AGAINST FICTIONAL REALISM

Fictional realists accept an ontology of fictional characters, creatures, places, and times. They are generally led to do so by a form of argument which is familiar from other areas of philosophy. For fictional realists note that there are apparently true sentences which appear to make reference to, or quantify over, fictional objects:

(1) (a) Raskolnikov is a fictional character.
(b) The character of Raskolnikov was created by Dostoyevsky.
(c) Raskolnikov is a more realistic character than Alyosha.
(d) There are fictional characters which could never have been depicted prior to the creation of Raskolnikov.
(e) There is a fictional character who, for every novel, either appears in that novel or is a model for a character who does.1

Now (1a)–(1e) appear to be literally and straightforwardly true. And it seems, prime facie, that we should take their syntax at face value. There simply is not an obvious systematic way of paraphrasing (1a)–(1e) that captures their original senses. But in this case, the fictional realist argues, we seem forced to accept that the occurrences of the name ‘Raskolnikov’ in (1a)–(1d) refer to a fictional object and that the quantifiers in (1d)–(1e) range over fictional objects. And this commits us to the existence of fictional objects.

The suggestion that the truth of (1d)–(1e) entails the existence of fictional objects is reinforced by two further observations. First,

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(1d)–(1e) can participate in certain apparently valid inferences, such as the inference from (1e) to the sentence:

(2) If no character appears in every novel then some character is modeled on another character.

The validity of this inference, it is suggested, requires us to understand the quantification involved as objectual quantification over fictional objects. Consequently, in so far as we take (1e) to be true, we seem committed to there being true sentences involving objectual quantification over fictional objects and hence to there being fictional objects. Second, each of (1a)–(1e) appears to entail directly the sentence:

(3) There are fictional objects.

In so far as we take (1a)–(1e) to be true we therefore seem committed to the truth of (3) and hence to the existence of fictional objects.

Let us call sentences such as (1a)–(1e) which appear to make reference to, or quantify over, fictional objects Fictional Object Sentences or FOS for short. Now fictional realists sometimes also offer analogous arguments for their position that invoke other sorts of linguistic data. Thus, for example, fictional realists sometimes argue that we are committed to fictional realism by the apparent truth of object-fictional sentences such as (4a) which appear to say what is true in the world of the relevant story, fictional intensional transitives such as (4b), and sentences comparing fictional and real objects such as (4c):

(4) (a) Raskolnikov is a student.
    (b) Putin is searching for Raskolnikov.
    (c) Putin is less neurotic than Raskolnikov.

However, these cases are far more controversial. It is plausible that utterances of object-fictional sentences do not involve us actually asserting anything but rather involve our merely pretending to make assertions or at least our making assertions which describe the content of a pretense rather than the nature of the real world. And if this is true it is not immediately clear how utterances of sentences

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2 See van Inwagen, "Quantification and Fictional Discourse," p. 244.
3 See van Inwagen, "Existence and Ontological Commitment," p. 137.
5 The classic statement of the view that utterances of object-fictional sentences should be understood as pretend assertions can be found in John Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," in his Expression and Meaning (New York: Cambridge, 1979), pp. 58–75; see Lamarque and Olsen, Truth, Fiction, and Literature, pp. 63–69, for a
such as (4a) could commit us to anything. Moreover, alternative treatments of the relevant comparatives and intensional transitives are available that do not seem to involve a commitment to fictional objects. Of course, it might ultimately turn out that the only way to make sense of (4a)–(4c) requires our taking them to make reference to fictional objects. But this is not at all obvious and requires further argument. In what follows, then, I will confine my attention to the argument for fictional realism that is based upon the apparent truth of FOS.

Now there is some disagreement among fictional realists as to how we should understand the nature of fictional characters. Some, such as David Braun, Nathan Salmon, and Amie Thomasson, take fictional objects to be abstract human artifacts created by authors. Nicholas Wolterstorff and Ed Zalta take fictional objects to be eternal abstract Platonic objects. And Peter van Inwagen takes fictional characters to be abstract objects but does not commit himself as to whether they are created or eternal. Moreover, there are those, such as Alexius Meinong, Terence Parsons, and Richard Routley, who take fictional objects to be nonexisting concrete objects. We can ignore these differences for the moment, however, since the objections I will raise below apply equally to all of these approaches.


9 See van Inwagen, “Quantification and Fictional Discourse,” “Creatures of Fiction,” and “Existence and Ontological Commitment.”

10 See Meinong, Über Gegenstandstheorie,” in his Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie (Leipzig: Barth, 1904), and Über die Stellung der Gegenstandstheorie im System der Wissenschaften (Leipzig: Voigtlander, 1907); Parsons, “A
Of course, if we accept fictional characters into our ontology then we face the task of determining precisely which fictional characters there are. Now it seems obvious that which fictional characters we take to occur in a story will depend upon what the world of that story is like. And, in fact, I suggest that the following principles have a near platitudinous status:

(P1) If the world of a story concerns a creature $a$, and if $a$ is not a real thing, then $a$ is a fictional character.

