

THE PUZZLE OF FICTIONAL RESEMBLANCE

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Abstract: This article discusses a puzzle, the heart of which is this question: How is it that real individuals can resemble fictional individuals? It seems that any answer given by one who has taken a stand on the ontology of fictional individuals will come with significant drawbacks. An Anti-Realist will have to explain, or explain away, the apparent truth of our positive assertions of resemblance, while a Realist will have to explain how we are to understand resemblance in light of either the further claim that fictional characters are not associated with properties in the same way real individuals are, or that fictional characters are nonexistent or nonactual. I here survey the different Realist and Anti-Realist strategies in hopes that reflection on (mainly the drawbacks of) each will aid those who are curious about ontologies that may include fictionalia.

1 The Puzzle

How is it that my niece, Lacey, can succeed in dressing as Cinderella for Halloween? What makes it the case that when she puts on a ball gown and a glass slipper, she thereby resembles this fictional character? Reflection on this leads to the following puzzle: each of the following six statements seem individually true, but it is unreasonable to think them all true.

- (1) In virtue of wearing a ball gown and a glass slipper, Lacey resembles Cinderella.
- (2) If Cinderella is not real, then (1) is false.
- (3) If Cinderella is a contingent abstractum, then (1) is false.
- (4) If Cinderella is a necessary abstractum, then (1) is false.
- (5) If Cinderella is either a Meinongian nonexistent or a concrete, mere possibilium, then if (1) is true, we'd be obligated to commit ourselves to entities that are ontologically intolerable.
- (6) If Cinderella is real, then she (or it) is either an abstractum, possibilium, or a nonexistent object.

1 All the potential solutions to the puzzle are troubling to some significant
 2 measure. My aims here are modest; I simply wish to survey the potential
 3 solutions, making explicit the drawbacks of each. But, while each is
 4 worrisome, one has to be correct. Providing a critical assessment of each
 5 will hopefully allow those curious about such matters to have one more
 6 desideratum to aid in their final ontological commitments *qua* inclusion of
 7 fictionalia.

9 2 The Six Components: An Initial Survey of the Potential Solutions

11 The least-bad solution to the puzzle might consist in denying (1). But
 12 if my niece dresses as Cinderella, our observations about her costume
 13 sure seem unobjectionable. Isn't it just plain true that she resembles the
 14 fictional heroine, and she does so in virtue of wearing a ball gown and
 15 a glass slipper?¹ Claims like (1) are ubiquitous; without hesitation or
 16 compunction, we compare non-fictional individuals to fictional ones.

17 On the other hand, one might instead deny (2). But suppose Anti-
 18 Realism is true—that is, that Brock (2010), Everett (2013), and Sainsbury
 19 (2010) are correct, and fictional characters in no way furnish reality. In
 20 that case, my niece resembles nothing whatsoever, and thus (1), taken at
 21 face value, would be false. So, (2) seems true.

22 Or one might deny (3). But suppose Artfactualism is true—that is,
 23 that Braun (2005), Salmon (1998), and Thomasson (1999) are correct,
 24 and Cinderella is a contingent abstractum brought about by our authorial
 25 activities, one exemplifying certain properties—such as *being abstract* and
 26 *coming into existence before the year 2000*—and being ascribed others²—
 27 such as *wearing a ball gown* and *wearing a glass slipper*. On this view, the
 28 properties ascribed to Cinderella will be ones that she exemplifies in virtue
 29 of what's true in the stories about her. As an abstractum, Cinderella can't
 30 wear a glass slipper, but she exemplifies the property *wearing a glass slipper*
 31 *according to the Cinderella story*. However, my niece doesn't exemplify
 32 the property *wearing a glass slipper according to the Cinderella story*. The
 33 traditional story is not about my niece at all, and in fact, my niece is
 34 nowhere ascribed this property. Even if some appropriately similar fairy
 35 tale existed about her as well, that would be irrelevant to the truth of (1).
 36 So, (3) seems true.³

37
 38 ¹ There are other factors, of course, that make it the case that her costume is a Cinderella
 39 costume in particular and not the costume of some other fictional or non-fictional gown-and-
 40 glass-slipper-wearing ball attendee, but none of them would count against the apparent truth
 41 of (1).

42 ² For a technical account of *ascription*, see van Inwagen (1977, 305).

