

THE FICTION OF FICTIONALISM

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Fictionalism about fictional entities is an antirealist approach. It suggests that statements of literary criticism are to be understood in the same way as are fictional statements. The latter are naturally understood as being uttered in a pretend mode, i.e. not seriously. Fictionalism has it that the same holds for the former. It is sometimes argued that this is unfaithful to our actual linguistic practice with critical statements. My aim is to strengthen this objection by pointing to some unwelcome consequences of the fictionalist position. It seems plausible that our practice with critical statements allows us: *a*) to supplement their utterances by remarks such as “And I mean it” or “What I have just said is true”; *b*) to report on their utterances by using statements such as ‘X asserted that C’ (where X is a speaker and C is a proposition expressed by a critical statement); *c*) to ask for arguments that would support the truth of critical statements; *d*) to agree or disagree with other speakers over the truth of critical statements. If fictionalism were correct, our practice with critical statements would not permit moves of these kinds.

Keywords: Critical statement – Fictionalism about fictional entities – Literary criticism – Ontological commitment – Pretense

Virtually everyone refers to, or quantifies over, fictional entities on a daily basis. Given this observation, one may come to believe that fictionalia are indispensable for a complete description of our world. Such a view may pave the way to fictional realism according to which fictionalia exist, albeit not in the same way as scientists, chairs or revolutions.¹ Nevertheless, fictional realism may become problematic once we start asking intriguing questions about the nature of fictional entities, their existence and our epistemic grasp of them. No wonder, many philosophers try to get rid of them and explain our talk about them in ontologically noncommittal terms. Our custom to refer to, and quantify over, fictionalia is explained—or rather explained away—by developing sophisticated conceptual means. Some approaches are based on ontologically innocuous paraphrases of our talk about fictionalia and some others on ontologically undemanding attitudes to such talk.

¹ Fictional realism as a philosophical approach is rather multifarious and one may find a vast array of theories that count as realist. I am not going to discuss them in this paper. A well written summary can be found, for example, in (Sainsbury 2010). According to the most widespread theories, fictionalia are either abstract Platonic entities (see, for example, Parsons 1980, Zalta 1983 and 1988) or abstract artefacts (see, for example, Kripke 2013, Salmon 1998, Thomasson 1999, van Inwagen 1977, Zvolenszky 2015a and 2015b).

The present paper discusses one version of antirealism concerning fictionalia, namely *fictionalism about fictional characters*, and deals with one challenge that is sometimes raised against it. I argue that this challenge can be strengthened by some other related objections. Nonetheless, this is not to be understood as an attempt to defend fictional realism.

1. Fictional Statements vs. Critical Statements. Antirealist approaches can be motivated by treating the talk about fictionalia as fictional rather than serious, making it ontologically noncommittal. This is surely the right approach in many cases. When a speaker tells a fairytale or an actor pronounces a line, nobody has it that they are committed to the truth of what they say. They are not making assertions, asking questions or issuing commands; rather, they *pretend* to do so.² A pretend assertion is not to be assessed as true or false, a pretend question is not to be responded to and a pretend command is not to be obeyed. If this is the case, we merely pretend that fictionalia from fictional stories exist.

Fictional statements concern contents of literary fictions (see Brock 2002, 4).³ They are contained in fairytales, novels, plays, etc.; they also are produced by way of telling, retelling or commenting on fictional stories. Take an example:

(1) Mrs. Gamp is an alcoholic.

If uttered as a part of telling, or commenting on, the story of Charles Dickens's novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*, (1) is uttered in a pretend mode. In such a case, 'Mrs. Gamp' is not to be understood as referring to anything. The speaker merely pretends to use the name to refer to something.

In addition to a fictional talk, a serious talk about fictionalia is recognized. While the former is a mere pretense, the latter, it seems, is free from any pretense. Literary criticism is a case in point. Literary critics produce utterances that are believed to be true or false. Occasionally, they are engaged in disputes in which one critic rejects another's claim, which implies that if one speaks truly, the other speaks falsely. It seems that this kind of discourse can be effectively used to motivate realist theories of fictional entities. No wonder fictional realists frequently do so.