(P2) If a story concerns $a$ and $b$, and if $a$ and $b$ are not real things, then $a$ and $b$ are identical in the world of the story iff the fictional character of $a$ is identical to the fictional character of $b$.

Some of our intuitions about fictional characters may, arguably, be potentially revisable. But (P1) and (P2) seem so fundamental to our conception of a fictional character I doubt very much that any account which rejected (P1) or (P2) would deserve to be counted as an account of fictional characters but should rather be regarded as an account of some other sort of entity. Note in any case that our intuitions that (P1) and (P2) are true seem at least as strong as our intuitions that (1a)–(1e) are true. Moreover, our acceptance of many *FOS* appears to result from our applying (P1) and/or (P2). Thus, for example, I suspect that our intuitions that (P1) is true are at least as strong as our intuitions that (1a) is true and that we only judge (1a) to be true because we accept (P1) and take the world of *Crime and Punishment* to contain Raskolnikov. I would argue, then, that the fictional realist cannot reject (P1) or (P2) without thereby undermining our motivation for accepting fictional realism in the first place. In what follows I shall therefore assume that the fictional realist is committed to (P1) and (P2).

Of course, as they stand, these principles are not terribly helpful since they presuppose an account of what it is for something to be the case in the world of a story. And this is a complex matter depending not merely upon what the relevant text says but upon the interpretation we bring to bear upon that text. Still, let us put these difficulties aside for the moment. In what follows, I shall argue that a commitment to (P1) and (P2) is enough to get the fictional realist into difficulties. In particular, I shall argue, authors may leave certain

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things unspecified about the world of their story including whether certain creatures count as identical or distinct in that world and which creatures exist in that world. Given (P1) and (P2), this sort of underspecification within a story gives rise to ontic indeterminacy concerning which fictional characters occur within that story. Moreover, I shall argue, if the laws of logic and identity fail in the world of a story, these failures may infect the fictional characters occurring in that story. In short, given (P1) and (P2), the fictional realist seems committed to certain pernicious forms of indeterminacy and to objects that flout the laws of logic and identity. These are obviously undesirable commitments. And, since these consequences do not arise for a pretense-theoretic account of fictional objects, I shall argue that we should favor a pretense-theoretic account over fictional realism. I conclude by briefly comparing the objections I raise in this paper to those raised by Bertrand Russell to Meinong.

I. OBJECTION 1: ONTIC INDETERMINACY

Let us turn to our first objection to the fictional realist. Now it is widely recognized that if there are fictional objects then it will at least sometimes be a vague or indeterminate matter as to whether two fictional objects are identical. This is particularly clear when we consider questions of intertextual identity. Consider, for example, the question of whether Marlowe’s Faust is the same character as Goethe’s Faust. Now I suspect our concept of fictional characters is insufficiently precise to provide an answer to this question and we have no principled pre-theoretic way of deciding it one way or the other. It seems plausible, then, to regard it as indeterminate whether these Faust characters are identical or distinct.

Many fictional realists seem willing to accept such cases of intertextual indeterminacy and, as they stand, I doubt these cases pose much of a problem to the fictional realist. For it is common to distinguish between benign cases of indeterminacy which arise as the result of imprecision in our concepts and language and pernicious cases of ontic indeterminacy where the nature of the world is itself indeterminate. And I think the fictional realist can plausibly argue that the cases of indeterminacy noted above result because of the imprecision in our concept of a fictional character. Our concept of a fictional character is simply not sufficiently precise to settle whether

we have two Faust characters or one but, were we so inclined, we could precisify it so as to settle this question.

Nevertheless, a little reflection suggests that the fictional realist is also committed to cases of genuine ontic indeterminacy. For a story might describe two characters in such a way that it is left indeterminate whether or not they are identical:

_Frackworld_: No one was absolutely sure whether Frick and Frack were really the same person or not. Some said that they were definitely two different people. True, they looked very much alike, but they had been seen in different places at the same time. Others claimed that such cases were merely an elaborate hoax and that Frick had been seen changing his clothes and wig to, as it were, become Frack. All that I can say for certain is that there were some very odd similarities between Frick and Frack but also some striking differences.

I think it is pretty clear that in this story it is left indeterminate as to whether Frick is Frack. But in this case (P2) entails that it is indeterminate whether the Frick-character is identical to the Frack-character.\(^\text{12}\) Note that this indeterminacy does not arise because our concept of a fictional character is vague and imprecise. No attempt to refine or precisify our concept of a fictional character can remove the indeterminacy in Frackworld and, granted (P2), this indeterminacy in Frackworld will carry over into an indeterminacy concerning whether or not the Frick-character is the same as the Frack-character.