43 ³ In this context, we might distinguish between exemplifying *wearing a glass slipper according*
 44 *to the Cinderella story* and exemplifying, according to the Cinderella story, *wearing a glass*
 45 *slipper* (perhaps understood as *wearing a glass slipper as Cinderella is said to do in story*,
 46 or *wearing a glass slipper while pretending she is Cinderella*, or . . . *while pretending the*
Cinderella fiction is true). As noted, my niece of course fails to exemplify the former property,

1 Or one might deny (4). But suppose Zalta's (1983) Platonism is true,
 2 in which case Cinderella is a necessary abstractum that merely encodes
 3 *wearing a ball gown* and *wearing a glass slipper*. Cinderella also exemplifies
 4 properties, such as *being abstract*, and *being a thing which encodes wearing*
 5 *a glass slipper*, but encoding is a different form of being associated with
 6 properties than exemplification. My niece, however, fails to merely encode
 7 the relevant dress-properties; rather, she exemplifies them in the ordinary
 8 manner. And none of the properties that both my niece and Cinderella
 9 exemplify, for instance, *being non-identical to the number 17*, have anything
 10 whatsoever to do with what makes (1) true. So, (4) seems true.

11 Or one might deny (5). But suppose Parsons's (1980) Meinongianism
 12 is true, in which case my niece resembles Cinderella in virtue of the fact
 13 that both she and some nonexistent individual, viz., Cinderella, have the
 14 following properties: *wearing a ball gown* and *wearing a glass slipper*. On
 15 Parsons's view, *wearing a ball gown* and *wearing a glass slipper* are both
 16 nuclear properties of Cinderella, but they are properties exemplified in the
 17 ordinary way—that is, in the same way my niece exemplifies them. On the
 18 other hand, if we suppose Possibilism is true and fictional characters are
 19 identified with a subset of concrete mere possibilia, then some nonactual
 20 individual, viz., Cinderella, wears a ball gown and wears a glass slipper in
 21 the same manner as my niece does. Both Parsons's view and the possibilism
 22 suggested by Lewis (1978) are consistent with (1). But commitment to
 23 nonexistents and concrete mere possibilia comes at a theoretical cost that
 24 appears to be too high; one embraces them at one's Ockhamist peril.⁴ So,
 25 (5) seems true.

26 Lastly, one might deny (6). The only philosophically serious attempt
 27 that I'm aware of to affirm that fictional characters are real yet fit into none
 28 of the relevant categories is by Everett and Schroeder (2015).⁵ On the view
 29 they defend, fictional characters ought to be identified with our ideas of
 30 them, where ideas are construed as contingent, concrete actualia, akin to
 31 other temporally bounded, spatiotemporally discontinuous entities, such as
 32 species. Everett and Schroeder's view is an eminently plausible alternative

33 but the latter property, however it's construed, is one that my niece exemplifies full stop.
 34 Crucially, neither property is had both by my niece and the fictional character.

35 ⁴ The Meinongian or the Possibilist at this point has likely already finished contemplating the
 36 puzzle. "Of course (5) is false, and to reject as ontologically intolerable the entities I have
 37 argued for extensively smacks of mere question begging." I return to this issue briefly in
 38 the body below. However, I'll say now that a) the rejection of (5) does not beg the question
 39 against the Meinongian or the Possibilist, it is based on an appeal to Ockhamist principles and
 40 the charge that these are ultimately profligate ontologies, and b) a Meinongian or Possibilist
 41 solution to the puzzle is indeed the quickest and most straightforward; if contemplation of the
 42 puzzle ought to stop here as they believe, all the better *qua* philosophical progress!

43 ⁵ The view defended in Goodman (2003) *may* also count. In that article, I argue that fictional
 44 individuals are contingent actualia that are temporally and spatially bounded, albeit in ways
 45 that are metaphysically vague. I take this vagueness as simply a hallmark of a fundamentally
 46 different variety of abstracta, but one might very well argue that anything located in space
 and time must be understood as a concretum.

1 to other realist ontologies; however, concrete ideas would no more be the
 2 sorts of things that could wear a glass slipper than could the candidates
 3 for Cinderella so far canvassed. So, interestingly, while the arguments
 4 for fictionalia-as-ideas may provide good grounds for a denial of (6), they
 5 would nonetheless simultaneously seem to fail to address what's at the heart
 6 of the puzzle: Why does (1) seem so perfectly assertable, if not outright
 7 true? Any *genuine* solution to the puzzle must answer that question.

9 3 Four Brief Remarks

11 First, something utterly obvious: The puzzle is wildly generalizable! The
 12 puzzle applies to outfits worn on Christmas, St. Patrick's Day, Easter,
 13 Chinese New Year, those worn by actors on stage and screen, etc. The
 14 puzzle applies not just to fictional characters, but to mythological and
 15 legendary individuals as well. Moreover, it seems one may resemble a
 16 fictional character not just by way of *dressing as*, but also by way of
 17 *looking (naturally) like, reasoning in the same fashion as, walking like,*
 18 *talking like, smelling like, etc.*

19 Second, while the theorists mentioned above do not provide views that
 20 exhaust what can be said concerning the ontology of fictional characters,
 21 other theories of note all turn out to be some sort of variant of one of
 22 the views discussed above, and all would provide a solution to the puzzle
 23 relevantly similar to one of those discussed above.⁶

