to erase the boundary between fiction and reality: fictional characters are supposed to "come alive," fictional stories are not to distort actual events, Sherlock Holmes is to direct his steps in accordance with the plan of London. Possible-worlds semantics insists that fictional worlds are not imitations or representations of the actual world (realia) but sovereign realms of possibilia; as such, they establish diverse relationships to the actual world, situate themselves at a closer or further distance from reality. They range from realistic worlds closely resembling the actual world to those violating its laws—fantastic worlds. But all of them are of a different stuff than the actual world: they are constituted by possible entities.

I have stressed already that Tolstoy's fictional Napoleon or Dickens's fictional London are not identical with the historical Napoleon or the geographical London, yet persons, places, events, and so forth, with actual-world background, constitute a distinct semantic class. An ineradicable relationship exists between the historical Napoleon and all fictional Napoleons, between the actual London and all the fictional settings called London. However, this relationship extends across world boundaries; fictional entities and their actual prototypes are linked by transworld identity. The idea of transworld identity is a consequence of the contingency of worlds postulated by possible-worlds philosophy. Brutus might not have killed Caesar, Trotsky might have become the leader of the Soviet Union, Nixon could have been a car salesman. Despite the difference in essential characteristics, Brutus, who did not kill Caesar, Trotsky, the leader of the Soviet Union, Nixon, the car salesman, are possible counterparts of the historical Brutus, Trotsky, and Nixon, respectively. A
formal representation of transworld identity is Hintikka's individuation function. It "picks out from several possible worlds a member of their domain as the 'embodiment' of that individual in this possible world or perhaps rather as the role which that individual plays under a given course of events." Rescher suggests the term "versions" to designate the different "descriptive guises" of "one selfsame individual" in different possible worlds. Lewis, emphasizing that "things in different worlds are never identical," links the various incarnations of one thing in different worlds by the "counterpart relation." It is "a relation of similarity" and thus seems to presuppose that the counter-parts share some essential properties. But it is also flexible enough to link the Hitler of history and a Hitler who led "a blameless life." In the end, Lewis disarms all those who might classify him as essentialist with a charming innocence: "The essences of things are settled only to the extent that the counterpart relation is, and the counterpart relation is not very settled at all." I feel therefore comfortable using the convenient term "counterpart" in a radically nonessentialist semantics of fictionality.

The threat that holds together all the embodiments of an individual in all possible worlds is thin and theoretically controversial: the proper name as rigid designator. The various incarnations of the French emperor—historical, Tolstoy's, Stendhal's, the legend's, and numerous others, past and future—will have been or will be named "Napoleon." Kripke offered the following definition of this special mode of naming: "Let's call something a rigid designator if in any possible world it designates the same object, a nonrigid or accidental designator if that is not the case." The semantic distinctiveness of the proper name is a consequence of its peculiar origin: it is attached to a person by an act of initial "baptism" and then is "passed from link to link," following the person—to use Barthes' apt formulation—like "a linguistic form of reminiscence."

The theory of rigid designation does not imply that a person has to bear one proper name only. He/she can be known under several names, aliases, nicknames, pseudonyms, and so forth. But once the referential equivalence between the different names is discovered (Dr. Jekyll = Mr. Hyde), the transworld link between the counterparts is established. The person can hide behind aliases, but this maneuver does not preclude the possibility of being identified.

3. Poiesis and noesis.

All possible worlds are constructs of human productive activities; fictional worlds of literature, as already mentioned, are products of textual poiesis. By writing a text the author creates a fictional world that had not been available prior to this act. Textual poiesis, like all human activity, occurs in the actual world; however, its constructs—fictional realms—show properties, structures, and modes of existence that are, in principle, independent of the properties, structures, and existential mode of actuality. Possible-worlds semantics offers a vision of literature as a perennial creation of "fictional landscapes," "fostering the plurality of worlds."

Our explanation of the world-constructing power of poiesis is stimulated by J. L. Austin's theory of performative speech acts. The fictional text includes performatives carrying a special illocutionary force called authentication. When authenticated by a felicitous performative, a possible is made into a fictional existent ("let it be"). It is as authenticated possibles that unicorns and fairies, Odysseus and Raskolnikov, Brobdingnag and Cevengur exist objectively and the readers can gain access to them, fear or feel pity for them, talk and argue about them at any time. Here fictional semantics pays back some of its debt to the philosophy of possible worlds by suggesting a partial answer to the questions "what is meant by existence in possible worlds and what is meant by existence of possible worlds."