This ontic indeterminacy is potentially problematic for the fictional realist for there is a well-known argument from Gareth Evans which appears to show that it cannot be an indeterminate matter as to whether \(a\) is \(b\).\(^\text{13}\) The argument runs as follows. Suppose that it was indeterminate as to whether \(a\) was \(b\). Then \(b\) would have the property of being indeterminately identical to \(a\). But, since \(a\) is determinately identical to \(a\), \(a\) does not have the property of being indeterminately identical to \(a\). So there is a property which \(b\) has but \(a\) lacks. So by Leibniz's Law \(a \neq b\). Now, as it stands, this is not a strict _reductio_ of our assumption. But it is surely an undesirable consequence for those who wish to maintain that it is indeterminate as to whether \(a\) is \(b\). Moreover, we may transform Evans's argument into a _reductio_ of the

\(^{12}\) This is granted, of course, the plausible assumption that the biconditional in (P2) preserves indeterminacy.

\(^{13}\) Evans's original argument is in his "Can There Be Vague Objects?" _Analysis_, xxxviii (1978): 208. There is an enormous body of literature on Evans's argument to which I cannot hope to do justice here, but see Timothy Williamson, "Vagueness in Reality," in Loux and Zimmerman, eds., for an excellent discussion of the relevant issues and references to the relevant literature.
assumption that it is definitely the case that it is indeterminate whether \(a\) is \(b\) as follows. Granted that Evans’s original argument preserves definiteness, it follows from the assumption that it is definitely the case that it is indeterminate whether \(a\) is \(b\) that \(a\) is definitely distinct from \(b\). But our assumption also entails that it is indeterminate whether \(a\) is \(b\) which, plausibly, entails that \(a\) is not definitely distinct from \(b\).

Of course, it might turn out in the end that there is something wrong with Evans’s argument. But it is worth heading off at least one potential response on the part of the fictional realist here. Some have thought that Evans’s argument may be blocked by a so-called fuzzy logic invoking degrees of truth and the fictional realist might hope to avail herself of this response.\(^1\) The problem here is that it is completely unclear how we could assign any degree of truth at all to the claim that Frick is Frack in our story. We cannot say whether that claim is very true, or quite true, or quite false, or very false, or somewhere in between. We cannot even say if any of these options are truer than any of the others. Fuzzy logic may work well for cases of vagueness where we have a series of borderline cases possessing a property to a greater or lesser degree. It does not work terribly well with the sort of penumbra-free indeterminacy generated by Frack-world. Anyway, I think it is clear that those who wish to reject Evans’s argument must argue their point. And until the fictional realist discharges this burden so much the worse for her position.

Fictional realists also seem to be committed to a rather different form of ontic indeterminacy. For they appear committed, not merely to cases of vague identity, but also to cases of vague existence or indeterminate being. Consider Tatyana Tolstaya’s recent novel The Slynx. Now in the end, I think, it is pretty much left open whether or not there really is a Slynx in Tolstaya’s novel. It seems to be an indeterminate matter as to whether the world of that novel contains a Slynx. But then, given (P1), it follows that it is an indeterminate matter as to whether there is such a fictional creature as the Slynx.\(^2\)

The problem here is that it is not clear how the being of the Slynx-creature could be an indeterminate matter. Three possibilities sug-


\(^2\) I assume, of course, that the biconditional in (P1) preserves indeterminacy.
gest themselves. The fictional character of the Slynx might be a special sort of object with an indeterminate ontological status so it does not definitely have being but does not definitely lack being either. It might be indeterminate as to whether the property of being the Slynx-character is instantiated. Or perhaps it is indeterminate as to whether the state of affairs of there being a Slynx-character obtains. I do not see what else it could be for it to be indeterminate as to whether there is a Slynx-character. But in the present case none of these will do.

The first option fails because it is not clear that those who postulate objects of indeterminate ontological status can even coherently formulate their position. In order to do this they must, presumably, maintain that there are objects which do not determinately have being but which do not determinately lack being either. But, of course, in so far as they commit themselves to \textit{there being} such objects, they appear to commit themselves to those objects having a determinate ontological status after all.\footnote{Van Inwagen makes a similar point in his \textit{Material Beings} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1990), p. 240.}

It might be replied, against this objection, that those who postulate objects of indeterminate ontological status should not maintain that there \textit{are} such objects but rather merely that it is indeterminate as to whether there are any such objects. This might be so. But in the present context this reply simply pushes our problem one stage back. We wanted an account of what it could be for it to be indeterminate as to whether there is a Slynx-character. The suggestion we were considering was that the Slynx-character might be an object with an indeterminate ontological status. In other words we invoked the idea that the Slynx-character might be an object with an indeterminate ontological status in order to make sense of the claim that it is indeterminate whether the Slynx-character exists.