24 Third, various other puzzles having to do with relations we bear to
 25 fictional characters that involve some of our intentional mental states are
 26 abundant and oft-discussed. How can I fear Freddy Krueger? How can I
 27 believe of Superman that he can fly, or that he is non-identical to Batman?
 28 But the present puzzle has to do with the metaphysics of resemblance, and
 29 none of my niece's nor anyone else's mental states in particular are relevant
 30 to generating the puzzle.⁷ Generally, what undergirds the puzzle is this
 31 seemingly highly plausible principle:

32 ⁶ For instance, Wolterstorff's (1980) view which identifies fictional characters with types
 33 counts as a brand of Platonism, while Priest's (2016) None-ism and Berto's (2008) Modal
 34 Meinongianism are best seen as versions of either Meinongianism or Possibilism (or both at
 35 once).

36 ⁷ Crucial to the set-up of the puzzle is the idea that *dressing as* requires *resemblance*. This is a
 37 contentious idea, and I discuss it further in the body below, especially in Section 6. However,
 38 let me point out here that it seems as though my niece may succeed in dressing as a real
 39 or fictional individual completely unwittingly, and she may succeed despite anyone else in
 40 particular being aware of her dress properties. If my niece is wearing a long, black robe, a lace
 41 collar, and wide-rimmed spectacles, she is dressed as Ruth Bader Ginsberg (well, as the latter
 42 dressed on some occasions). My niece's aims may play a crucial role in making this true, or
 43 the intentional states of those around her may play such a role, but an individual's awareness
 44 of her outfit, and generally, any ideas she or anyone else *in particular* may have about the
 45 (occasional) dress properties of Ruth Bader Ginsberg seem unnecessary. However, anyone
 46 who is justified in making the observation that my niece is dressed as Ruth Bader Ginsberg
 must have some appropriate intentional mental states about the latter.

- 1 (R) Necessarily, for any x and any y , if x resembles y (i.e., if xRy), then
 2 there is an extant (not nonexistent, not merely possible) x and an
 3 extant y , and there is some extant (not alien) F , such that Fx and
 4 Fy .

5 Nothing relevantly similar undergirds intentionality, so questions having to
 6 do with our representational mental states directed at fictional characters
 7 seem to be of a different nature.

8 Lastly, my aims in presenting and discussing the puzzle have nothing
 9 to do with unearthing entirely novel troubles for Realist and Anti-Realist
 10 theories of fictionality. A defense of any of one of the potential solutions will
 11 be accompanied by theoretical drawbacks, some of which have been oft-
 12 discussed and are well-known, and these drawbacks will ultimately need to
 13 be weighed against the overall advantages of the background ontology on
 14 offer. My intentions here are to provide a sort of meta-assessment of some of
 15 the (perhaps well-documented, negative) implications of the tenets of these
 16 various views; what *more* can be said about each view and its implications
 17 *qua* treatment of apparently true claims about resemblance between non-
 18 fictional objects and fictionality? For any one potential solution, what
 19 *further* fuel is now added to the fire such that one now perhaps has sufficient
 20 reason to look elsewhere to find their preferred ontology?
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22 4 A Bit More on a Meinongian or Possibilist Solution

24 Admittedly, the ability to solve the puzzle via a denial of (5) is just one
 25 fairly small consideration when thinking about one's overall ontological
 26 commitments. When wondering about the cost/benefit analysis of adopting
 27 either Meinongianism or Possibilism, one must not just think about how
 28 each theory fares generally with respect to the semantics of sentences such
 29 as (1) and its kin, but also the semantics of modal sentences (including
 30 counterfactuals and counterpossibles), intentional, and doxastic states of
 31 all sorts and their objects, etc. So, the dismissal of the Meinongian and
 32 Possibilist responses to the puzzle will of course seem hasty, even question-
 33 begging, to many. Parsons's and Lewis's theories of objects are incredibly
 34 well-developed and would solve many metaphysical problems if true—
 35 including the present puzzle! In the end, either view may indeed be worth
 36 the cost; credence might be appropriate, all things considered. But for many,
 37 the theoretical benefits of such views cannot cover the cost of commitment.
 38 And so we at least owe it to ourselves to explore whether an actualist,
 39 non-Meinongian theory of objects can provide an adequate solution to
 40 the present puzzle. If so, we'd have even further reason to doubt that
 41 nonexistent or nonactual objects are worthy of belief.
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5 Anti-Realism to the Rescue?

The puzzle at issue is a metaphysical puzzle undergirded by the apparent truth of the metaphysical principle (R). But suppose the Anti-Realist claims that what we are faced with is a metaphysical puzzle having a semantic/pragmatic solution. There are three different forms this strategy might take.⁸

5.1 Strategy (i)—Error Theory

The Anti-Realist may deny (1), going on to claim that a face value reading of (1) is the correct reading. (1) is simply false, or at least not true, because it is either meaningless or not genuinely a declarative sentence. The principle at work behind this strategy is that *any* sentence containing the name ‘Cinderella’ should be regarded as false (or not true).