The world-constructing power of the fictional text implies that the text is prior to the world, that it calls the world into existence and determines its structure. In contrast, cognitive texts represent (image) a world that exists prior to, and independently of, textual activity. Because knowledge acquisition is an activity that requires us to make a distinction between true and false statements, it operates with constatives, with sentences and texts subject to truth -valuation? Fictional texts as performatives are outside truth-valuation; their sentences are neither true nor false. This property of fictional texts, perceived by Gottlob Frege and confirmed by Austin, is a precondition of their world-constructing power. It makes no sense to ask whether
Gustav Flaubert was telling the truth or lied when he made his Emma Bovary die by poisoning herself. There was no world, no life, no death of Emma Bovary prior to Flaubert's authenticating act. But it is appropriate, indeed necessary, to ask whether a historian of literature is right when he states that Emma died of tuberculosis. His constative, his statement about the fictional world of Emma Bovary, is subject to truth-valuation.

Literary history is a special branch of history and the false statement about Emma Bovary's end is a launching pad for a general reflection on the speech-act status and truth conditions of historical texts. The literary "imperialism" mentioned in the introduction to this paper has especially strongly affected contemporary theorizing about historiography. The latest stage of historical relativism has a distinctly literary flavor: since historical writing shows features of literature, such as emplotment, poetic and rhetorical tropes and figures, semantic indeterminism, and ambiguity, there is no fundamental difference between history and fiction.

The equation of literariness and fictionality has been widely accepted due to the influential work of Hayden White. Starting from the assumption that a historian matches up "a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind," White comes to the following conclusion: "This is essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation" (emphasis mine). The identification of history with fiction-making is helped by a push from the other side, by treating literary fiction as mimesis: "The aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of 'reality' (emphasis mine). In his later work, White retreats to a more moderate position. Now historical writing consists of two levels. One is the "account of events already established as facts"; on this level, "competing narratives' can be assessed, criticized, and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever arguments they may contain." The second level consists of "poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story. Among these elements are those generic story patterns we recognize as providing the 'plots'. . . . Here the conflict between 'competing narratives' has less to do with the facts of the matter in question than with the different story-meanings with which the facts can be endowed by emplotment." It remains to be seen whether this two-layered structure of historical writing can be reconciled with White's basic axioms, or whether it is just a tactical move to dissociate the theorist from the perpetrators of lies about and distortions of such undeniable historical facts as the Holocaust.

What appears at first sight from the vantage point of possible-worlds semantics is that literary (poetic) properties are irrelevant for the truth-functional status of texts. It is one thing to write in a certain style, but it is a completely different thing to make truth claims. Literariness and truth-functionality are two distinct qualities of writing: the former is a property of texture, the latter is a matter of the communicative aims and speech-act characteristics of textual activity. History, journalism, legal and political discourse, and so forth, all falling into the domain of cognitive communication, can be conducted in styles of various degrees of poeticity. But no flights of poetry or rhetoric can liberate them from truth-valuation. On the other hand, the most "pedestrian" styles have no effect on the lack of truth-valuation of fictional texts.

Of the many theorists who argue that the distinction between fiction and history must be preserved, let me quote just three. Paul Ricoeur defined fiction in contrast to the truth-claims of "historical narrative": "I am reserving the term 'fiction' for those literary creations that do not have historical narrative's ambition to constitute a true narrative." To support the distinction, he recalled the Aristotelian possible, the ancestor of all talk about possibilia: "The quasi-past of fiction . . . becomes the detector of possibilities buried in the actual past. What 'might have been'—the possible in Aristotle's terms—includes both the potentialities of the 'real' past and the 'unreal' possibilities of pure fiction." Dorrit Cohn, facing squarely the much misused case of biography and autobiography, states firmly: "We cannot conceive of any one given text as more or less fictional, more or less factual, but that we read it in one key or the other—that fiction, in short, is not a matter of degree, but of kind." C. Behan McCullagh, speaking for the historians, has pointed out that "Hayden
White and others have performed a great service in exposing the variety of literary and other structures which historians use as frameworks for their accounts of the past. What those philosophers have overlooked, however, is an organizing principle which is peculiar to history and not found in fiction. Historians who write narrative histories generally try to provide a fair overall representation of the central subject of their narrative. . . In this sense, historical narratives can be true as a whole whereas fictional narratives cannot. " Only if we posit that language is monofunctional, that all language use is poetic, non-referential (or, as it is inappropriately called, self-referential), the opposition between fictional and cognitive texts disappears." But then we have to accept the logical, ethical, and existential consequences of this position. We land in the ultimate dystopia, a world where we cannot make a distinction between what is false and what is true, what happened and what did not happen, who is honest and who is a liar, who is guilty and who is innocent, what is genuine and what is fake.