I argued, however, that we cannot make sense of there \textit{being} a Slynx-character of indeterminate ontological status. Rather we must hold that it is indeterminate whether there is a Slynx-character of indeterminate ontological status. But this means that we still need an account of what it is for it to be indeterminate as to whether there is a Slynx-character. And this is the very phenomenon that the postulation of ontologically indeterminate objects was supposed to explain. We have gone around in a circle and the postulation of ontologically indeterminate objects does no explanatory work here. I conclude that the fictional realist cannot provide an account of what
it is for it to be indeterminate whether there is a Slynx-character by maintaining that the Slynx-character is an object of indeterminate ontological status.

The second option fails because, in order for it to be indeterminate as to whether a property is instantiated, there must surely be an object or set of objects such that it is indeterminate as to whether they instantiate that property. At any rate, if every object determinately fails to instantiate a given property it is not clear how it could be indeterminate whether that property is instantiated. Now if the property of being the Slynx-character is indeterminately instantiated then it must be indeterminately instantiated by a fictional character in Tolstaya’s novel. But every fictional character occurring in Tolstaya’s novel which has a determinate ontological status determinately does not instantiate the property of being the Slynx-character. So the property of being the Slynx-character is not indeterminately instantiated by any objects that have a determinate ontological status. If it is indeterminately instantiated at all, then, it must be indeterminately instantiated by an object which does not have a determinate ontological status. So, if the suggestion we are considering is to work, we must accept that there are objects which lack a determinate ontological status. But, of course, we have just rehearsed the problems facing the view that there are such things.

The third option fails because, if it is indeterminate as to whether the state of affairs of there being a Slynx-character obtains, it must surely be indeterminate as to whether the property of being the Slynx-character is instantiated. After all, if that property was determinately instantiated or determinately failed to be instantiated then it is hard to see how it could be an indeterminate matter as to whether the state of affairs of there being a Slynx-character obtained. But we have already seen that, in the present instance, we cannot make sense of it being indeterminate as to whether the property of being the Slynx-character is instantiated.

Of course, there might be some other way of understanding how it could be indeterminate as to whether there is a Slynx-character that we have not considered. But, if so, I do not see what it is. And the fictional realist is clearly faced with the task of explaining it. Until the fictional realist discharges this burden, so much the worse for her position.

The two arguments just given assume (P2) and (P1) respectively and, although I argued earlier that the fictional realist must accept these principles, a fictional realist might nevertheless hope to block my arguments by rejecting them. However, it is worth pointing out that this strategy faces a problem. For, even if we block my arguments by rejecting (P1) and (P2), we still face the problem of deciding
whether the Frick-character is the same as the Frack-character and whether there is a Slynx-character. And there seems no principled way in which we might decide these questions. In each case we have no more reason to choose one of the options than the other and whatever choice we make will be unacceptably ad hoc. Hence, I would argue, simply rejecting (P1) and (P2) will not save the fictional realist.

Before concluding our discussion of indeterminacy, it is worth emphasizing that the cases we have been discussing really generate two problems for the fictional realist. First, of course, the fictional realist seems committed to two problematic varieties of ontic indeterminacy. But even those who are willing to embrace ontic indeterminacy face a second and perhaps deeper problem here. For, if fictional realism were true, ontic indeterminacy would be uncomfortably easy to come by. To bring this point out imagine, for a moment, that God created the world so that it was completely precise and determinate, so that there was no ontic indeterminacy of any form. If fictional realism was true then human beings could still generate cases of ontic indeterminacy simply by writing fiction. This seems disquieting. Surely we do not have this degree of control over the metaphysical nature of the world. And we should surely be wary of any view which entails that we do.

II. OBJECTION 2: LOGICAL INCOHERENCE

Let us turn to our second objection to the fictional realist. The difficulty here is that a story might describe an impossible world in which the laws of logic or identity fail. But since, by (P1) and (P2), what exists in the world of a story determines which fictional characters occur in that story, various impossibilities within the world of a story may infect the fictional characters that occur in that story. Here are two examples. In the first story the law of noncontradiction fails. In the second, the symmetry of identity fails:

*Diaethialand:* When she arrived in Diaethialand, Jane met Jules and Jim. This confused Jane since Jules and Jim both were, and were not, distinct people. And this made it hard to know how to interact with them. For example, since Jules both was and was not Jim, if Jim came to tea Jules

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17 These examples might be multiplied. With sufficient ingenuity we might construct stories where, for example, the law of excluded middle, the reflexivity of identity, the transitivity of identity, and the laws of arithmetic, fail to apply to identity statements involving the denizens of the stories and hence fail to apply to the fictional characters occurring in those stories. Indeed, Tamar Szabo Gendler’s *The Tower of Goldbach* (see her “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance,” this *Journal*, xcvi, 2 (February 2000): 55–81) provides a case where, arguably, 7 fictional characters plus 5 fictional characters both does and does not equal 12 fictional characters.
both would and wouldn’t come too. This made it hard for Jane to determine how many biscuits to serve. Then Jane realized what to do. She needed both to buy and not to buy extra biscuits whenever Jim came. After that everything was better.

