Generality in Fiction

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RESUMEN

En este artículo se investiga la naturaleza de los enunciados generales que pueden extraerse de una obra de ficción y proyectarse en el mundo real. La forma de esos enunciados puede presentarse como 'Un F tiene típicamente G'. Se argumenta que esta extracción tiene como guía el supuesto de que al menos algunas propiedades adscritas a un personaje de una obra de ficción son tales que ese personaje es particularmente representativo de la propiedad en cuestión. Se establece una distinción entre dos géneros de enunciados generales que se pueden extraer de la ficción, y esta distinción se elabora en seis dimensiones.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *enunciados generales, ficción.*

ABSTRACT

The paper investigates the nature of general statements that can be extracted from a work of fiction and projected to the real world. The form of these statements is given as 'an F typically has G'. It is argued that this extraction is guided by an assumption that at least some properties ascribed to a character in a work of fiction are such that the character is particularly representative of the property in question. A distinction is drawn between two kinds of general statements extractable from fiction, and this distinction is elaborated along six dimensions.

KEYWORDS: *General Statements, Fiction.*

I. EXTRACTING GENERALITY FROM FICTION[1]

It is often asserted, plausibly, that fiction can impart to the reader certain general statements. These may also carry or receive certain kinds of justification. So, as far as propositional knowledge attainable from fiction is concerned, in addition to learning about particular geographical facts or historical events, one might also be able to acquire from a work of fiction pieces of knowledge more general in nature.

In this paper I will be concerned with what I will term *transfictional* statements (or, rather, a subset of these). By 'transfictional' I mean something different than what Currie (1990), ch. 4.11, means by 'transfictive', where his *transfictive* statements always include the name of a fictional character and express comparisons between the properties of the (named) fictional character and some other characters or real-life individuals. In contrast, by 'transfictional statements' I mean statements general in nature, extractable from a work of fiction, which can be projected to the real world. In that way, they differ from *metafictional statements* as exemplified by 'All characters in this novel are such-and-such', which cannot be so projected. Construed thus, transfictional statements (henceforth T statements for short) bear a certain affinity to the *thematic* statements of Lamarque [cf. Lamarque and Olsen (1994), Lamarque (2006)], but whereas Lamarque's point is that such thematic statements have a primary role in organizing the particulars of the work into a meaningful pattern and are of little interest otherwise, the main interest of this paper is the role of T statements in learning from fiction.

I propose to draw a distinction between two importantly different kinds of T statements, which differ along several dimensions, including their respective sources of justification, their cognitive value and their role in the aesthetic value of the work. But before we get to that, the T statements I take to be most relevant need to be isolated from the comprehensive set of T statements (as given by the specifications above) and it needs to be clarified what form these relevant statements have.

Logic standardly recognizes two different kinds of general statements, namely those that involve the existential and those that involve the universal quantifier. So, if standard logic is followed, we might expect the general statements extractable from a work of fiction to be of the form 'Some Fs are Gs' or 'All Fs are Gs'. However, neither is a good candidate for the most representative form of a T statement. Universally quantified T statements will in most cases be too strong, i. e. easily shown to be false. If we attempt to extract from a work of fiction a statement such as 'All criminals had an unhappy childhood' and project it to the real world, we will end up with statements that can be seen to be false with a minimum of effort, and therefore cannot contribute to our knowledge.

As for existential statements, they will perhaps form a non-negligible part of the set of T statements, but I wish here to introduce a restriction on the T statements that are the focus of this article. The restriction is this: that they aim at wide coverage (or strong projectibility).

This means, first, that they have to be satisfied, in order to be confirmed, by most or all of the Fs. A statement of the form 'Some Fs are Gs' is not such, it is confirmed as soon as a single F that is a G is found, which shows that it does not aim at wide coverage (although it might have it, by accident so to say). Second, they aim to cover sufficiently large 'zones' of the (human) world. When it comes to general knowledge, the greater the coverage, the greater the value, the leading thought might go (i.e., all else being equal, it's better to acquire more widely applicable than less widely applicable knowledge). The T statements that I am interested in in this article, and that seem to embody best the general knowledge one might seek from a fictional work, are those that aim at wide coverage in these two senses. Existentially quantified statements can be useful for formulating *story content* [cf. Currie (1990), ch. 4.6], but this is a different matter.