4. Fictional and historical worlds.

The contrast in truth-conditions between historical and fictional texts is pragmatic. It is a condition of a successful (felicitous) functioning of these texts as communicative acts, a prerequisite for achieving their respective aims. Fictional texts, liberated from truth-valuation, construct sovereign fictional worlds which satisfy the human need for imaginative expanse, emotional excitement, and aesthetic pleasure. Historical texts, constrained by the requirement of truth-valuation, construct historical worlds which are models of the actual world's past. One and the same historical event or sequence of events (historical period, life, and so on) can be modeled by various historical worlds. In a critical testing, these worlds are assessed as more or less adequate to the actual past.

The modelling role of possible worlds in cognition has been noted in general terms by Eco: "We explore the plurality of possibilia to find out a suitable model for realia." The nuclear physicist J. S. Bell constructed "six possible worlds of quantum mechanics" as models of the dynamics of elementary quanta. The possible-worlds model incorporates quantum phenomena "into a coherent theoretical picture," rather than dealing with "the permissible variation of incidental detail." Having presented the extant possible worlds of quantum mechanics, Bell answers a question which is crucial for our considerations: "To what extent are these possible worlds fictions? They are like literary fictions in that they are free inventions of the human mind. In theoretical physics sometimes the inventor knows from the beginning that the work is fiction, for example when it deals with a simplified world in which space has only one or two dimensions instead of three. More often it is not known till later, when the hypothesis has proved wrong, that fiction is involved. When being serious, when not exploring deliberately simplified models, the theoretical physicist differs from the novelist in thinking that maybe the story might be true."

In order to construct stories that "might be true," the historian has to respect certain constraints which are not operative in the construction of fictional stories. Consequently, historical worlds and fictional worlds exhibit marked macrostructural contrasts. I believe that a number of such contrasts can be found, but I will consider only three of them:

(a) The cast of agents in the historical world is determined by the set of agents involved in the actual historical event(s). If it is revealed (by new documents, say) that a person who did not actually exist or could not participate in the event was included in a historical world-model, he or she has to be removed from the grouping. No such restriction applies to the constellation of agents in fictional worlds. Commonly, this set consists of persons who never existed and are brought together in action and interaction by a decision of the fiction maker. But, surprisingly, the macrostructural opposition between fictional and historical worlds comes into sight most clearly when one considers a literary genre where fiction and history seem to merge, that is, historical fiction. It is a defining feature of the genre that fictional persons coexist and interact with counterparts of historical persons. Thus in E. L. Doctorow's Ragtime (1974) Emma Goldman, Teddy Roosevelt, Harry Houdini, Sigmund Freud, and others mingle with Father, the little boy, younger brother, Mameh, Tateh, the little girl, and so on. This feature gives Doctorow's novel its literary effect, but invalidates it as a model of
the American society at the beginning of the twentieth century. No possible world where counterparts of historical persons cohabit with fictional persons is an adequate model of the actual past.

(b) We know that neither fictional nor historical worlds are inhabited by real, actual people, but by their possible counterparts. Yet there is a major contrast between the fictional and the historical treatment of cross-world identity. Fiction makers practice a radically nonessentialist semantics; they give themselves the freedom to alter even the individuating properties and well known life episodes of historical persons when transposing them into a fictional world. Verisimilitude is a requirement of a certain poetics of fiction, not a universal principle of fiction making. It is essential to the historical Napoleon that he died at St. Helena. But according to a legend, quoted as a motto of Georg Kaiser's play Napoleon in New Orleans (1937), Napoleon was rescued from the island, taken to North America, and died in New Orleans. No such freedom is enjoyed by the historian. The historical world persons (like its events, settings, and so on) are imaged to be as similar as possible to the actual persons of the past. Historians are involved in a continuous refining of the "pictures" of the past in order to maximize the similarity. This refinement is a prominent aspect of the historical method. Guided by the "regulatory" idea of historical truth, historical research, among other tasks, "supplement[s] or rewrite[s] narratives according to the state of the sources."

(c) Both fictional and historical worlds are by necessity incomplete. To construct a complete possible world would require writing a text of infinite length—a task that humans are not capable of accomplishing. If possible worlds of fiction and history are incomplete, then gaps are a universal feature of their semantic macrostructure. Yet in the distribution and the manipulation of gaps, fiction and history show fundamental differences.