Let us assume that *critical statements* are made true or false in virtue of the contents of literary fictions, although they do not express such contents (see Brock 2002, 4). Given that critical statements are serious, if they contain referring expressions that are supposed to designate fictionalia or quantifier phrases that are supposed to quantify over them, they are committed to the existence of such entities. Or so it is usually argued. Take (2):

² This idea had already been propounded by Frege (see Frege 1979, 130). Frege's views are discussed in detail in (Zouhar 2010).

³ For the sake of simplicity, I deal exclusively with literary fictions. Some other kinds of fiction are generated by visual arts and music. Paintings can be often taken as fictional representations. Similarly, classical music sometimes generates stories. For example, Berlioz's *Fantastic Symphony* is entitled *An Episode in the Life of an Artist*, which implies that it narrates a story; in fact, there are two different versions of the story that are captured in Berlioz's own program notes from 1845 and 1855, respectively.

(2) Mrs. Gamp is the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels.

This statement is taken from Sylvia Manning's serious book *Dickens as Satirist*.⁴ It contains reference to, and quantification over, fictional entities—it refers to Dickens's character Mrs. Gamp and quantifies over all Dickens's characters portrayed as masculine anti-women. It is true provided Mrs. Gamp has a particular feature that the other characters lack.

2. Critical Statements and Ontological Commitments. Fictional realists may argue as follows. Given that critical statements are serious, if there are true critical statements that contain reference to, or existential quantification over, fictional entities, there are statements that bear ontological commitments to fictionalia. Since (2) is a true critical statement that contains both reference to Mrs. Gamp and existential quantification over some other characters from Dickens's novels, there are ontological commitments to these characters. Thus, Mrs. Gamp and the other characters exist.

Can antirealists block this inference of the ontological commitments to fictionalia? Are they in a position to rebut the above realist argument? In fact, there is one possibility to do so; it is inspired by a certain fact about fictional statements. Although fictional statements are naturally uttered in a pretend mode, invoking pretense is by no means inevitable. An alternative rendering of telling or retelling a fictional story may suggest that it is (explicitly or implicitly) prefixed by a suitable sentential operator. For example, a retelling of the *Martin Chuzzlewit* story can be understood as prefixed by 'according to *Martin Chuzzlewit*'. Thus, instead of (1) uttered in a pretend mode, we may have (3) uttered in a serious mode:

(3) According to *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Mrs. Gamp is an alcoholic.

Despite the fact that (3) can be used seriously, 'Mrs. Gamp' is not to be understood as referring to anything. As a result, no commitment to the existence of Mrs. Gamp arises. Nevertheless, assertions of (3) do express something about the content of *Martin Chuzzlewit*; moreover, they do so either truly or falsely, depending on how things are with the content of the novel. Thus, prefixing suitable sentential operators to fictional statements has a similar effect as uttering fictional statements in a pretend mode.

Now, the same kind of strategy might be adopted with respect to critical statements—(2) need not be taken at face value, but can be understood along the lines of (4), for example:

(4) According to *Dickens as Satirist*, Mrs. Gamp is the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels.

Clearly, (4) is not committed to the existence of Mrs. Gamp and other characters in

⁴ See (Manning 1971, 79). This example is often used as an illustration of critical statements in philosophical literature. As far as I know, (van Inwagen 1977, 301) used it for the first time to this effect.

Dickens's novels; (4) express something about the content of *Dickens as Satirist* and thus what the statement suggests is that *Dickens as Satirist*, if anything, is committed to the existence of the fictionalia in question.

3. A Prelude to Fictionalism. Appearances notwithstanding, the suggestion to treat critical statements as prefixed by sentential operators similar to 'according to *Dickens as Satirist*' need not eliminate the ontological commitments to fictionalia referred to, or quantified over, in the prefixed statements. We may argue as follows.

