ANIMADVERSIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS: REFERENCE, INFERENCE AND TRUTH IN FICTION

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1. I have long believed that a primary datum for the semanticist of fiction is the syntactic (rather than lexical) ambiguity of fictional sentences. After all, it is true is it not, that Sherlock Holmes lived in Baker Street, yet also true that he did no such thing? That we seem ready to acquiesce without embarrassment in such apparent contradictions suggests to me that they are indeed *only* apparent and that the appearance can be despatched by postulating ambiguity. So, then, though possessed of important pragmatic peculiarities, fictional discourse lays strong claim to a non-negligible semantic status; and the accommodating theories could be expected to articulate appropriate doctrines of reference, inference and truth.

2. The surface 'contradiction' that "Sherlock Holmes lived in Baker Street" is both true and not true requires clarification and eventual disposal in the theory of truth. If this is to be achieved by way of syntactic ambiguity, then the theory of truth needs to expound and regiment the ambiguity, of course; but it can also be expected to clarify the respects in which, if any, fictional pronouncements refer, and the manner in which fictional surface contradictions avoid authorization of the inference of everything whatever. So we may suppose that the theory of truth would give the lead to the theory of reference and the theory of inference. Truth theory would seem to be basic.

3. In some of my earlier work[1], I attempted to find a semantic framework for fictional discourse that answers to these various tasks. It is clear to me now, as it was in 1974, that *The Logic of Fiction* did not give all the answers and that it was far from perfect, even as far as it went and goes. It may now be timely to quickly review this theoretical sketch, with three main purposes in mind:

(1) To take account of whatever virtues it may still possess.
(2) To expose and develop its evident deficiencies.
(3) To use it as a benchmark (though manifestly an imperfect one) against which rival theoretical perspectives may be compared and assessed.

4. The theoretical sketch of *The Logic of Fiction* may be set out as follows:

A basic semantic datum, I have said, is that fictional sentences give rise to apparent contradictions by which are, except in deliberately theoretical moments, not in the least disturbed. We say that "Sherlock Holmes lived in Baker Street" is both true and not true, yet we do not blush. There is an ambiguity somewhere that annuls the contradiction and fully justifies our confident casualness. One way of representing the ambiguity is by assigning to "Sherlock Holmes lived in Baker Street", a *pair* of canonical representatives S and $\ulcorner O(S) \urcorner$ in an appropriate semantic metalanguage in which S can be declared not true and $\ulcorner O(S) \urcorner$ true. 'O' is a (kind of) modal operator on sentence representations in the theory, the semantics of which should capture the truth theoretical peculiarities of fictional sentences. Ordinarily the operator 'O' does not appear in the surface structure, in order that fictional sentences may achieve and preserve effective verisimiltude.

The truth theory for fictional sentences (or, more

precisely, for their canonical representations in the semantic metalanguage) defines a satisfaction relation for sentences, from which, in turn, a truth definition can be got. Initially we say that a sentence $\ulcorner O(\phi)\urcorner$ meets the *elementary sayso condition iff*

(S$\urcorner$) $\ulcorner O(\phi)\urcorner$ represents a sentence that occurs in a work of fiction. And let us say that a sentence $\ulcorner O(\phi)\urcorner$ meets the *author's sayso condition iff* (S2) $\ulcorner O(\phi)\urcorner$ meets the *elementary sayso condition* or

(S3) ϕ is a logical consequence of ψ, ψ is consistent, and $\ulcorner O(\psi)\urcorner$ meets the author's *sayso condition.*

The basis of the definition of *satisfaction of sentence,* ϕ by a sequence, s, can now be given.

1. If ϕ is $\ulcorner O(\psi)\urcorner$ meets the *sayso condition,* s satisfies ϕ. The recursion clauses are as follows: Given that ϕ does not meet 1, then

2. *Negation.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner O(\neg\psi)\urcorner$ then s satisfies ϕ *iff* there is a sentence $\ulcorner O(\chi)\urcorner$ that is satisfied by S and no sequence satisfying χ^* fails to satisfy $\ulcorner \psi^*\urcorner$, where any sentence $\ulcorner\ulcorner^*$ is exactly like the sentence $\ulcorner\ulcorner$ save for showing a free variable wherever $\ulcorner\ulcorner^*$ displays a fictional name.