5.2 Strategy (ii)—Non-Cognitive Fictionalism

The Anti-Realist may deny (1), going on to claim that (1), while strictly expressing either a false proposition or no proposition at all (in virtue of containing a fictional proper name or in virtue of not being a genuinely declarative sentence), is one that we are pragmatically justified in uttering. The value of an utterance of (1) resides in something other than saying something true. (1) is *acceptable*, even though it should not be believed. The Non-Cognitive Fictionalist claims that utterances of (1) have instrumental value because they inform us about the practices of members of the community my niece is a part of and their desires to participate in an extended game of Cinderella make-believe; they serve as convenient invitations or commands to pretend that my niece genuinely bears the resemblance relation to the fictional heroine.

This is the version of Anti-Realism that has been most fully developed and has the most adherents.⁹ And intuitive support for the plausibility of Non-Cognitive Fictionalism seems close at hand. Suppose we are in front of a painting that depicts Cinderella, the very painting that inspired my niece to dress as the fictional character on Halloween in the first place. Further suppose that, on Halloween, while pointing at the painting, one utters the following: “In virtue of wearing that ball gown and that glass slipper, Lacey sure does resemble that fictional character; in fact, her outfit is almost an exact replica of the one worn in the painting by Cinderella.”

⁸ I borrow some nomenclature in this Section from Brock and Mares (2007). It should be noted that the following strategies do not correspond to mutually exclusive theoretical categories; some Non-Cognitivist Fictionalists and some Prefix Fictionalists, depending on whether they embrace a revolutionary or a hermeneutic brand of fictionalism, may also count as Error Theorists. (Thanks to an anonymous referee at *Res Philosophica* for pointing this out.)

⁹ See, for example, Clark (1980), Everett (2013), and Walton (1990).

1 It thus seems undeniable that one (who simultaneously believes that Cin-
 2 derella does not furnish reality) thereby has visual evidence that justifies her
 3 utterance and makes it acceptable for all those in Lacey’s community. But
 4 only Non-Cognitive Fictionalism seems able to immediately make sense of
 5 this; the evidence behind one’s utterance here is automatically embedded
 6 within the pretense one chooses to engage in. Meinongians, Possibilists,
 7 Everett/Schroeder-style Realists, and Abstractionists (i.e., either Artificu-
 8 alists or Platonists) who accept (R) and take (1) as straightforwardly true
 9 have a harder time availing themselves of an explanation as to how the
 10 visual intake of the painting allows us to accept claims regarding Lacey’s
 11 resemblance to Cinderella. All would be faced with the daunting task of
 12 explaining how the artist responsible for the painting was able to provide
 13 a pretense-external, visual depiction of a non-existent entity, or a merely
 14 possible entity, or a concrete idea, or an abstract entity in the first place.
 15 And even if these details could be worked out, one now wonders what
 16 motivation would remain in place for a Realist solution if such a theorist
 17 were to follow the Non-Cognitive Fictionalist in rejecting the believability
 18 of (1) in favor of mere acceptability.¹⁰

20 5.3 Strategy (iii)—Prefix Fictionalism

21 The Anti-Realist may deny (2), going on to claim that (1), while true, ought
 22 not be taken at face value. The contents of the proposition expressed by
 23 (1) are not exhausted by my niece, Cinderella, the *resemblance* relation,
 24 etc., but rather (1) is elliptical for a longer sentence that we clearly should
 25 believe. Transfictive sentences, generally, should be understood as involving
 26 an implicit prefix.¹¹ For instance:

28 (B) Holmes is admired by many members of the British Police Force.

29 on Brock’s (2002) view should be taken as elliptical for:

31 (F) According to Realism (about fictional characters), Holmes is ad-
 32 mired by many members of the British Police Force.

33 Applying this treatment to (1), we get:

34 (A) According to Realism, in virtue of wearing a ball gown and a glass
 35 slipper, my niece resembles Cinderella.¹²

38 ¹⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee at *Res Philosophica* for inspiring this bit of pro-Non-
 39 Cognitive Fictionalist commentary.

40 ¹¹ Generally, a sentence is *transfictive* if it is about a fictional work or involves a fictional
 41 character yet is not directly about what is true according to that fictional work or what is
 42 true about the fictional character according to the fictional works in which that character is
 43 mentioned.