The fiction writer is free to vary the number, the extent, and the functions of the gaps; his choices between gaps and fictional facts are determined by aesthetic factors, especially by the norms of a period style, and by ideological intent. The stylistic manipulation of gaps has been noted in literary semantics. Thus, for instance, I have indicated how the radically incomplete physique of the romantic hero serves the semantic aims of romantic narrative: a physical detail surrounded by emptiness is brought into sharp focus and thus offered for symbolic reading. Pavel, noting that "authors and cultures have the choice to minimize or maximize" the "unavoidable incompleteness" of fictional worlds, has suggested that cultures and periods of a "stable world view" tend to minimize incompleteness, whereas periods of "transition and conflict" tend to maximize it. Marie-Laure Ryan used the degrees of incompleteness as a criterion for a triadic typology of fictional worlds, with realistic fiction ranking highest on the scale of world-saturation: the realist strives for the highest degree of completeness, without ever being able to reach the ideal. Dallenbach has come independently to a similar conclusion: the reality-like completeness of realistic narratives is no more than an illusion "destined precisely to camouflage [their] blanks."

What applies to fiction in general, applies to historical fiction in particular. The writer of historical novels or stories is free to choose from the available historical material according to his or her aesthetic and ideological aim. Viktor Shklovsky investigated in detail the choices that L. N. Tolstoy made when writing War and Peace. Tolstoy omitted historical facts which did not suit his aesthetic and ideological purpose. He recreated the campaign of 1812 as a war where all classes of Russian society fought enthusiastically. He created a radical contrast between Napoleon who "wants to control history, who is convinced that he controls history" and Kutuzov who believes only in the force of the people. He employed the subtle narrative device of "making strange" to strengthen the contrast between the French and the Russian storylines. Shklovsky comes to the conclusion that War and Peace "is not history," but the "canonization of a legend".

Since fictional gaps are created in the act of world construction, they are ontological in nature. They are irrecoverable lacunae which cannot be filled by legitimate inference. Statements about fictional gaps are in principle undecidable: we will never be able to decide whether Emma Bovary did or did not have a birthmark on her left shoulder. Alluding to a cause celebre, Nicholas Woltersdorff has succinctly explained the ontological character of fictional gaps: "We will never know how many children had Lady Macbeth in the
worlds of Macbeth. That is not because to know this would require knowledge beyond the capacity of human beings. It is because there is nothing of the sort to know."

Historical worlds are incomplete in a different manner and handle the gaps in a radically different way. The incompleteness of historical worlds is epistemological; it is given by the limitations of human cognition. Paul Veyne expressed this incompleteness in a grand metaphor: "History is a palace whose full extent we do not discover . . . and of which we do not see all the suites at once." The first source of gaps is the historian's selectivity, guided either by purely practical considerations (the scope of the investigation), or by a chosen "plot" structure—as Veyne and others would have it. Whatever the motivation, these gaps result from a conscious decision on the part of the historian about the relevance of the facts, and he or she must be ready to defend it. Selectivity involved in history writing and gaps existing in historical worlds do not free historical worlds from the requirement of adequacy. The other kind of gaps in historical worlds, those that are due to lack of evidence, can be filled when new documents become available. This cognitive progress is one of the basic accomplishments of historiography, as Hugh Trevor-Roper's splendid study demonstrates. We are let into the historian's workshop watching him perform two roles simultaneously: that of a detective who uncovers or is given documents about a mysterious person, and that of a writer who constructs a model of that person's life. A major part of Trevor-Roper's detection work is to assess the veracity of the documents compiled by his subject. The historian's razor divides the documents into reliable evidence and "fabrication," "fantasy," "fiction," or "forgery." The construction of the historical world can proceed only from reliable evidence. If no such evidence is available, a gap is left in the world, a gap clearly marked as epistemic: "Of Backhouse's duties and success in this post [as Professor of Law and Literature at the University of Peking], which he held for ten years, we know nothing: the documents of the university of Peking have disappeared from human, or at least from Western, sight". If the documents of the University of Peking are opened for inspection, then, of course, this gap in Trevor-Roper's model of Edmund Backhouse's life might be filled.

Between the gaps and the historical facts there exists a broad spectrum of plausible conjectures. The conjectured events are not marked as certain facts, but are assigned a degree of probability. Trevor-Roper applies a rich vocabulary of expressions that assess the reliability of his conjectures, such as perhaps, it is probable, it is possible, possibly not, conceivably, historically plausible, almost certainly, we may surmise, it may well be, we may suspect, we do not know exactly, all this is pure speculation, and so on. The final decision about the factuality of the conjectured events is, so to say, postponed. A critical historian cannot go any further.

The boundary between fictional and historical worlds is firmly set by the different nature and treatment of gaps. Fictional gaps are produced by the fiction writer, are ontological and irrecoverable. Historical gaps are due to the lack of evidence or the historian's selectivity; they are epistemological and can be filled either by future evidence or by the historian's recasting of the relevance hierarchy. What happens when this boundary is not respected, when the historian appropriates the right of the fiction maker to create gaps?