It can be admitted that (3) is not committed to the existence of Mrs. Gamp, and that, in general, no commitments to fictionalia follow from fictional statements prefixed by sentential operators. It can be claimed, however, that the commitments are *entirely* eliminated only provided fictional statements, when taken as un-prefixed, are understood in a pretend mode. (3) says what holds in *Martin Chuzzlewit*—it contains a reference to *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and thus implies that there is a certain piece of work. If *Martin Chuzzlewit* were treated as an historical record of what really had happened, the ontological commitment to Mrs. Gamp would not be eliminated at all! This is because (1), when uttered in telling or retelling the recorded history, would occur as a serious claim. Fortunately, (1) is naturally understood in the pretend mode and the existence of Mrs. Gamp is thus not implied. In virtue of this fact, the reference to *Martin Chuzzlewit* in (3) does not imply that there is a serious source of information in which (1) is uttered in a serious mode.

This observation suggests that the case of (4) is problematic. True, (4) is not committed to the existence of the character mentioned therein. Nevertheless, (4) contains a reference to *Dickens as Satirist*, which is recognized as non-fiction, meaning that what it claims aspires to truth. Given that (2) occurs in this book and, thus, there is an utterance of it that is made in a serious mode, the ontological commitments to fictionalia arise again. Consequently, even though (4) bears no direct ontological commitments to fictionalia, it indirectly implies that there is a source of information that, if understood in a serious way, contains such commitments. Given that this argument is based on there being references to serious origins of critical statements, we may call it *the argument from serious source*.

This danger might perhaps be eliminated provided all (serious) utterances of (2) occurred as (implicitly) prefixed by sentential operators like 'according to *Dickens as Satirist*'. In such a case, no (serious) utterance of (2) would be committed to the existence of fictionalia. Unfortunately, this possibility is closed. This is because there is at least one utterance of (2) that cannot be so understood, namely the one that appears in *Dickens as Satirist*. Even if all other utterances of (2) were understood as somehow referring back to Manning's utterance and, thus, as being (implicitly) prefixed by 'according to *Dickens as Satirist*', the utterance contained in the book itself cannot be so understood. And since Manning meant her utterance of (2) seriously, the ontological commitments to Dickens's characters in question are still in force.

4. Type-A Fictionalism about Fictionalia. The challenge presented by the argument from serious source should be rebutted. A simple reply can be based on a parallel

between fictional and critical statements that is sometimes invoked in the literature.⁵ The following quotation summarizes it nicely:

Authors pretend, in their writing, that there are such flesh-and-blood individuals as Hamlet and Holmes... [and] want their audiences to pretend along with them... On this perspective, when critics... come along with such attributions as *being created/made up by so-and-so*, *being modelled on such-and-such*, *being killed off/resurrected for such and such a reason*, and so on, they too are continuing the pretense, this time in order to describe, from the inside, the ground, content, style, and history of the creative imaginative activities in question. (Kroon 2011, 220).

The suggestion is to take the discourse featuring critical statements as a kind of pretense that, in a sense, continues pretense found in works of fiction. This is motivated by taking literary critics as audiences that are supposed to appreciate certain features of literary fictions. Silvia Manning can be said to pretend asserting a proposition about Mrs. Gamp because Dickens pretended that there is a certain Mrs. Gamp. Manning's pretense in her theoretical considerations about Mrs. Gamp is, so to speak, powered by Dickens's pretense in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

In general, critical statements are used in a pretend way along with fictional statements, although the kind of pretense relevant to the former may somewhat differ from the latter. Literary criticism contains a theoretical kind of pretense that is parasitic on pretense contained in works of fiction. Importantly, when one utters (3), one is not asserting anything; instead, one is merely pretending to do so. And since utterances of (3) are used in a pretend mode and (4) is ontologically noncommittal with respect to fictional entities either, there is no way how one might derive the existence of fictionalia on the basis of critical statements. Moreover, given that the existence of fictionalia does not follow from fictional statements either, one obtains a completely antirealist account of the talk about such entities.