*Asymmetryville.* As soon as he got up in the morning Cicero knew that something was wrong. It was not that he was distinct from Tully. On the contrary, just as always he was identical to Tully. It was rather that while he was identical to Tully, Tully was distinct from him. In other words, some time during the night (he could not tell exactly when) the symmetry of identity failed. This had some rather annoying consequences. When Cicero got paid Tully could spend the money but not vice versa. Tully got fat off the food Cicero ate and gave up dining himself. And Tully was praised for Cicero’s denunciation of Catiline although he himself had slept through the whole affair. It was enough to test Cicero’s Stoicism to the limits. Then something happened that changed everything. Cicero’s political enemies who knew that Cicero was Tully mistook Tully for Cicero and murdered him. At first it seemed as if Tully had died. But then Cicero realized that since he was alive and he was Tully, Tully was alive too. Tully was understandably grateful and reformed his ways. After that Cicero and Tully lived together happily.

These magical realist stories describe worlds that are supposed to flout the laws of logic. In the world of *Dialethialand,* Jules both is and is not Jim and in the world of *Asymmetryville,* Cicero is Tully though Tully is not Cicero. The question arises, then, as to which fictional characters occur in these stories.

If, as I suggested, the fictional realist is committed to (P1) and (P2) then there seem only two responses open to her if she wants to avoid a commitment to objects that flout the laws of logic and identity. She could maintain that my stories do not contain any fictional characters at all. Or she could allow that they contain fictional characters but maintain that these characters do not after all flout the laws of logic and identity. Let us call the first response the *No Character* response and the second response the *Coherent Character* response. I will consider and reject each response in turn.

Given (P1) and (P2), the No Character response requires the fictional realist to deny that *Dialethialand* and *Asymmetryville* describe fictional worlds that contain people. Now in so far as *Dialethialand* and *Asymmetryville* describe fictional worlds those worlds certainly appear to contain people. So I think that if the fictional realist is to maintain the No Character response she had better argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, *Dialethialand* and *Asymmetryville* do not succeed in describing fictional worlds in the first place.
Unfortunately, this claim seems highly implausible and it is not clear how it might be defended. Of course, the fictional realist could simply insist that fictional worlds must obey the laws of logic and identity. But without some independent motivation this seems a terribly ad hoc maneuver and I doubt it could be maintained. After all, many stories contain lurking or explicit contradictions but we nevertheless take them to provide perfectly good descriptions of fictional worlds.

A more interesting variant of this response on the part of the fictional realist would hold that we cannot really imagine the worlds which *Dialethialand* and *Asymmetryville* attempt to describe because this would require us to imagine something logically incoherent and then argue that a story counts as successfully describing a fictional world only in so far as we can imagine that world. But this response also faces its problems. While *Dialethialand* and *Asymmetryville* are no doubt strange stories, I think many readers are able to engage imaginatively with them. After all, I suspect that many readers will find Jane’s response to the biscuit problem very appropriate, given that she is in Dialethialand. And I suspect that many will also find the way Cicero and Tully resolve their conflict appropriate. But the very fact that we find such things appropriate is surely a sign that we are able to engage with my stories and have succeeded, at least to some extent, in imagining the worlds they portray.

Of course, it might be objected, we cannot really imagine the worlds of my stories because we cannot really imagine in detail what the world would have to be like in order for my stories to be true. Rather, it seems, when we try to imagine the worlds described by *Dialethialand* and *Asymmetryville*, we will only focus upon certain aspects of those worlds at any one time. At different times we may

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18 We might, for example, take my stories to be describing conceptual impossibilities and agree with Kathleen Stock that we cannot imagine conceptual impossibilities; see her “The Tower of Goldbach and Other Impossible Tales,” in Matthew Kieran and Dominic Lopes, eds., *Imagination, Philosophy, and the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 107–24. Of course, Stock’s arguments raise the question of what counts as a conceptual impossibility. But, putting this issue to one side, I think there are serious reasons to doubt their cogency. Brian Weatherson, “Morality, Fiction, and Possibility,” *The Philosopher’s Imprint*, iv (2004): 1–27 (see especially pp. 10–11) raises some well-taken worries about some of Stock’s arguments and I give some further reasons to suppose can imagine the logically incoherent below. See Szabo Gendler’s “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance,” and “On the Relationship between Pretense and Belief,” in Kieran and Lopes, pp. 139–40, for a defense of our ability to imagine conceptual impossibilities. Weatherson, “Morality, Fiction, and Possibility,” argues that we are able to imagine certain impossibilities although he is more cautious than Gendler about our ability to imagine conceptual impossibilities.
focus upon aspects of these worlds that are not logically compatible with each other. But, at any one time, what we imagine is logically coherent. And we are unable to bring these different islands of coherence together and imagine what Dialethialand and Asymmetryville are really like in any detail or completeness.