3. *Negation.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner\neg O(\psi)\urcorner$, then ϕ is satisfied by s *iff* $\ulcorner O(\psi)\urcorner$ is not satisfied by s.

4. *Conjunction.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner O(\chi_1)\urcorner$ and is $\ulcorner O(\ _2)\urcorner$ then s satisfies $\ulcorner\phi\&\psi\urcorner$ *iff* s satisfies both ϕ and ψ.

5. *Conjunction.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner O(\psi\&\chi)\urcorner$ then s satisfies ϕ *iff* s satisfies $\ulcorner O(\psi)\urcorner$ and $\ulcorner O(\chi)\urcorner$.

6. *Implication.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner O(\chi_1)\urcorner$ and ψ is $\ulcorner O(\chi_2)\urcorner$ then $\ulcorner\phi\rightarrow\psi\urcorner$ is satisfied by s *iff* s satisfies ψ or does not satisfy ϕ.

7. *Implication.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner O(\phi'\rightarrow\psi)\urcorner$ then s satisfies ϕ *iff* s satisfies some sentence $\ulcorner O(\chi)\urcorner$ and no sequence that satisfies χ fails to satisfy $\ulcorner\phi'\rightarrow\psi\urcorner$.

8. *Quantification.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner \exists \nu_i O(\psi) \urcorner$ then ϕ is satisfied by s *iff* at least one of these conditions is met:

(i) $\ulcorner O(\psi) \urcorner$ contains free occurrences of the variable ν_i and ν denotes the i-th element of some sequence s' differing from s in at most the i-th place, a is the name of that element and χ is a substitution instance of $\ulcorner O(\psi) \urcorner$ with respect to a, and χ meets the *sayso condition.*

(ii) If $O(\psi)$ is $\ulcorner O(\chi(\nu_i, a)) \urcorner$, then ν_i denotes the i-th element of some sequence s' differing from s in at most i-th place; that element knows $\ulcorner O \exists \nu_k (\nu_k = a) \urcorner$ to be true; the predicate χ is such that in general $\ulcorner \chi(\nu_j, \nu_h) \urcorner$ is semantically equivalent to $\ulcorner \nu_j$ believes that $\ulcorner \chi(\nu_j, \nu_h) \urcorner$ is semantically equivalent to $\ulcorner \nu_j$ believes that $\ulcorner \chi(\nu_j, \nu_h) \urcorner$; and the element denoted by ν_i believes that $\ulcorner \chi(\nu_i, a) \urcorner$.

9. *Quantification.* If ϕ is $\ulcorner O(\exists \nu(\psi)) \urcorner$ then ϕ is satisfied by s *iff* for some name or singular term a, free for a free variable in ψ, $\ulcorner O(S^{\nu}_{x}(\psi)) \urcorner$ is satisfied by s.

A truth-definition now easily drops out. *Truth is satisfaction by every sequence.* And truth, it should be noted, is governed by a single condition of material adequacy:

(T) x is true *iff* y

where x is the name of a sentence and y is the sentence named or a translation of it in our theory's semantic metalanguage. In particular, "O (Holmes lived in London)" is true if O (Holmes lived in London).

Now, though it would be dreadfully cumbersome here to set forth the details, it can be seen that this semantic sketch has, or seems to have a number of advantages.

(a) Condition 9 provides that "Moriarity discovered that Holmes really existed" is unsatisfiable, whereas "O (Moriarity discovered that Holmes really existed)" is allowed to be satisfiable.

(b) Conditions 8 and 9 allow for the representation of "Holmes had tea with Gladstone" by the harmless $\ulcorner O(T(h, g))\urcorner$, and of "Someone psychoanalyzed Grandiva" and "Someone loves Molly Jeavens" by the also harmless $\ulcorner \exists_\nu O(\psi(x_\nu, a))\urcorner$. On the other hand, the theory will reject such sentences as "Pierre Trudeau waltzed with Molly Jeavens," as it righly should.