44 ¹² One important thing to note here is that unless the Realist theory appealed to in (A) takes
 45 the form of Parsons’s Meinongianism or Lewisian Possibilism (or some relevantly similar
 46 variant), (A) apparently will not preserve the truth the Prefix Fictionalist wishes to preserve; it’s

1 Any version of Anti-Realism will be strengthened or diminished to the extent
 2 that the auxiliary semantic/pragmatic claims adopted allow for a systematic,
 3 unified treatment of the variety of the kinds of sentences involving fictional
 4 characters that we encounter, not just transfixive sentences such as (1) and
 5 its kin. And while each of the three strategies discussed above allow for
 6 a significant degree of uniformity and systematicity in their application,¹³
 7 auxiliary claims about how language works that would seem to undermine
 8 the very ontology they are supposed to support are highly problematic on
 9 their face. Consider the following sentence, one that speaks to the very core
 10 of any Anti-Realist metaphysics:

11 (C) Cinderella in no way furnishes reality.

12 Notoriously, Error Theory seems to imply that (C) should be taken at
 13 face value and *denied*. Non-Cognitive Fictionalism seems to imply that
 14 (C) *should not be believed*, but rather it should be accepted and taken as
 15 an invitation or a command to engage in some sort of Cinderella *pretense*.
 16 Prefix Fictionalism seems to imply that (C) should not be taken at face
 17 value, but that the sentence it is elliptical for, viz.:

18 (P) According to Realism, Cinderella in no way furnishes reality.
 19 *should be believed*.

20 No matter which Anti-Realist strategy one opts for, these all seem to
 21 bear on the puzzle in unfortunate ways. Each sort of theorist will, of
 22 course, have some way of making exceptions for (C) and its kin (which
 23 includes (1)!) or explaining away the appearance of the troubling results
 24 just discussed.¹⁴ As we have seen, the Non-Cognitive Fictionalist, for
 25 instance, would hold that even though (1) is strictly not true and not to
 26 be believed, it is nonetheless true in the Cinderella game of make-believe
 27 we and Lacey are playing that she both resembles Cinderella and dresses
 28 as Cinderella. Within such a pretense, after all, Cinderella is real! When
 29 Lacey plays dress-up on Halloween, *there Cinderella is*, in a sense, wearing
 30 her ball gown; she is flesh and blood—because my niece *is her* in the game.

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 34 false that: according to Platonism or Artfactualism, my niece and Cinderella both exemplify
 35 *wearing a ball-gown* and *wearing a glass slipper*.

36 ¹³ Error Theory does not seem very good on this score at all. While an utterance of:

37 (S) Cinderella was mistreated by her stepmother.

38 is plausibly taken to be false (or not true), there is clearly some instrumental value in its
 39 assertion; if nothing else, it informs us about the content of the fairy tale. Moreover:

40 (F) Cinderella is fictional.

41 seems not only true, utterances of it serve to inform us, among other things, that a full
 42 inventory of actual concreta will not include Cinderella.

43 See Zouhar (2019) for some arguments that Prefix Fictionalism is poor on this score, and
 44 see Richard (2000) for arguments that Non-Cognitive Fictionalism is poor on this score.

45 ¹⁴ See Sainsbury (2010, 49) for a strategy the Error Theorist might appeal to; see Walton
 46 (1990, 420–430) for a strategy the Non-Cognitive Fictionalist might employ; and see Brock
 (2002, 14–18) for some strategies available to the Prefix Fictionalist.

1 This sort of response may ultimately be compelling, but one cannot
 2 deny that it involves giving up, to some degree—as do all Anti-Realists
 3 responses to the puzzle—semantic/pragmatic systematicity and uniformity.
 4 However, we may remind ourselves at this point that while the Meinongians
 5 or the Possibilists can seemingly profit from an ability to adopt a uniform
 6 semantics/pragmatics for (1), (C), and their kin, they pay a substantial sum
 7 in the coin of a profligate, counterintuitive ontology. In the end, therefore,
 8 an Anti-Realist solution (to this inherently metaphysical puzzle) may seem
 9 to be the only one worth the cost.

11 6 An Abstractionist Solution?

13 However, according to one final way of solving the puzzle, (1) ought to be
 14 denied, but for reasons that are perfectly consistent with a form Realism
 15 that can (allegedly) avoid the profligacy of Meinongianism or Possibilism.

16 First consider an Abstractionist—either a Platonist or an Artfactualist—
 17 who is tempted to say that either (3) or (4) is false because my niece does
 18 resemble Cinderella in virtue of there being at least one property, *wearing*
 19 *a glass slipper*, say, that is either encoded by or ascribed to Cinderella
 20 that is also exemplified by my niece. While I intend to return to this
 21 sort of suggestion later in this Section, this appears to merely change the
 22 topic; (1) seems true because my niece, Lacey, in virtue of the way she
 23 is dressed, seems to resemble Cinderella in the good, old-fashioned sense
 24 of ‘resembles’ captured by (R)—that is, the sense that requires a genuine
 25 co-exemplification of a property.