This kind of approach to critical statements is sometimes called *fictionalism* (about fictional entities). More precisely, this is one version of fictionalism available in the literature. It is sometimes called *pretense fictionalism* because it assumes that critical statements are uttered in a pretend mode; according to it, the use of critical statements is in a sense parasitic on pretense featured in utterances of fictional statements. Literary criticism involves pretense because its subject-matter resides in the realm of fiction. Based on this, literary criticism simply continues pretense in question, but does so in a theoretically minded way.

Apart from pretense fictionalism, we may discern *prefix fictionalism*. While pretense fictionalism assumes that a particular critical discourse provides a kind of context with

⁵ *Locus classicus* is Walton (1990). A recent attempt along similar lines that deserves a special notice is Everett (2013). It bears mentioning that antirealists seem not to be aware of the argument from serious source. The antirealist position described below is usually motivated by other reasons. Nevertheless, I find the motivation based on an attempt to respond to the argument from serious source as rather appealing.

which utterances of critical statements are to be related, prefix fictionalism assumes that utterances of critical statements directly contain reference to such kind of context. According to the latter, critical statements are to be understood as (explicitly or implicitly) prefixed by sentential operators such as ‘according to *Dickens as Satirist*’. Thus, (3) can be understood along the lines of (4), for example. It bears mentioning that, as far as I know, nobody actually adheres to a prefix fictionalist account of this kind. There are, however, prefix fictionalist theories of a somewhat different kind. I will mention them later.

Notice that the argument from serious source suggests that pretense fictionalism has to be superior to prefix fictionalism. This is because a prefix fictionalist theory may easily fail to provide a satisfactory explanation unless it is backed up by a corresponding pretense fictionalist theory. On the other hand, pretense fictionalist theories can be self-sufficient. As a result, if one adopts a pretense fictionalist account, one may adopt its prefix fictionalist version without any obstacles; on the other hand, if one adopts the latter without the former, one’s explanation of critical statements is seriously deficient.

5. The Fiction of Fictionalism about Fictionalia. Fictionalism concerning a certain kind of discourse—such as mathematical, modal, moral or critical—suggests that whenever we utter statements that belong to this kind of discourse, we utter them in a pretend mode or as (implicitly) prefixed by a suitable kind of sentential operator. This approach is often blamed for providing a distorted picture of our actual use and understanding of statements from a given kind of discourse.⁶ According to this criticism, when we utter a statement from a given kind of discourse, we simply do not mean to use it in a pretend mode or within the scope of a fictionalist sentential operator; rather, we mean to utter the statement seriously. This is based on a straightforward observation of our actual practice. I am going to apply this line of criticism to fictionalism about fictionalia. Then, I will strengthen the objection by presenting further criticisms that point in the same direction (Section 7).

Before doing so, it should be remarked that fictionalist theories have to be general. According to them, *all* utterances of statements from a certain kind of discourse have to be used and understood in the prescribed way. Thus, it is required that unless a person is gravely confused, she takes all utterances of critical statements in the prescribed way. A person can be confused in the relevant sense provided she mistakes fiction for reality, for example, due to her inability to make such a difference or simply due to a lack of required information. If there were at least one utterance of a critical statement that she, despite not being confused, takes seriously, all benefits of fictionalism would be lost. Such an utterance would demonstrate that we do use critical statements (*qua* critical statements) in non-fictionalist ways, in which case the ontological commitments to the problematic kind of entities would arise again.