(c) Conditions 2 and 3 concerning negation provide that $\ulcorner O(\phi)\urcorner$ and $O(\neg\phi)$ are neither contradictories nor contraries, which gives us a respectable method of representing the indeterminacy of fictional beings, if it were our wish to do so, without doing violence to the Law of Excluded Middle. What is more, a canonical representation in the form $\ulcorner O(\psi\&\neg\psi)\urcorner$ is satisfiable, as is its implicandum $\ulcorner O(\psi) \& O(\neg\psi)\urcorner$. Since, $\ulcorner O(\psi)\urcorner$ does <u>not</u> contradict $\ulcorner O(\neg\psi)\urcorner$, it is impossible to derive from $\ulcorner O(\psi\&\neg\psi)\urcorner$, any sentence whatever; and an all-important contradiction problem is disposed of.

(d) There are methodological virtues, as well. The system of *The Logic of Fiction*.

> requires only the classical truth values, the semantic rudiments of first order systems, both referential and substitutional, - such items as sets, functions, substitution instances, and the like, a primitive alethic modality, possibility, and another primitive, O, which is a very weak modal. Negatively speaking, for a theory of fiction we do not need to depart the classical laws of Non-Contradiction and Excluded Middle; we do not need to postulate the multivocality of 'true' or of 'exists' or of 'is in the world'; we do not need to abandon classical negation for some many-valued interloper; we do not need many-valued composition logics; we do not need the neutral

quantifiers 'Σ' and 'π'. We can still win and lose bets concerning the whereabouts of Holmes: "O (Holmes lived in Baker Street)" wins; "O (Holmes lived in Berczy Street)" loses[2].

(e) And, finally, here is a theory of truth that does direct a certain amount of traffic in the theories of reference and inference.

(i) Reference. That we refer in fiction to fictional objects could be accounted for by the legions of sentences in the form $\ulcorner O(\psi\nu)\urcorner$ and in the form $\ulcorner O\exists_\nu(\psi_\nu)\urcorner$ that are assigned the truth-value T. That reference does *not* in such cases imply existence is conveyed by the unsatisfiability of such sentences as "$\exists x$(Sherlock Holmes = x)".

(ii) Inference. Getting the truth conditions right goes quite some way, of course, in charting the course of what, in fiction, follows from what and what does not. Certainly one of the largest claims of the truth theory of *The Logic of Fiction* is that it shows convincingly not only how 'contradictions' can be true but also how they do not sanction that classical nuisance, the inference *ex falso quodlibet*.

5. It is pleasant to have one's critics speak well one's work and to take it seriously. But an altogether more beneficial outcome of criticism is the disclosure of problems and perplexities. Here are some that have been unearthed by critics of *The Logic of Fiction*.

(a) *Robert Howell*[3] The semantic theory of *The Logic of Fiction* does in fact, and contrary to my intentions, allow that "inconsistent fiction, contrary to fact, does narrate everything". Proof. To show that if $\ulcorner O(\phi\&\neg\phi)\urcorner$ is in a given story, then so is $\ulcorner O(\neg(\neg\psi))\urcorner$, for arbitrary ψ. Let $\ulcorner O(\phi\&\neg\phi)\urcorner$ be in the story; hence it meets the *elementary sayso condition* and is satisfied by s. To show that $\ulcorner O(\neg(\neg\psi))\urcorner$ is also satisfied by s, we use *Negation* rule 2 as follows. There is a sentence $\ulcorner O(\phi\&\neg\phi)\urcorner$ that is sat-

isfied by s, and (vacuously) no sequence satisfying $\ulcorner(\phi\&\neg\phi)$ falis to satisfy $\ulcorner\neg(\neg\psi)$, for any ψ. So $\ulcorner O(\neg(\neg\psi))\urcorner$ is satisfied by s.

(b) *Richard Routley*[4] Consider an authored self-contradiction represented as $\ulcorner O(\phi\&\neg\phi)\urcorner$. Then the story containing such a sentence yields $O(\psi)$, for arbitrary ψ. Proof. Since $\ulcorner(\phi\&\neg\phi) \equiv (\psi\&\neg\psi)\urcorner$ is a classical tautology, we have it by the modality of 'O' that $\ulcorner O(\phi\&\neg\phi)\urcorner$ *iff* $\ulcorner O(\psi\&\neg\psi)\urcorner$. Thus we also have $\ulcorner O(\psi\&\neg\psi)\urcorner$, hence by &-distribution, $\ulcorner O(\psi)\urcorner$, where ψ is any sentence you please.