26 But an Abstractionist who doesn’t appear to change the topic in this way
 27 may instead focus on some background assumptions involved in the very
 28 set up of the puzzle.¹⁵ (1) should be denied, rather, because wearing a ball
 29 gown and glass slipper—that is, dressing as the fictional character—simply
 30 doesn’t amount to resembling that character. While my niece does dress as
 31 Cinderella, this just consists in her exemplifying (on Halloween) some dress-
 32 properties that the stories ascribe to Cinderella or that Cinderella encodes.
 33 There are properties concerning dresswear, F_1 , F_2 , etc., such that my niece
 34 exemplifies F_1 , F_2 , etc. and Cinderella is ascribed or encodes F_1 , F_2 , etc.,
 35 that is, exemplifies F_1 , F_2 , etc. according to the stories, and that’s why my
 36 niece counts as dressing as Cinderella. But she does *not* thereby resemble
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 39 ¹⁵ This potential solution was suggested to me by David Braun. It is one that is also open
 40 to the Realist, discussed briefly above, who denies (6), and nothing in principle even bars
 41 a Meinongian or a Possibilist from going this route, as I discuss in the body below. (In
 42 these latter two cases, however, one wonders what independent motivation would exist for
 43 altering their straightforward, (R)-consistent views about resemblance.) Furthermore, I think
 44 even some Anti-Realists could embrace this solution, specifically, those that would ultimately
 45 quarrel over (R). (R), they might say, captures only one way we speak and think about
 46 resemblance, and on the way of understanding ‘resemblance’ that’s germane to the puzzle, it’s
 false.

1 Cinderella with respect to dress-properties; in fact, there cannot possibly be
 2 any dress-properties that they both exemplify. (Cinderella-the-abstractum
 3 cannot, for example, wear a glass slipper.)

4 Now, suppose that for Halloween my niece had instead dressed as Ruth
 5 Bader Ginsberg—she instead had donned a long, black robe, a lace collar,
 6 and some large-rimmed spectacles. It seems clear that in this case my
 7 niece (on Halloween) would have thereby resembled Ruth Bader Ginsberg
 8 (as she dressed on occasion). Here, *dressing as* does seem to amount
 9 to *resemblance*. So why would *dressing as* sometimes be sufficient for
 10 *resemblance*, sometimes not? The obvious answer is because in the case of
 11 Ruth Bader Ginsberg, we are dealing with something non-fictional, while
 12 in the case of Cinderella, we are dealing with something fictional.

13 Before returning to what, specifically, may seem troublesome about the
 14 current strategy, it is worthwhile to point out why this solution is not
 15 available to an Anti-Realist who accepts an (R)-compatible reading of (1).
 16 It's not available to Anti-Realists of this sort because on their view, since
 17 my niece would fail to be dressed as any target object whatsoever were
 18 she to dress as Cinderella, she'd therefore simply exemplify the one-place
 19 *dressed as* property. But were she to be dressed as Ruth Bader Ginsberg,
 20 she would therefore bear the *resemblance* relation to Ruth Bader Ginsberg.
 21 But *dressing as* cannot be both a relation and a one-place property.¹⁶

22 The current solution is, in principle at least, available to the other
 23 sorts of Realists we've been considering. For example, one can happily
 24 maintain that *dressing as* is a relation (only) if one admits Meinongian
 25 nonexistents or nonactual concrete possibilia into one's ontology and then
 26 identifies fictional characters with some subset of such objects.¹⁷ But then
 27 one must consider whether Ockhamist troubles are enough to outweigh
 28 that happiness. Furthermore, given that fictional characters can exemplify
 29 properties in the same manner as non-fictional individuals on Parsons's and
 30 Lewis's views, one would also be left wondering what non-*ad hoc*, positive
 31 grounds a Realist of this sort would have for denying (1).

32 But let's return to the Abstractionist's strategy. According to this solu-
 33 tion of the puzzle, *dressing as* may sometimes consist in co-exemplifying
 34 (dress-)properties with (and thereby resembling) some target object, but
 35 sometimes not. Another way to put it: two things exemplifying the same
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37 ¹⁶ But assume 'dresses as' is ambiguous; on some occasions it expresses a one-place property,
 38 on other occasions a two-place relation. If this is so, then one might infer that 'resembles' is
 39 also ambiguous, and so the principle (R) is ambiguous, and indeed it's false when understood
 40 in the good, old-fashioned way assumed to be correct here (i.e., as involving a two-place
 41 relation). The Abstractionist here may reasonably doubt the assumption, but she should
 42 forcefully reject the inference. However, even if (R) is ambiguous and on occasion 'resembles'
 43 expresses a one-place property, we are thereby no closer to a solution to the puzzle than we
 44 were before.