According to *type-A pretense fictionalism*, by uttering critical statements, we take

⁶ Versions of this argument can be found in numerous places, such as (Eklund 2015), (Stanley 2001) or (Thomasson 2015). A response to some of them is contained in (Brock 2014). The argument is sometimes presented in a general form, without being explicitly applied to a particular kind of discourse. However, if such an application is explicitly made, the argument usually targets mathematical discourse.

part in a pretense shaped by a literary criticist discourse (exemplified by a theory or work of literary criticism, for example). It can be objected that this is generally not the case. It is easy to find instances of using critical statements in a serious rather than pretend way. In particular, literary critics simply do not view themselves as being involved in a kind of pretense. What they claim as literary critics is intended to be taken seriously. Saying otherwise amounts to being unfaithful to the actual practice in literary criticism. In other words, literary critics are researchers rather than artists and literary criticism aims at truth in the same way as scientific and philosophical theories rather than at some other kinds of objective that are more appropriately associated with fiction.

According to *type-A prefix fictionalism*, by uttering critical statements, we use them as (perhaps implicitly) prefixed by a sentential operator that contains a reference to a literary critical discourse. Again, this is generally not the case. To demonstrate this claim, we may simply build on the case of literary critics' practice. When they produce utterances of critical statements, they usually do not mean to suggest that what they claim holds according to such and such theory or work. Their utterances should be taken as they stand because they want to convey their own opinion; to do so, they need not invoke any prefix—it completely suffices that they simply utter the statements in question. More generally, works of literary criticism are usually intended to be taken as serious achievements that are aimed to claim what is the case about certain fictional entities rather than what is the case according to some theory or other.

In summary, there are obvious instances of uttering critical statements that are not amenable to fictionalist explanations of either kind. Fictionalists might claim otherwise only provided they would assume that people fall victim to a massive illusion that they do not use critical statements in a fictionalist way even though they actually do so—they are just unaware of being fictionalists. This kind of illusion also besets all philosophers that are involved in this discussion about fictionalia, but are reluctant to adopt fictionalism. It is highly improbable that such an illusion is so widespread and that fictionalists are the only ones who know better. It seems to be more plausible that the assumption of such a massive illusion is in fact a mere illusion on the fictionalists' part—it is a fiction of fictionalism about fictionalia.

Fictionalists might resort to claiming that they do not intend to describe the actual practice of literary critics and other people referring to, or quantifying over, fictionalia; rather, they are merely making a proposal about what these people should do by way of uttering critical statements.⁷ In other words, fictionalists might adopt revolutionary fictionalism rather than hermeneutic fictionalism. *Hermeneutic fictionalism* is a descriptive project. Hermeneutic fictionalists claim that it generally holds that critical statements are uttered in a pretend mode or are prefixed by a suitable sentential operator. *Revolutionary fictionalism*, on the other hand, is a prescriptive project. It recommends that we should use critical statements in a certain way, but admits that we actually do not do so. Revolutionary fictionalism admits that our actual way of using critical statements may have various unwel-

⁷ This kind of escape is considered in Brock (2014), for example.

come consequences, including the problematic ontological commitments to fictional entities. But it assumes that once people recognize this drawback, they will adopt the fictionalist suggestion.⁸

It is obvious that the above line of criticism only concerns hermeneutic fictionalism. Revolutionary fictionalism need not be threatened by it. It might thus seem that being revolutionary is a promising way. Nevertheless, there are some problems to be discussed in Section 7 that may shed some doubt on the prospects of revolutionary fictionalism as well.

6. Type-B Fictionalism about Fictionalia. Type-A fictionalism about fictionalia, which has been discussed so far, assumes that discourse featuring critical statements is a direct continuation of discourse that consists of fictional statements. There also is another kind of fictionalism; let us call it Type-B fictionalism. Its explanation of critical statements is not presented as a direct continuation of a pretense exhibited in utterances of fictional statements. Nevertheless, it parallels the pretense account of fictional statements. Type-B fictionalism does not suggest to take literary criticism as a special kind of pretense. If one is not charmed by the idea that literary criticism is just a pretense and, yet, refuses to adopt realism about fictionalia, one may find this type of fictionalism attractive.