(c) *Terence Parsons*[5] Formulas $\ulcorner\exists_{\nu} O(\psi_{\nu},a)\urcorner$ are taken to represent such fictional-real world truths as that "Someone psychoanalyzed Gradiva." The semantical rules of *The Logic of Fiction* provide that such a formula is (in the particular case before us) satisfied *iff*

(i) v knows that O someone, w, is Gradiva.

(ii) v believes that v psychoanalyzed Gradiva.

(iii) for all w and u, that w psychoanalyzed u is equivalent to w believes that w psychoanalyzed u.

But it is not true, in particular, that "a psychoanalyzed b" is equivalent to "a believes that a psychoanalyzed b". It could have happened that Freud psychoanalyzed Gradiva and yet was immediately thereafter struck down with irreversible amnesia; or he might have died.

More importantly however, the rules utterly fail to account for such sentences as "A certain fictional detective is more famous than any real detective". Here is a bet-sensitive, indeed winning, asseveration, but it contains nothing even resembling an intensional verb, as required by rule 8 (ii).

6. Trouble indeed for the semantic account of *The Logic of Fiction*, perhaps even trouble enough to show that that en-

terprise was Fundamentally misconceived and that we should pursue the semantics of fiction in very different theories, or even that we should abandon the semantic pretense altogether and content ourselves with pragmatics. Let us see.

A. *Possible Worlds Semantics: Pavel*[6] Mature theories exist which give the semantics of possible worlds. True, some thinkers despair of a completely satisfying account of that powerful metaphor. Maximal sets of propositions have been put to the explicational test, and some still find it wanting, what with the notion of a proposition being no clearer than that of apossible world, or what with propositions being explicable only in terms of possible worlds. On the other hand, possible worlds semantics are certainly theoretically better-behaved than the theory of *The Logic of Fiction;* so would it not be preferable, if far from ideal, to look there?

No, I think not. For I take it that the predicate, "is fictional", which Holmes satisfies (e.g., "$O\exists x(x$ = Holmes & x is fictional)") is governed by the following condition:

'x is fictional' entails, for some ϕ, possibly $\phi\dot{x}$ and $\neg\phi x$. That is, a fictional object, x, satisfies some such modalized inconsistent predicate by virtue of this circumstance that had the author so chosen, x would have behaved inconsistently, and the author could have so chosen. Moreover, if we allow for some standard reduction postulates for iterated modalities, we could obtain from ⌜Possibly ψ⌝ ⌜Necessarily (Possibly ψ)⌝, from which, in the particular instance, we would have, essentially as it were, the necessary possible self-contradictoriness of fictional beings. Fictional beings would be *impossibilia,* and not intuitively plausible candidates for residency in <u>any</u> possible world.[7]

Now, it is quite true that a major thrust of *The Logic of Fiction* was to show that such fictional contradictions were only apparent. But, Howell and Routley have rather convincingly averred that the attempt failed. Therefore, show how the contradictoriness of fictional objects was "only" apparent, and how the derivation of everything whatever could be avoided. What is more, they would need to show that their solutions of such contradiction problems could be absorbed without theoretical violence into their possible world semantics. And finally, in order to show the *advantages* of their theory over my own, it would be required of them to show that their solutions of the contradiction problems could not, without theoretical violence, be absorbed into a theory of *The Logic of Fiction* sort. *Tu quoque*.