45 ¹⁷ Or even concrete ideas of the [Everett and Schroeder \(2015\)](#) variety. Their ontology, it seems
 46 to me, would ultimately be on a par with Abstractionism when it comes to a cost/benefit
 analysis of its treatment of the puzzle under consideration.

1 dress-properties is sometimes sufficient for them bearing the *dressing as*
 2 relation (as in the Lacey/Ruth Bader Ginsberg case), but it is not necessary
 3 (as in the Lacey/Cinderella case). The relation $xD(\text{resses as})y$ obtains if
 4 and only if some extant (i.e., not nonactual, not nonexistent) x and some
 5 extant y “share” some dress-properties. In cases where x is a non-fictional
 6 individual and y is a fictional individual, sharing will not amount to resem-
 7 blance but rather x exemplifying at least one dress-property F while y is
 8 ascribed F or encodes F .

9 Abstractionism can in this way solve the puzzle and render false the
 10 observation with which we began:

- 11 (1) In virtue of wearing a ball gown and a glass slipper, Lacey resembles
 12 Cinderella.

13 while simultaneously allowing us to hold on to the attractive notion that
 14 my niece is at least capable of dressing as Cinderella. That is, we can retain
 15 the notion that justifies our assertion of true claims importantly similar to
 16 (1), such as:

- 17 (1)* In virtue of wearing a ball gown and a glass slipper, Lacey is dressed
 18 as Cinderella.

19 However, it seems problematic that this strategy automatically renders the
 20 following sentence false:

- 21 (D) In virtue of the way they’re dressed, my niece on Halloween resem-
 22 bles Cinderella to a higher degree than my aunt (who is wearing
 23 neither a ball gown nor a glass slipper).

24 On the present proposal, both my niece and aunt would resemble Cinderella
 25 to degree zero (with respect to dress-properties). Even more worrisome
 26 perhaps is that the present strategy renders false:

- 27 (H) In virtue of the way she is dressed, my niece on Halloween resem-
 28 bles Cinderella to a much higher degree than she resembles
 29 Sherlock Holmes.

30 while simultaneously automatically rendering true:

- 31 (G) In virtue of the way she is dressed, my niece resembles Ruth Bader
 32 Ginsberg more than she resembles Cinderella.

33 even if my niece, on Halloween, is wearing a ball gown, a glass slipper, and
 34 no Ruth Bader Ginsberg-style adornments whatsoever.

35 Finally, let us suppose that the following two claims are simultaneously
 36 true in virtue of my niece wearing a costume on Halloween that consists of
 37 a lace collar, a glass slipper, wide-rimmed spectacles, and a ball gown:

- 38 (L1) In virtue of the way she is dressed, Lacey resembles Cinderella.
 39 (L2) In virtue of the way she is dressed, Lacey resembles Ruth Bader
 40 Ginsburg.

1 In that case, their conjunction is true:

2 (L3) In virtue of the way she is dressed, Lacey resembles Cinderella, and
3 in virtue of the way she is dressed, Lacey resembles Ruth Bader
4 Ginsburg.

5 But (L3) seems synonymous with:

6 (L4) In virtue of the way she is dressed, Lacey resembles both Cinderella
7 and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

8 It seems that if the Abstractionist solution is correct, (L4) should sound at
9 least slightly infelicitous or odd to competent English speakers. But it seems
10 equally unlikely, however, that any such speaker would feel any reluctance
11 or unease whatsoever in asserting (L4). In ordinary parlance, when we talk
12 of sharing dress-properties among any kind of relata, we naturally take
13 ourselves to be talking about good, old-fashioned resemblance.

14 Now, proponents of Abstractionism will have ways to explain away
15 some of these apparently troubling implications. Call the following the
16 “Casual Strategy.” Casual Abstractionists will emphasize the way the
17 folk ordinarily speak, and while attempting to avoid the embrace of any
18 full-blown fictionalism in the either of the senses discussed in [Section 5](#),
19 they will claim that certain paraphrases and everyday locutions allow
20 us to speak in the manner of the more robust Realist without thereby
21 committing ourselves to a Meinongian or Possibilist ontology. In everyday
22 parlance, Holmes is casually credited as being a detective; Cinderella is
23 casually said to be a ball attendee. Of course, the fictionalia in question
24 do not exemplify these properties, but the fact that they are ascribed or
25 encode these properties—that is, exemplify-them-in-the-stories, serves as
26 a license for our casual (albeit untrue) talk. Ontological considerations
27 are suppressed, usually unwittingly, for convenience, ease of conversation,
28 apathy, or out of an ignorance of philosophical theory. And so the Casual
29 Abstractionist may likewise say that when folk claim, for instance, that
30 Lacey resembles Cinderella in virtue of the dress-properties had by both,
31 others easily play along and justifiably assent to such (false) sentences.¹⁸