I grant that we cannot imagine in any detail or completeness what Dialethialand or Asymmetryville would be like. But this seems equally true of many other stories and does not appear to prevent our imagining the worlds of those stories. When we watch Aristophanes we have no difficulty imagining that the birds build a Cloud-Cucko-Land between heaven and earth. Generations of readers and viewers have had no difficulty imagining that Dr. Who’s Tardis is a small police phone box on the outside but contains a vast space within. And generations of children have had no difficulty imagining that Winnie the Pooh and Piglet are talking animals. But when we stop and try to imagine in detail how the world would have to be if any of these things were the case then our imaginations are likely to balk. A great deal of the world’s fiction will generate imaginative resistance if we try to delve too closely into what the world would have to be like in order for the relevant stories to be true but this does not prevent us from imaginatively engaging with that fiction and imagining the world it describes. So I grant that we cannot imagine in detail what the worlds portrayed in Dialethialand and Asymmetryville would be like but I do not think this precludes our imaginatively engaging with those stories or our imagining those worlds to be real.19

There is obviously a great deal more to say here but for the moment I want to point out two reasons to suppose that we are, in general, able to imagine logically incoherent or inconsistent states of affairs. First, observe that we do seem able to pretend or imagine that some logically impossible state of affairs holds in order to see what follows from them or in the course of a reductio proof that no such state of affairs can obtain. I might, for example, imagine that Cicero is Tully but Tully is distinct from Cicero in the course of a reductio proof aimed at establishing the impossibility of this. But if I can imagine this when constructing a reductio then surely I can also imagine it when reading fiction. Second, observe that some humans do genuinely seem able to believe things that are logically incoherent or inconsistent. Dialetheists believe that certain contradictions are both true and false. Meinongians believe in nonexistent objects. And some of us believe that The

19 Szabo Gendler makes a closely related point in her “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance,” pp. 69–70.
Trinity is simultaneously both one and three. But if humans can believe logically incoherent or inconsistent things then surely we can imagine or pretend those things. If we can believe that The Trinity is both one and three then we can surely pretend that Jules both is and is not Jim.

So much the worse, then, for the No Character response. But what about the Coherent Character response? As I see it there are two problems with this response. We can bring these out by considering how the response applies to Dialethialand but analogous points may be made with respect to Asymmetryville. The first problem is we have to decide whether we are going to take Jules to be identical to Jim or whether we are going to take Jules to be distinct from Jim. And there seems no possible reason to favor one of these options over the other. It seems ad hoc and unmotivated to maintain that Jules and Jim are identical and reject the claim that Jules and Jim are distinct. But it seems equally ad hoc and unmotivated to maintain that Jules and Jim are distinct and reject the claim that Jules and Jim are identical. The second problem here is that neither of these options really does justice to my story. In so far as we deny that Jules and Jim are distinct or deny that they are identical we seem to get something badly wrong about the world of my story. Neither of these options, for example, allows us to make good sense of Jane’s Dialetheist solution to the biscuit problem. In so far as we find Jane’s solution very appropriate in the context of my story, I think we must imagine that Jules both is and is not Jim. The only way to do justice to my story then, I would suggest, is to accept that in the world of Dialethialand, Jules both is and is not Jim.

I conclude that neither the No Character response nor the Coherent Character response work. We must accept that, in the world of Dialethialand, Jules both is, and is not, identical to Jim. This, together with (P1) and (P2), entails that the fictional object corresponding to Jules both is and is not identical to that corresponding to Jim. Moreover we must accept that, in the world of Asymmetryville, Cicero is Tully but Tully is distinct from Cicero. This, together with (P1) and (P2), entails that the fictional object corresponding to Cicero is identical to the fictional object corresponding to Tully but that the latter object is distinct from the former. The fictional realist, then, appears to be committed to the existence of logically incoherent objects.

Once again there are two reasons to be unhappy about this outcome. A commitment to logically incoherent objects is in itself obviously extremely problematic. But there is a second problem facing the fictional realist here. For if fictional realism were true then true inconsistencies and violations of the laws of identity would be
uncomfortably easy to come by. If God created a world in which the law of noncontradiction and the laws of identity otherwise held, we would nevertheless be able to violate these laws simply by making up stories like Dialethialand and Asymmetryville. Surely we do not have this degree of control over the laws of logic and identity. And surely we should be wary of any view which allows that we do.