B. *Meinongean Semantics: Parsons*[8] The best treatment of Meinongean semantics is that of Terence Parsons. One of its most useful features is that it has been very deliberately developed so as to provide an adequate theoretical home for fictional objects. However, for me there is an uncertainty about its analysis of fictional objects. Part of it has to do with the general notion of a Meinongean object. Parsons' account provides that corresponding to each different non-empty set of properties there is a different specific object. Some might find this an over-generous criterion of objecthood and others, might wonder whether, say, *unit* sets of properties are ever property-rich enough adequately to individuate. It depends I suppose on how close a connection there is between uniqueness and individuatedness. For example, there is no particular reason to think that there is just one object that is red and has no other (nuclear) properties; but corresponding to the set {being red} there is one object at most. So we have a problem with uniqueness. Moreover, regardless of whether the-red-only-thing is unique, it is dubious that redness alone ever makes a substantive enough contribution to its bearer so as to confer genuine

individuality upon it. My own complaint, however, is somewhat different. *All* objects, fictional or otherwise, *are* by virtue of their corresponding sets. Thus fictional objects "were objects before they were written about: they were so to speak only identified by the author, and writing about them did not confer objecthood upon them." So, then, the requirement that fictional objects be run-of-the-mill Meinongean objects as such denies us the intuition that in a rather deep, and somewhat literal sense, fictional objects have a literary patermity; i.e., that they are created by their authors.

There is also something unsettling about the requirement that fictional objects should be incomplete in the manner of Parsons' treatment of this notion, that is, that they be indeterminate with respect to an enormous range of properties that one would have supposed them capable of exemplifying. On the face of it, it is not credible to say that Sherlock Holmes neither lacked nor possessed a kidney, ten toes, two elbows, or a mother; than he went to school or not, that he did not comport himself with Watson and the world in ways not chronicled by Doyle. Mind you, there are ever so many things about Holmes that we shall never know. But it is an over-reaction to elevate these *insolubilia* to ontological heights; it is a confusion of the *ordo essendi* with the *ordo cognoscendi*. Perhaps it might be thought that I am wrong to suppose that on the Meinongean analysis Holmes' incompleteness (epistemologically or ontologically rendered--it doesn't matter here) involve those properties of a few lines back. Nevertheless Holmes is a man. I would think that it would follow this, relative to elementary zoology, that Holmes had a mother, and that relative to human anatomy, he had two elbows, a kidney and a certain number of toes. I would also think that having shoulders and back, that either he was be-moled or not. It may be a deficiency of sorts that Parsons' Meinongean preoccupation is with

ontology and not with logic. Parsons says that he does not seek for a logic of fiction. But if I am not to know what follows about Holmes from what, I wonder whether the ontological project can satisfactorily proceed. Let A be any proposition ascribing to Holmes any property not in his representing set. Parsons elects to assign to A. and to not-A as well, the intermediate truth value "indeterminate" or *i*. This leaves us with the need to make up our minds about A or not-A . Are we to assign it *i* or do we attach the classical truth-value T? If we make the former choice, we abandon the law of excluded middle for fictional objects. If we go with the second option we tamper with the conventional truth-functionality of the law. Either way, we invest our decision and the theory which it advances with a logical significance that needs to be explained and justified.

3. *Pragmatics: Purtill*[9] Some authors have been tempted by the notion that the sentences actually constitutive of a piece of fiction (as opposed to those that are *about* fiction, those that a literary critic might use, for example) are spared all but the limits of semantic significance. they are not true and they are not false, and that is about all there is to their semantic "theory"; the deeper truths lie elsewhere--in pragmatics. Purtill is one who has yielded to such a temptation, but not with wholly convincing results[10]. As I have said, Purtill holds that the sentences literally constitutive of a piece of fiction are neither true nor false, that they do not make assertions, that (therefore) they do not make assertions about what they would appear to be about. Such sentences in fact *tell tales*, and in such non-assertive uses, they escape the burdens of all but the limits of semantic significance. That is, they are *not true* and they are *not false*. Purtill holds that if I tale-tell by means of a sentence, S, then S neither asserts nor denies anything, and that it cannot be inferred

either that S is true or that S is false. Purtill makes two claims which it is useful to distinguish:

(A) In fiction sentences are forwarded non-assertively.

(B) Any sentence forwarded non-assertively is non-truth-valued.

It is, of course, open to us to accept (A) without accepting (B). Proposition (B) is not obviously true, and some philosophers (Frege, for example, in "The Thought") have held that it is false. In particular, if a *statement* could be used unassertively, then tale-telling could perfectly well be the non-assertive presentation of statements; and I do not see why such statements couldn't be truth-valued, and why in such non-assertive uses we can't be said to be forgiven the obligation of staying on the semantics tracks.