Type-B fictionalism assumes that a realist theory of fictional entities is available, and takes *this* theory as a special kind of fiction. Type-B fictionalism has it that when one utters (2), one pretends that, according to the realist theory in question, Mrs. Gamp has a certain feature that some other Dickens characters lack. The realist theory is thus committed to the existence of Mrs. Gamp and other fictional characters. Nevertheless, since the theory is to be taken as involving pretense, the utterance of (2) implies nothing about their existence in reality. This is a pretense version of type-B fictionalism.

Alternatively, we may opt for a prefix version. According to it, (2) is (explicitly or implicitly) prefixed by a suitable sentential operator which contains a reference to the fictional realist theory in question. Thus, (2) can be rendered along the lines of (5):

(5) According to the fictional realist theory, Mrs. Gamp is the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels.

Clearly, (5) is not committed to the existence of the fictional characters mentioned therein; it is merely committed to the existence of a particular fictional realist theory.⁹ Nevertheless, given the argument from serious source, the prefix version of type-B fictionalism does not suffice to eliminate the ontological commitments to fictionalia. They can be truly eliminated only provided the fictional realist theory is treated as a kind of

⁸ The distinction between hermeneutic and revolutionary conceptions was introduced in (Burgess and Rosen 1997, 6-7). It is also frequently applied to fictionalism; see, for example, (Eklund 2015), (Sainsbury 2010), (Stanley 2001).

⁹ (Brock 2014) presents a version of fictionalism that is close to type-B pretense fictionalism, but he does not explicitly apply it to fictionalia. A version that suggests prefixing a special sentential operator to critical statements is developed in (Brock 2002) and defended in a number of other places, most importantly (Brock 2015 and 2016).

fiction. Thus, the pretense version is superior to the prefix version, and if one adopts the latter, one should better adopt the former as well.

Clearly, the problem discussed in Section 5 with respect to type-A fictionalisms is easy to adapt to type-B fictionalisms too. According to *type-B pretense fictionalism*, by uttering critical statements, we engage in a pretense shaped by a philosophical fictional realist discourse (exemplified by a philosophical theory or work of fictional realism, for example). This is generally not the case, however. Ordinary people are usually unaware of philosophical theories and, thus, they cannot take part on pretense motivated by such theories. But even if we disregard this line of criticism,¹⁰ there are other instances that can be used to back up the challenge to fictionalism. Take fictional realists. When they utter critical statements, they are not simply assuming that the utterances are to be taken in a pretend mode. What they actually want is that the utterances are to be taken at face value—this is what truly makes them fictional realists. Ironically, the same also holds for some antirealists about fictionalia, namely those who take fictional realist arguments for fictionalia seriously and try to rebut them. Saying otherwise amounts to being unfaithful to the actual practice in philosophical debates about fictionalia.

According to *type-B prefix fictionalism*, by uttering critical statements, we use them as (at least implicitly) prefixed by a sentential operator that contains a reference to a philosophical fictional realist discourse. This is, again, problematic, because there are utterances of critical statements that cannot be interpreted along these lines. First, fictional realists usually do not intend to make direct utterances *about* their theories; rather, they claim what is the case concerning fictionalia, and, *in so doing*, they make it plain what their theories claim. Second, when antirealists intend to express disagreement with fictional realist claims, they do not generally want to oppose statements, which state what is the content of fictional realist theories; rather, they aim at directly rebutting realist claims about fictionalia. Consequently, there definitely are utterances of critical statements that are not amenable to type-B fictionalist accounts.

It should be clear that this criticism applies merely to hermeneutic versions of type-B fictionalism, leaving revolutionary versions untouched. Nevertheless, there are some problems that, if properly interpreted, may cast some doubt on revolutionary fictionalism too. They are outlined in the following section.

7. Further Arguments against the Fiction of Fictionalism. The general complaint against fictionalism consists in that the fictionalist treatment of critical statements is based on a certain illusion, namely the illusion that people always use critical statements in the fictionalist way. It seems that it is simply a kind of fiction that people are fictionalists when it comes to critical statements. The inappropriateness of the idea that people are fictionalists of a sort can be strengthened by some other related worries. I will discuss them as applied to pretense versions of fictionalism; however, they can be easily extrapolated to prefix versions as well.