I propose that the form of the relevant T statements be construed thus: *an F typically has G* (the F-term should have a sufficiently wide span, in accordance with the above). And, whereas one might talk of existential or universal T statements, these will form, I believe, only a small part of the set of interesting T statements, and can so be dropped from further discussion (at least for the purposes of this brief article). I will term the F-term the *locus* of the T statement and the G term the *dependant* (this asymmetry, to be elaborated upon below, is why I use the 'has' instead of 'is' in the formulation, which, I believe, stresses the asymmetry).

Now, how exactly is this formulation to be understood? A possible reading is 'Most Fs are Gs', and I think it will be adequate in most cases. However, the notion of typicality carries an evaluative component – a ranking, a foregrounding – and so, in some cases, one might want to claim that an F typically has G, although it might not be the case that this holds of most Fs. This evaluative component can be cashed out as an incentive to focus attention, such that saying 'an F typically has G' conveys the suggestion 'the Fs that have G are the really characteristic ones, worthy of attention in the context'. The evaluative reading should be given priority over the majority reading in cases where there is a divergence between them (I will avail myself of this distinction towards the end of the article).

What is now crucial is how the relevant properties, namely F and G, are chosen. In attempting to identify the properties that the F-terms will denote in T statements, we seek properties such that, in having them, the character[2] seems to be a representative member of the category given by the property. In interpreting a work, that is, we are particularly interested in construing characters as being representative of certain general categories. This is in accordance with Lamarque's claim that 'the

artistic achievement is to move beyond subject to something more universal, to reveal, as one might say, the universal in the particular' [Lamarque (2006), p. 131].

We are interested, therefore, in a character as an F-representative. When construed as such, we (the reader), in the attempt to extract T statements, will look for properties of the character that are somehow meaningfully, explicably related to the F property, often by some sort of reliable causal connection. Upon identifying (one of) them, we can form a relevant T statement to the effect that an F typically has G.

Given the elucidation above, the form of the relevant T statement might actually be expanded to 'a typical F typically has G' (e.g. 'a typical man typically annoys his wife'). However, if it is understood that the F is meant to be a typical F, this expansion can be dropped.

The way that the F and the G are chosen can be further elucidated if we compare extracting generalities from a fictional text and from a 'factional' one. Here we may start with some insights provided by Nicholas Rescher. He says: 'A key fact about fictional particulars is that they are of finite cognitive depth. A point will always be reached when one cannot say anything characteristically new about them (...) With real things, on the other hand, there is no reason of principle why this process need ever terminate. *Au contraire*, we have every reason to presume them to be cognitively inexhaustible' [Rescher (1996), p. 35]. And: 'Its being somehow poorer than reality is thus an advantage to the world of fiction. For it enables us to achieve a clarity of focus (...)' [Ibid., p. 37].

One crucial aspect of our reading stance, so to speak, when we are reading a fictional text (or at least a text that is presented to us as fictional), is that we know that the information we receive from the text about a character in the story that the text tells is all the information we are ever going to receive about that character. This might be disputed in the case where there is a series of novels or short stories involving the same character, but then we can just treat the series as a single text and claim the same: namely, that there is a cut-off point to the information we can ever receive about the character in question.[3]

Things work differently in real life. As Rescher claims, real things are cognitively inexhaustible: there is always, in principle, something new we might learn about them. There is no natural cut-off point.