But what of what we ourselves say about fictional goings-on, by way for example of literary criticism? Purtill thinks that, unlike the sentences constitutive of the fiction in question, these sentences do have some positive semantic significance, for they are true of false, and quite genuinely about something, of which something quite genuinely is asserted. They have syntactic significance as well, for they are "ellipses" for sentences that are more faithfully rendered in the form:

⊢ (Doyle, his readers, "Holmes solved the case of the Speckled Band"),

where '⊢' is a quasi-operator with, as arguments, and author, the author's audience or readership, and the non-truth-valued, semantically bereft sentences with which the author makes his magic.

In this particular example, we have more or less obvious facts to take into account.

1. In this fashion, Doyle has tale-told us that Holmes solved the case of the Speckled Band.

2. Statement 1 is true ("straightforwardly true" as Professor Purtill might say).

3. The sentence "Holmes solved the case of the Speckled Band" makes a false assertion.

4. What was tale-told would make a false assertion; that is, what Doyle tale-tells, but does not assert, would make a false assertion.

Consider now the following inconsistent set:

(*i*) *What Doyle tale-told is X.*

(*ii*) *What Woods (say) non-elliptically asserted is Y.*

(*iii*) *What Doyle tale-told is neither true nor false.*

(*iv*) *What Woods non-elliptically asserted is false.*

(*v*) '*X*' = '*Y*'.

I think that we can quickly agree that Purtill is committed to the rejection of (v), for he would appear expressly to hold (i)-(iv). Suppose then that (v) is rejected. Then, though 'X' and 'Y' are the same sentence, 'X' was put to non-assertive, non-truth-valued purposes, and 'Y' to assertive, truth-valued purposes. The similarity is syntactic only. But, if so, it is unsurpassingly unclear (to me at least) whether the predicate in 'X' and 'Y' predicates the same thing, and unclear, as well, whether their common subject term has any, never mind whether it be the same, semantic role (e.g., does it refer to Holmes?). What, then, accounts for the urge in us all to think that the author's "Holmes scolded Watson" and the critic's "Holmes scolded Watson" show a common concern for Watson?

Purtill's views, perhaps like my own in *The Logic of Fiction*, rather quickly prove unconvincing. I do not, however, for a moment suppose that the difficulties with Purtill's pragmatic reconstruction indicate that the pragmatic approach is wrong in principle[11]. But I *do* think that the possible world and Mainongean approaches are wrong in principle; and about the approach of *The Logic of Fiction* I remain, for the time being at least, undecided and more baffled than I care to admit.

Notes

[1] John Woods, *The Logic of Fiction: A Philosophical Sounding of Deviant Logic*. Mouton. 1974.

[2] *The Logic of Fiction*, p. 143.

[3] Review of *The Logic of Fiction*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34, pp. 354-55.

[4] "The Semantical Structure of Fictional Discourse", to appear in *Poetics*.

[5] Review of *The Logic of Fiction*, *Synthese*, forthcoming.

[6] Thomas Pavel, "'Possible Worls' in Literary Semantics", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34, pp. 165-76.

[7] Except for a limiting case of the notion of "possible world" according to which there is a so-called world in which everything is the case. Not, certainly, a concept of possible worldhood that encourages one to think of fictional beings, should they inhabit such a world, as *possibilia*'. See Robert Stalnaker, "A Theory of Conditionals", *American Philosophical Quarterly Monograph Series*, 2, pp. 98-112. Cf. *The Logic of Fiction*, pp. 96ff.

[8] Terence Parsons, "A Meinongean Analysis of Fictional Objects," *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 1975, pp. 73-86, and "Nuclear and Extranuclear Properties: Meinong and Leibniz," *Nous*, 1978, pp. 137-52.

[9] R. L. Purtill, "Telling the Tale," *Canadian Journal of Philosphy*, 1978.

[10] Susan Haack is another. See her Critical Notice of *The Logic of Fiction*, *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. 1976. pp. 303-20. Dr. Haack does not, however, indicate how the pragmatic development might proceed.

[11] It is interesting that Routley is so impressed by the dominant pragmatic features of fictional discourse. One may expect good work from this quarter. In fact, see Routley *op. cit.*

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