III. PRETENSE THEORY

In the light of these problems I think that we would be well advised to abandon fictional realism and exclude fictional objects from our ontology. But in this case we need an alternative account of how we should understand (1a)–(1e) and our talk and thought about fictional objects in general. Moreover, of course, our account should allow us to avoid the problems facing fictional realism. In what follows I will sketch a view that I find plausible and that meets these desiderata.

I am going to argue that we should, in a certain sense, take a fictionalist view of fictional characters so I want to begin by briefly considering how we should understand the nature of fiction. I am going to assume that our engagement with fiction should be understood in terms of our engaging in some sort of imaginative act, pretense, or game of make-believe. More precisely, I will assume that our engagement with a fictional text involves our pretending that the world is as that fictional text portrays it. But I do not want to commit myself to the details of any more specific view beyond this for the moment nor do I want to commit myself to any particular account of the imagination, pretense, or make-believe. The reader should feel free to substitute whatever variant of my account she prefers and to adopt her favored account of imagination, pretense, and make-believe. Anyway, the basic idea here is that just as little Johnny might pretend that his bicycle is a horse, and just as little Sally might pretend

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20 This sort of view is defended by, amongst others, Greg Currie in his The Nature of Fiction (New York: Cambridge, 1990), and Walton in Mimesis as Make-Believe.

that she is a Native American telling the story of her tribe, so, when we read *Emma*, at least in the simplest case, we pretend that we are reading a factual narrative and we imagine that what we read really took place.\(^2\) Utterances of object-fictional sentences such as (4a) are to be understood as being made within the scope of these sorts of pretense. So in uttering (4a) we are not making an assertion about the real world. Rather we are pretending that the world is as it is portrayed in *Crime and Punishment* and we utter (4a) in order to describe it.

Next I want to note a phenomenon which suggests that our talk and thought about fictional characters, the sort of talk and thought that fictional realists take to be about real fictional objects, is a natural extension of this sort of imaginative engagement with fiction. For observe that critics are given to saying such things as:

(5) The most famous of Conan Doyle's creations is the great detective Sherlock Holmes who lives in Baker Street.

Now (5) simultaneously talks about Holmes both as if he were a human detective living in Baker Street and as if he were a fictional object created by Conan Doyle. In other words, (5) simultaneously talks about Holmes from the perspective of the reader who is caught up in the world of the Holmes stories and from the perspective of the critic who is engaged in literary criticism. In fact, a little reflection

\(^{22}\) Our more sophisticated responses to fiction might involve taking the narrator to be unreliable or pretending that the text is something other than a factual narrative. These responses, however, seem parasitic upon a more basic and more naive response to fiction in which we pretend that narrators are describing the real world and where we treat them as infallible authorities concerning what is true in the worlds they describe.
suggests that, in one way or another, a great deal of literary criticism involves this sort of thought or discourse. We enter inside the world of the text being discussed where fictional characters are flesh and blood people while simultaneously adopting a perspective from which we can recognize that the characters we are talking about are fictional objects and are modeled on, or used as the models for, other fictional objects in other texts. Our engagement in literary criticism naturally and seamlessly involves participation in the sorts of pretense or make-believe involved in reading and imaginatively engaging with a fictional text. Criticism is not a practice that is external to and separable from our ordinary imaginative engagement with fiction. Rather it presupposes and incorporates that engagement.

Because of this I think we should regard our talk of fictional characters as simply another sort of pretense which builds upon and extends those pretenses into which we enter in the course of our ordinary imaginative engagement with fictional texts. I will call the sorts of pretenses involved in our ordinary imaginative engagement with fictional texts \(P_1\) pretenses and I will call the sorts of pretenses involved in our thought and talk about fictional characters \(P_2\) pretenses. On this picture, then, a \(P_2\) pretense involves our engaging in a \(P_1\) pretense in which we pretend that the world is as it is portrayed in the relevant text and, in particular, that it contains various individuals who have the sorts of properties ascribed to them by that text. But, in addition to this, it will also involve us pretending that these individuals have the sorts of properties which fictional realists attribute to fictional characters. We should, in short, pretend that these individuals have a dual nature.\(^{25}\)

Thus, for example, a \(P_2\) pretense might involve our pretending that Holmes and Watson were human beings born of human parents who lived in Victorian England. But it would also involve our simultaneously pretending that Watson and Holmes are fictional characters which were created by Conan Doyle, are more or less realistic, were modeled in various ways upon various real people and fictional characters, were the inspiration for other fictional characters, and so on. When engaged in this \(P_2\) pretense we would pretend that Holmes and Watson had a dual nature. We would pretend they are as they are

\(^{25}\) This is, of course, something of an oversimplification. First, some fictional texts explicitly acknowledge the fictional status of their characters and so our ordinary engagement with these texts immediately involves us in a \(P_2\) pretense. Second, as a result of our engaging in a \(P_2\) pretense, we may gain new insights into the world of the relevant story and so come to alter the details of the underlying \(P_1\) pretense. For our purposes, however, we may put these complications aside.
described in the Conan Doyle stories. But we would also pretend that they have the sorts of characteristics the fictional realist attributes to fictional objects.  