This has an effect on how we perceive fictional characters, more specifically, on how we construe (some of) their properties, as opposed to real people we might read about in a newspaper article. In a nutshell, we are more likely to construe fictional characters as particularly repre-

sentative of (some of) the properties they instantiate in the story than we are to construe real people learned about from a factional text as so representative. Given that the information on a particular character is of necessity restricted to what is said in the text, we tend to construe this information as particularly relevant to the character. This in turn yields the 'clarity of focus' that suggests that the character is a particularly representative member of the category identified by the property. Not all such pieces of information will lead to such a move, of course: purely ephemeral information won't be so construed. But information having to do with longer lasting proclivities or patterns of behavior often will. For example, if we read a story about a character doggedly opposing some sort of authority, and dealing with certain consequences because of it, we will tend to see this character as essentially an authority-opposer, and as being particularly representative of the category of authority-opposers. This can be seen as an explication of the function of exemplification that is characteristic of works of art, as stressed by Goodman (1968).[4] We will also tend to construe the sequence of events that follows from the character's opposing act as tightly and relevantly connected with this act, attempting to interpret whatever happens as meanigfully related to the initial act, and not just as a sequence of events open to many extraneous influences. Thus we get the G.

This is not to say that we cannot extract all sorts of general lessons from real-life events; of course we can and we do. But the point is that the informational closure that is essential to fictional characters and situations puts special pressure on us to see them as particularly representative of (some of) the properties ascribed to them in the fictional text.

Several clarifications are now in order, having to do with the relation of the fictional world to the real world and the nature of the extraction of a T statement. It might be thought that the discussion so far implies fictional realism on my part; on the other hand, the discussion of informational closure above might seem to align T statements too closely with Lamarque's thematic ones, which primarily concern the fictional work, and not the real world. Now, in defining T statements as statements general in nature, extractable from a work of fiction, which can be projected to the real world, I am establishing an analogy between the world of a fictional work and the real world. However, I believe this does not commit me to fictional realism; I am only relying on the way readers normally think and talk about the fictional world, and that is precisely as an analogue (in many, but of course not all, respects) of the real one. After all, it is not at all unusual to say something like 'Holmes is

much smarter than the average detective', which expresses a comparison in thought between a fictional detective and real ones.[5] The extraction might be taken (as a rational reconstruction) to proceed in the following two steps: the reader identifies a typical F in the fictional word, and ascertains that s/he, in the fiction, has the property G (meaningfully linked to F). The reader then concludes that an F typically has G (both in the fiction and in real life, so that a 'fiction operator' can be present or absent from the statement). On the other hand, the informational closure doesn't tie the T statement inexorably to the fictional world: what it does is to prompt the reader to construe characters as F-representatives, which is an incentive to the process of extraction as given above.

Further questions can now be posed as to the nature of this extraction. Reicher (2014) claims that fictional works can carry indirect assertions, opposing therein, but also partly building on, Searle's (1975) classic account of fictional discourse. However, this is not a good model for the T statements which I have in mind, because I think that Stolnitz (2004), p. 319, is right to point out the following: 'Do the statements of psychological truth [what I would consider to be a type of T statements] refer to all or most or a few of the flesh-and-blood beings they designate? How can we know? The drama or novel will not tell us'. The T statements cannot be extracted from a work of fiction by any kind of rule-governed operation of working out indirectly asserted content. They can be treated as implicit in the work, but have to be arrived at abductively, by specifically aiming to extract such statements. On the other hand, I also reject Searle's (1975) account of fictional discourse, and concur with Reicher, who claims that the author of fiction performs genuine illocutionary acts, whose function is that of building a fictional world for the reader.

The extraction of T statements is a matter of abductively extracting these statements, with the aim of learning interesting generalizations about the real world. A caveat: sometimes such statements, or statements easily transformable into them, can be stated explicitly in the work itself. However, this is a minority phenomenon, and even in works where there are T statements stated explicitly, there will be other interesting T statements that have to be extracted. Especially in the case of so-called great literature, it is often not at all clear, and a matter of critical dispute, just *which* categories a character is representative of, and therefore which F terms can be legitimately applied to the character.

The 'which categories' question compels us to say more about the nature of this abduction. In what follows, I will use, as a source of examples, the detective novels of Michael Connelly. These feature the

LAPD officer Harry (Hieronymus) Bosch, a maverick detective, often in conflict with his superiors, but undeniably successful at solving cases. The novels are particularly interesting for their sociological aspect, because, in addition to the (riveting) whodunit scenarios that they contain, they always also concern intra-departmental politics and extra-departmental relations, namely, as regards the former, the way the power structure of the LA Police Department operates and how decisions are made, and, as regards the latter, the modes of cooperation between the LAPD and other relevant institutions, such as the FBI, the press, and the judiciary.