32
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34 ¹⁸ As an anonymous referee at *Res Philosophica* has pointed out, the (Casual) Abstractionist
35 at this point may try to retreat to a more nuanced, yet-to-be considered response to the
36 puzzle. The (“Sophisticated Casual”) Abstractionist will claim that ‘*x* resembles *y*’ is correctly
37 understood only as *there is physical resemblance between x and y*—that is, as exemplification
38 of physical-look properties by the relata under consideration. We can thus imagine the
39 (Sophisticated Casual) Abstractionist saying, “(1) is justifiably uttered and it indeed *seems* true,
40 especially to the lay-folk, but given the physical-resemblance reading it just reflects unreliable
41 intuitions about the properties that can be exemplified by fictionalia; we (Sophisticated Casual)
42 Abstractionists therefore reject (1) for this reason.” (This sort of strategy would also be
43 available to the other theorists so far discussed who would deny (1)—namely, the Error
44 Theorist and the Non-Cognitive Fictionalist.) The problem I see with this retreat, however, is
45 that it would seem to be an *ad hoc*, unprincipled maneuver. What reason is there generally to
46 think, independent of the puzzle under consideration, that *x* resembles *y* only when *x* and *y*
share physical-resemblance properties? It seems that 2 resembles 4, for example, in virtue of

1 A more surly member of the community who is aware of philosophical
 2 theory, however—an Abstractionist who refuses to play along or who ad-
 3 vocates that we ought not continue playing along—may instead embrace a
 4 “Liberal Strategy” to try to explain away apparently troubling implications.
 5 The Liberal Abstractionist can say:

6 What’s conversationally at work and justifying assertions of (1) and
 7 its kin of course cannot be (R); rather, such assertions are justified
 8 all along by (R)*, a principle according to which resemblance
 9 occurs between x and y if and only if there is some property F such
 10 that: x either encodes or exemplifies F and y either exemplifies F or
 11 encodes F . Recognizing that (R)* is what we really rely on, perhaps
 12 unwittingly, in our discourse comparing non-fictional objects to
 13 fictionalia is what allows us to see that the correct solution of the
 14 puzzle consists not in denying the intuitively true (1) as all my
 15 fellow Abstractionists above would have it, but rather in denying
 16 either (3) or (4). This recognition is also what allows us to have
 17 theoretical results that are in line with our intuitions regarding the
 18 truth values of (D), (H), (G), and (L1)–(L4).

19 Using this strategy, it appears as though the Abstractionist can avoid what
 20 she’d likely regard as unattractive about the Casual Strategy, specifically,
 21 something that is at least akin to a semantically messy sort of fictionalism.

22 At this point, however, one may wonder if the Abstractionist is in some
 23 of the same hot water that the Anti-Realist found herself in. That is, can
 24 Abstractionism enjoy a straightforward, uniform semantics of the sort
 25 afforded by the more robust Realisms of Possibilism and Meinongianism?
 26 The Liberal Abstractionist’s worry for Casual Abstractionism, after all,
 27 seems well-founded: the Casual Abstractionist’s understanding of (1), for
 28 instance, is nearly indistinguishable from the Non-Cognitive Fictionalist’s.
 29 (1) is false on this view and so not to be believed, but there are at least
 30 everyday sorts of occasions on which utterances of it are acceptable. And
 31 should the Liberal Abstractionist say that all resemblance claims are to be
 32 understood liberally and interpreted using whatever mode-specific relation
 33 is appropriate so as to make their truth values line up with our intuitions—
 34 that is, should we understand all such claims using (R)*? Or should we
 35 instead engage in such semantic liberality only when the relata in question
 36 are non-fictional objects and fictionalia?—that is, should we restrict our
 37 use of (R)* to these occasions and use (R) for all the rest? If the answer is
 38 the apparently less-messy, former option, the Liberal Abstractionist owes
 39 us a principled explanation as to why this is the case.
 40
 41
 42

43 both being even. So if we are not given reason to think this holds for resemblance generally,
 44 we are left with no independent rationale for saying that this is what’s going on in the special
 45 case where x = Lacey and y = Cinderella.
 46

7 Conclusion

The Puzzle of Fictional Resemblance is a stubborn one, but reflection on its potential solutions is hopefully enlightening for those wondering about the ontology of fictionalia. The Meinongian and Possibilist solutions are perhaps the most straightforward, and they will prove to be just as plausible as the arguments for their underlying ontologies. Common sense intuitions about what's real and Ockhamist principles, however, may stand in the way. While Anti-Realist solutions are less straightforward semantically, there is, intuitively at least, no costly underlying ontology. But such views are just as plausible as the explanations given for the exceptions that must be made in their attendant semantics. And while many find the Abstractionist's underlying ontology to be as safe as the Anti-Realist's, it turns out they have their own semantic burdens to bear when trying to explain away the counterintuitive consequences that come along with their specific strategies for solving the puzzle.

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