¹⁰ Brock rejects this criticism in (Brock 2014).

First, when a speaker utters a critical statement, she may explicitly add a remark suggesting that her utterance of the critical statement is meant seriously. Adding such a remark need not cause any conversational flaw on the speaker's part. For example, the speaker may utter (2) and add a note like "And I mean it", "What I have just said is true" or "What I have just asserted was meant seriously", etc. Clearly, it is easy to imagine that the speaker utters this kind of remark in a pretend mode. This might suggest that the critical statement to which the remark has been appended has been also uttered in a pretend mode. Nevertheless, it is perfectly legitimate to admit that the remark is meant seriously and, on top of that, that the speaker's utterance of it has been true. In such a case, her utterance of a critical statement also has been meant seriously, and the speaker indicates that her audience should take her at her word. From the conversational point of view, there is nothing inappropriate to accompany an utterance of a critical statement by a serious utterance of a statement that refers to the former and comments on its mode of utterance. Given the fact that speakers must be allowed to be aware of what they claim, this is a strong reason to take it for granted that critical statements can be uttered in a serious rather than pretend mode. Fictionalists may face serious troubles when attempting to explain away that speakers may appropriately accompany their utterances of critical statements by remarks such as "What I have just said is true".

Second, we may report on utterances of critical statements that were made, for example, by literary critics. In so doing, we prefer to use locutions such as 'the speaker asserted that' to locutions like 'the speaker pretended that'. Nevertheless, our reports are perfectly legitimate.

Let us assume that a literary critic, X, sincerely utters (2) by way of presenting her account of most interesting Dickens's female heroines. Importantly, X utters (2) as a literary critic and does so with due seriousness—she can utter (2) during her presentation at a conference, for example, and she can even add to it "And I mean it". Let us also assume that Y reports on X's utterance by saying

(6) X asserts that Mrs. Gamp is the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels.

Is Y's report true? Intuitively, we agree that it is. X uttered a statement that expresses the content captured by the embedded sentence in (6) and she did so by way of producing a speech act of assertion. This suffices for Y's utterance of (6) to be true.

Now the problem is that fictionalists cannot admit that (6) is true, appearances notwithstanding. Fictionalists believe that when a person utters a critical statement such as (2), she is to be understood as being engaged in a sophisticated pretense. In such a case, instead of asserting something, one is merely pretending to assert something. Asserting is not compatible with being engaged in pretense and vice versa. In such a case, a correct report should claim that X pretends, or pretends to assert, that Mrs. Gamp is the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels. Thus, either we agree with fictionalists that X is merely pretending when she utters (2) or we take Y's report on X's utterance to be true. We cannot have both.

Nonetheless, fictionalists might attempt at another approach by suggesting that Y's utterance of (6) is to be understood in a pretend mode. Now this move would not be fully justified. Notice that Y's intention might merely be to register a certain communication fact, namely the fact that X articulated certain words with certain communicative intention. Y need not have any interest in taking part on a pretense. This may be recognized by a third party, Z, who may truthfully report on Y's utterance by saying that Y's report on X's utterance was meant seriously, for example. If Z's report was true, Y's utterance was serious; and if Y's utterance was serious, X produced a speech act of assertion by uttering (2), which means that X was not pretending.

Third, when a speaker utters a critical statement, her audience may legitimately ask her to argue for what she claims. To argue for a claim is tantamount to providing reasons that explain why the claim is believed to be true. No doubt, literary critics spend some time with providing reasons for their claims when they discuss with their colleagues, for example. This seems to be a plain sociological datum that cannot but be complied with. Now it seems that the fictionalist approach has to assume otherwise. It seems that if fictionalism is correct, it would be fundamentally mistaken to demand reasons for the truth of what a person states. According to fictionalism, critical statements are not true (nor false), so it is mistaken to ask for justifying their truth. If X uttered (2), it would be inappropriate for her colleagues to ask for some justification of (2) or other. In a word, if fictionalism is correct, no justification is needed. Clearly, this contravenes the above sociological datum.