Some T statements extractable from the novels might be the following: 'a member of a police department is typically distrustful of members of the press'; or: 'a non-conformist individual typically prevails over an opportunistic hierarchical structure (because his values are superior)' (these two statements exhibit different kinds of generality, which will be the subject of section two of the article; they also show that both the F and the G in the abstract form of the T statement are placeholders for what can be elaborate descriptions of situations or sequences of events).

Now, how might one decide that Detective Bosch is a typical non-conformist individual, but a typical member of a police department only in certain respects, viz. in his distrust of the press, but not in being non-conformist? That is, how might one decide of which Fs Bosch is an F-representative? To the extent that this instance of abduction, like any instance of abduction, can be given a satisfactory elucidation at all, one might say that the evidence for the choice of relevant categories is given partly by the text itself, and partly by general knowledge. The novels dedicate a lot of space to Bosch's refusing to conform to demands from authority and following his own code, imperilling thereby his own position within the Department and his career, which, given the informational closure discussed above and our general knowledge of what characterizes non-conformists, allows us to see Bosch as a typical non-conformist. On the other hand, that Bosch is a typical member of a police department when it comes to his attitude towards the press but not in many other respects (proneness to conflict with superiors, very demanding work ethic) is evidenced by the text itself: it is clear that Bosch's attitude towards members of the press is shared, but his attitude towards his superiors in not shared (and is even frowned upon) by his peers, who also follow a much looser work ethic. Why we might trust the text to be correct in its portrayal of the typical member of a police department will be discussed in the next section, under the heading 'source of justification'.

II. Two Kinds of Generality

Now I would like to introduce and characterize two different kinds of T statements that one can extract from a fictional work, which is meant as the main contribution of this paper. I will call them the *restricted* and the *domain-general* T statements, thereby indicating the different kinds of generality that they carry. As with most distinctions, there will probably be a gray area of in-between cases, but I aim here to characterize the prototypical case for each class (kind). I will characterize the two kinds as differing along six dimensions: extractability from a fictional work, source of justification (or lack thereof), role in the aesthetic value of the work, extent of intra-work indeterminacy, possibility of inter-work clash, and cognitive value. Before I proceed to this, let me clarify what I mean by each kind. I have already given above two examples of T statements extractable from Connelly's novels, and they illustrate precisely the two kinds of T statements distinguished here, where the example given first illustrates the restricted kind, and the example given second the domain-general kind. To elaborate: there are, I claim, two main kinds of generalities one can extract from the Connelly novels. One has to do with the way said institutions operate, with the whole system of inner workings and outer relations of law-enforcement, immersed as it is in politics and burdened by bureaucracy. At a slightly more abstract level, one can extract generalities about how any rigidly hierarchical, military-like institution operates. The other kind of generality has nothing to do with any particular kind of institution: it concerns the situations a non-conformist individual following his own code within an institution finds himself in, and how he deals with them; also, possibly some other situations, e.g., in the later novels, the dynamics of a father-daughter relationship.

The first kind of generality (as expressed by a T statement) I call restricted – here the locus (the F-term) is 'member of such-and-such institution (who...)'. These are indeed generalities – they do not concern particular historical events or geographical locations, but express patterns of functioning of certain kinds of historically existing institutions.[6] However, they are restricted: they apply only to said types of institutions, and not to humanity at large. The second kind of generality extractable from a work of fiction is the domain-general kind: in this case, the locus of the T statement is a completely general category of human nature, such as 'non-conformist individual'.

