

How Difficult Is the Selection Problem?

Certain versions of realism about fictional characters, in particular *non-actualism*, are ostensibly saddled with a *selection problem* (e.g. Kripke): There are multiple candidates that satisfy the role-descriptions associated with (e.g.) ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in different worlds and no principled way to distinguish between these candidates, yet if names are referential, there can only be one possible referent. The problem is often taken to be serious – even decisive – and I aim to explore how serious it actually is. The problem assumes that the referent of ‘Holmes’ is fixed by the descriptions associated with him in the stories, but this assumption is not mandatory. Instead, I suggest that Conan Doyle fixed the referent by a simple act of stipulation. He needed a referent that *could* play the role of Holmes, but insofar as possible individuals instantiate different properties in different worlds, many – perhaps *any* – merely possible individual would suffice, and it doesn’t matter which one he selected. So, instead of determining a referent by description, Conan Doyle selected possible individuals and then determined which of the worlds in which those individuals exist serve as truth-makers for the story by adding properties to his characters (thereby reducing the set of truth-making worlds). Finally, I argue that this approach is consistent with reasonable, foundational requirements on reference, such as a causal-historical theory (properly understood) and, since Conan Doyle could not be in error neither about the selection nor about any property ascribed to Holmes, even some version of *acquaintance*.