It might be replied that fictionalists are in a position to cope with this challenge in a rather straightforward way. They might say that when someone asks for a reason to justify a critical statement, instead of asking for reasons for the truth of the statement, one should be understood as asking for reasons to make the pretense in question. Thus, literary critics are supposed to justify why they pretend that there are certain fictionalia and why they pretend that they are ascribed certain properties. This suggestion seems implausible. When we ask why a person pretends something, we may get answers along the following lines: "Because I want to deceive somebody that *p*", "Because I wish it to be the case that *p*" or "Because the rules of game *G* that I am playing require me to do so". These responses explain why a person engages in a pretense at all. Now it does not seem correct to suggest that when literary critics provide reasons for their utterances of critical statements they actually explain why they are engaged in a certain pretense in the first place. What they rather do is arguing for their particular views.

There might also be another way to defend the fictionalist position. Fictionalists might claim that if a person asks for a justification of a critical statement she is asking for what can be pretended to be a reason for the statement. Thus, literary critics can be supposed to give pretended reasons for what they pretend to assert. Neither this option is convincing, however. Clearly, there is just a rather limited variety of claims that can be successfully used to back up a particular statement. For example, (2) can be supported only by some of the statements that are appropriately connected to its subject-matter. Now this limitation need not be operative if a speaker is required to provide a merely pretended reason for a certain

claim. This is because virtually any statement can be pretended to justify any statement. What might limit us is just our imagination. No doubt, literary critics do not assume that they are allowed to justify their claims by any statement whatsoever. Thus, this suggestion also fails.

Fourth, when speakers are involved in a dispute that centers on critical statements, they may express agreement or disagreement with one another. If two literary critics, X and Y, are involved in such a dispute and X utters (2), Y may respond along these lines:

(7) You are wrong. Mrs. Gamp is not the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all Dickens's novels. Madame Defarge is.

Y's utterance is a perfectly legitimate means to express her disagreement with X. Now, if we take the notion of pretense on board, an important feature of agreements and disagreements is lost. If X merely pretended that Mrs. Gamp has a certain property and Y merely pretended that she does not have the very same property, no disagreement would arise. There would be, at most, a pretended disagreement, if at all. Nevertheless, disagreements between literary critics are real. Claiming otherwise would amount to disrespecting the seriousness with which literary critics are engaged in disputes over matters concerning fictionality.

The above arguments apply to hermeneutic versions of fictionalism, both pretend and, if suitably recast, prefix versions. It is easy to see, however, that they also may cause troubles for revolutionary versions. Revolutionary fictionalism can be understood as a recommendation to change our actual practice with critical statements; instead of uttering them seriously, critical statements should be uttered in a pretend mode. This recommendation leads to a number of consequences. First, revolutionary fictionalism seems to suggest that adding phrases like "And I mean it", "What I have just said is true" or "What I have just asserted was meant seriously" to critical statements should be forbidden. Second, it seems to recommend that our reports on someone's utterances of critical statements, if they are to be appropriate, should not contain verbs like 'to assert'. Third, it also seems to require that we abandon our practice of asking and giving reasons for endorsing critical statements. Fourth, revolutionary fictionalism recommends us to reject the idea that literary criticism and other kinds of discourse that feature critical statements provide room for agreement or disagreement in a proper sense. All of these suggestions lead to adopting certain severe restrictions to our actual linguistic practice with critical statements. Of course, they need not be viewed as showing that revolutionary fictionalism is a defective approach to critical statements. Nevertheless, they clearly show that adopting revolutionary fictionalism amounts to truly radical changes in our linguistic practice. These changes are so far-reaching that they undoubtedly strip revolutionary fictionalism of much of its appeal.

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