What is the exact relation between these two kinds of statements? Isn't it always possible to generate a domain-general T statement from a

restricted one simply by engaging in more abstraction? The answer is no. While it might be possible to do this in some cases, in a case such as e.g. (as given above) 'a member of a police department is typically distrustful of members of the press', there seems to be no way to straightforwardly generate a plausible domain-general statement from it ('members of one (type of) institution are typically distrustful of members of another' wouldn't work, because members of police departments are not typically distrustful of members of e.g. the health-care system). Of course, human nature reflects itself in the operation of institutions; however, sometimes aspects of this operation are too specific to yield any kind of interesting generalization pertaining to human nature as such. And so, there is no straightforward route from a restricted to a domain-general T statements, which confirms that there is a pertinent distinction to be made here. I will now proceed to characterize these two kinds along six dimensions.

a) *Extractability*. Not all works of fiction will allow one to extract restricted T statements from them, but all will allow one to extract domain-general ones. This is because not all works of fiction offer insight into the workings of any kind of particular human institution, but all arguably portray the ways of human nature (cf. fairy tales).

b) *Source of justification*. When the issue of learning from fiction is at hand, one of the central questions is the question of the source of justification for the purported knowledge-claims. I have not yet dealt with the specific cognitive value of the two kinds of T statements respectively (see under f), but the issue of justification can be dealt with immediately. A source of justification that is sometimes invoked for knowledge purportedly acquired from fiction is reliable testimony [cf. Klauk (2014) for a recent defence] – on this account, we can learn from fiction because we have reason to treat certain statements that the author of the work makes (directly or indirectly) within the work as true of the world and justified by the fact that the author is a reliable witness. The reliability of the testimony is then accounted for in different ways: Klauk (2014), p. 213, invokes a convention to the effect that, if the plot of the fictional work can be spatio-temporally placed in our world, then general information about the historical setting of the plot can be counted on to be accurate. Reicher (2014), p. 90, invokes that fact that authors of realistic fiction usually research the geography and history that form the background of the plot, and also that the descriptions of the places and events that form this background normally fit with our general knowledge about these

places and events. However, these explanations mostly concern the reliability of authorial testimony with regard to descriptions of particular places and historical events mentioned in the fictional work, and so are not immediately transferable to the issue of generalities that concerns us here.

With regard to our two kinds of T statements, it seems that the justification of the first, restricted kind does indeed rely on treating the content of the statements as reliable authorial testimony (as extracted from the text). However, given that this content concerns patterns of behavior rather than information about particular places or historical events, it is not so much accuracy that we count on, but adequate generalization. Now, we might treat these generalizations as adequate because they seem plausible and fit with some of our antecedent beliefs, but the main reason we trust them relies on some kind of extra-textual information about the author of the work having first-hand experience with the subject matter, and therefore being a sort of an expert on the matter (compared to the reader). For example, in the case of Connelly's novels, a short bio of the author informs us that he spent many years as a newspaper reporter on the 'crime beat'. It is then some combination of plausibility and this extra-textual information about the author that makes us trust the way the relevant institutions are presented in the respective novels, however, extra-textual information about the author will normally be more important: even if some ways the relevant institutions are presented seem implausible, we can rely on the author knowing what s/he is talking about.

As for the domain-general kind of T statements, it seems that no similar justification is forthcoming. The only expertise the author can usually bring to bear on the matters of human nature in general is that s/he is her/himself human (the author rarely holds a PhD in psychology), but that is no expertise at all with regard to the reader, who is, we may assume, also human. Indeed, it seems that the extracted domain-general T statements have no particular source of justification, which then gives the aesthetical anti-cognitivist reason to claim that they cannot be considered knowledge at all. I will come back to the issue of the cognitive value of these statements later.

c) *Role in aesthetic value.* One of the two characteristic claims of aesthetic cognitivism [cf. e.g. Gaut (2006)] is that the cognitive gains we can reap from a (in this case) fictional work contribute to the aesthetic value of the work. I claim that both kinds of T statements, as implicit in the work, can contribute to the aesthetic value of the work, but at different levels.

Following Reicher's (2014) claim that an utterance is fictional when it is used to build a fictional world, I claim that the aesthetic contribution of restricted T statements (as implicit in the work) is that the insight they provide contributes to building a convincing fictional world. At a certain level of the content of the work, its plausibility or verisimilitude (an aspect of which is richness of detail) is an important aspect of its aesthetic value. It is at this level that the restricted T statements have their aesthetic role. A world of police detectives and criminals is much richer, more convincing, more 'juicy' when one is introduced to the intricacies of intra-departmental politics (involving extra-departmental relations to the press, the judiciary, other law-enforcement agencies, etc.) than when the investigation happens, so to speak, in a vacuum. There may be other ways build a convincing fictional world centered around a crime investigation, but this 'sociological' one definitely works. If it is an aesthetic value that a work of fiction present to the reader a plausible world in which to immerse oneself, then the restricted T statements make a definite contribution to this value.

As for the domain-general T statements, their contribution belongs to a different level, namely the thematic level [cf. Lamarque and Olsen (1994), more recently e.g. Misselhorn (2014)]. This is the level of general themes of human interest that the work explores. We can say that at this level the work contains an implicit worldview, and the possible aesthetic contribution of the domain-general T statements (as implicit in the work) is that they may articulate a complex and profound one. A work of fiction cannot fail to present a certain view of human nature, and it is the role of the domain-general T statements to articulate this view.

Of course, the restricted T statements will also play a certain role in building the worldview of the work, whereas the domain-general T statements may have to be extracted from a work focused largely on human nature operating within a specific institution; nevertheless, I maintain that the main roles these different kinds of T statements in the aesthetic value of the work belong to different levels.

d) *Intra-work indeterminacy*. The extent to which the choice of F and G is indeterminate with respect to a work differs with regard to the two kinds of T statements. When it comes to restricted T statements, the indeterminacy is, expectedly, rather restricted. Since the institution that is the subject matter of these generalizations is rather precisely defined in any given case, and the patterns of behavior normally clearly delineated, there isn't much leeway in the choice of the F and the G terms. The choice is

often between extensionally closely related terms such as 'member of a police department' and 'police detective'.

When it comes to domain-general T statements, the indeterminacy greatly increases, largely because, as Lamarque (1996) points out, a fictional world is built not only by what is said in a work of fiction, but also by how it is said. Especially with regard to great literary works, which exhibit great complexity, due in a large part to the wide repertoire of techniques available to the author in structuring the 'how it is said' aspect of the work, it is often a matter of critical dispute what the correct choice of the F term or the G term is. For example, in a work centered around a character opposing some kind of authority, should the F term be construed as 'stubborn and vain opposer of authority' or 'heroic opposer of authority'? The correct choice (to the extent that there is one) will depend on the nuances of the text, available connotations, points of view presented, etc.

e) *Inter-work clash.* Aesthetic anti-cognitivists are prone to pointing out that the statements we extract from different works of fiction can often be incompatible, but that we are not worried by this nor do we attempt to resolve the seeming contradiction, which might be taken to show that we are not dealing with any kind of knowledge claims at all. How does this issue pertain to the two kinds of T statements under consideration?

It seems that with regard to this issue the two kinds of T statements are in doubly opposite positions. An inter-work clash between two restricted T statements is rare, but resolvable. One doesn't really expect to find a novel which presents the relations between a police department and the press as full of mutual trust, but if one were to encounter such a novel, then the contradiction between its presentation of the relations between the said institutions and the presentation afforded by Connelly's novels could arguably be resolved by recourse to sociological research.

Precisely the opposite holds for domain-general T statements. Although some [e.g. Gaskin (2013), pp. 151, 152] would dispute this, inter-work incompatibility seems to be a frequent case. At the same time it seems unresolvable. If one work yields the following T statement as extractable: 'a non-conformist individual typically prevails over an opportunistic hierarchical structure (because his values are superior)', another work might yield the following: 'a non-conformist typically doesn't prevail over an opportunistic hierarchical structure (although his values are superior)' (here the notion of institution involved is domain-general, and therefore the T statements are such). How are we to handle this incom-

patibility? Gaskin (2013), p. 153, suggests that in such a case one claim is actually false, and can be shown to be so. I disagree. Taking my cue again from Lamarque (2006), p. 137, I would say that the generality (wide coverage) of the domain-general T statements is largely *perspectival*. This means that, in the domain-general case, the 'an F typically has G' is often more felicitously treated, not as a straightforward verifiable claim, but rather as a suggestion how to construe the (human) world – a suggestion, that is, to treat Fs-having-G as more characteristic of the world, more worthy of attention, than Fs-not-having-G (compare the discussion at the beginning of the article). If one work suggests that we construe the world as typically rewarding the pursuit of a personal moral code against a morally bankrupt bureaucracy, whereas another suggests that we construe it as such that the bureaucratic machine ultimately crushes the free-thinking individual, it wouldn't be a relevant part of literary appreciation of these works to engage in a statistical study about the outcomes of opposing a prevailing mentality with a personal moral code. Nor could it ever really decide the issue, since we are dealing here with different perspectives, i. e. suggestions about construal. This takes us to the final dimension of difference, the dimension of the cognitive value of the two kinds of statements.

f) *Cognitive value*. The two kinds of T statements find themselves again in doubly opposite positions. The cognitive value of restricted T statements seems to be reliable, but narrow (although still affording wide coverage). That is, these statements offer reliable knowledge, by way of affording insight into the functioning of certain types of institutions, but this knowledge is of a restricted nature, pertaining only to the said institutions. On the other hand, the cognitive value of domain-general T statements is potentially very wide (it concerns human nature as such), but it is at the same time rather unreliable. Non-cognitivists such as Stolnitz or Lamarque (despite the differences in their overall positions) stress the triviality or banality of the generalities extractable from fiction. But, as Reicher (2014), p. 78, points out, triviality is something relative to the consumer of the work. I prefer to put the matter thus: the domain-general T statements extracted from a work, embodying as they do suggestions how to construe the human world, can prove to be more or less fruitful for an individual in making sense of her/his experience, can be real eye-openers but also lead one astray.

Finally, the question may be posed how exactly the distinction between the two kinds of T statements contributes to the discussion of learning from fiction. When it comes to acquiring general knowledge from fiction, it seems that two opposing principles dictate the value of this knowledge. One was mentioned at the beginning of the article: the greater the coverage, the greater the potential value of the knowledge acquired. The other emerged in this part of the article: the greater the coverage, the weaker the reliability (because the author can no longer claim expertise, and because of the largely perspectival nature of the domain-general statements). It seems that the restricted T statements strike the best balance between these two principles, offering as they do reliable knowledge of medium-wide coverage. They also point to value of expertise on the part of the author, namely to the fact that the aspects of the work which are most informative are those which the author has imbued with some kind of specialized knowledge.

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NOTES

[1] I am grateful to two anonymous referees for helping me improve on the original version of the article.

[2] In this paper, I will mostly talk of F and G as properties of *characters* in the story, but this is only a simplification with expository purposes; F and G could also be properties of situations, atmosphere, or whatever.

[3] It might also be disputed by saying that we may in some cases learn something new about a character by gaining insight into its genesis. However, receiving this kind of information, which is in most cases extremely unreliable (given the inscrutable nature of the creative process), will not have the impact on the process of interpretation I am concerned with above.

[4] For a recent elaboration cf. Gabriel (2014).

[5] To clarify further the notion of analogy at play here: when I say that people normally think and talk about the fictional world as an analogue of the real one, I mean that, for purposes of reasoning about characters and events (e.g. what led to what) in the fictional world or drawing lessons from a fictional work, they treat the characters and events reported about in the fiction largely as they would real events and persons. This allows them to apply the whole repertoire of concepts used for dealing with the real world to the fictional world (including speculating whether Hamlet had an Oedipus complex).

⁶ Of course, a statement such as 'In that battle, all the soldiers...' is also a general one. However, since it is restricted to a single event, the patterns such a statement concerns are (usually) too confined and transient for their description to embody general knowledge of, so to speak, sufficient generality. Here again the notion of wide coverage comes into play. Admittedly, it is a somewhat vague notion (as is the notion of an event), so that in applying it one has to use common sense. In any case, one might distinguish between logical and epistemological (wide coverage) generality, and say that there is partial overlap between them. In this paper I am interested in statements that have both.

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