We can make this picture more precise as follows. Now exactly what counts true within a given pretense will be determined by a set of basic foundational principles of generation. These will typically include certain foundational claims which are held true within the pretense. But they may also include various specific bridging principles, principles which tell us how what is true within our pretense depends upon what is really true, and there may be specific conditional principles which tell us that if certain things count as being true within our pretense then certain other things will also count as being true. Thus, for example, if we are pretending that we are bakers and that mud pies are cakes then our foundational principles will include the principle that we are to pretend that we are bakers and that mud pies are cakes. Our bridging principles will include the principle that if some participant in our pretense has \( n \) mud pies then they are to count as having \( n \) cakes. And our conditional principle might include the principle that if anyone counts as having more than fifteen cakes in our pretense then they count as being a millionaire. Finally, let us say that a pretense \( \beta \) extends a pretense \( \alpha \) just in case all the principles of generation for \( \alpha \) are principles of generation for \( \beta \).

I suggest we may extend any ordinary \( P_1 \) pretense to a \( P_2 \) pretense by adding some further principles of generation. Now I think that any \( P_2 \) pretense must include at least the following conditional principles in order to count as a \( P_2 \) pretense at all:

(P1*) If our pretense concerns a creature \( a \), and if \( a \) is not a real thing, then \( a \) is a fictional character.

(P2*) If our pretense concerns \( a \) and \( b \) and if \( a \) and \( b \) are not real things then \( a \) and \( b \) count as identical within our pretense iff the fictional character of \( a \) = the fictional character of \( b \).

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24 In pretending this, we would obviously be pretending something metaphysically and perhaps logically impossible but I argued earlier that we are able to pretend impossible things.

25 See Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, pp. 35–43 and pp. 138–91, for an extended discussion of principles of generation. In addition to the principles noted above, our pretense will almost certainly also be governed by some restricted version of the Incorporation Principle and the Recursive Principle discussed by Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (New York: Oxford, 1982), pp. 354–55. Note however that Evans’s Incorporation Principle and his Recursive Principle are in general unlikely to hold without restriction for the sorts of reasons discussed by Walton and due to the sorts of cases of disparity discussed by Szabo Gendler in her “On the Relationship between Pretense and Belief.”
Depending upon our interests and tastes we may then add various further principles to (P1*) and (P2*) governing when a character is to be counted as the creation of a given author, when a character is to count as realistic or unrealistic, when a character is to count as well developed, as well as when a character is to count as the expression of the author’s Id, when a character is to count as occupying a given place in a Levi-Straussian structure, when a character is to count as an embodiment of Foucauldian power relations, and so on.

Note that, given that the world of a story contains \( x \) just in case we pretend that \( x \) exists when we imaginatively engage with that story, then (P1*) and (P2*) are equivalent to (P1) and (P2). Consequently, given that we cannot talk and think about fictional objects without entering into a \( P_2 \) pretense, and given that any \( P_2 \) pretense is in part constituted by our adopting (P1*) and (P2*), we should expect (P1) and (P2) to have the near platitudinous status they do.

Of course, there is no reason why a \( P_2 \) pretense should only extend a single \( P_1 \) pretense. On the contrary, a single \( P_2 \) pretense might simultaneously extend a number of different \( P_1 \) pretenses associated with a number of different stories. In such a case we might imagine a super-world somehow containing all the different worlds of those different stories with the principles of generation for each story restricted to that world. This super-world would contain all the different creatures from those worlds. We would imagine these creatures to have the dual nature of fictional characters. And by engaging in such a pretense we could compare fictional characters from different stories, we could consider which characters occurred in more than one story, we could note which characters served as models for which others, and so on.

There is obviously much more to say here. But for the moment let us contrast the view articulated above with fictional realism. I argued earlier that the fictional realist seems committed to ontic indeterminacy and to fictional objects which flout the law of noncontradiction and the symmetry of identity. The pretense theorist, in contrast, is not subject to these problems. She does not claim that fictional objects really exist, they are not denizens of the real world. Rather, she claims, we simply pretend that there are such things when we engage in a \( P_2 \) pretense. And, unlike reality, what we pretend can be indeterminate, inconsistent, and even flout the laws of identity. We may easily engage in a \( P_2 \) pretense in which we pretend there are fictional characters while still leaving it open as to whether fictional character \( a \) exists or whether character \( a \) is the same as character \( b \). The resulting indeterminacies in the world of the pretense will not spill over into the real world. Likewise, we might balk at the suggestion that two objects \( a \)}
and \( b \) are simultaneously both identical and distinct or that \( a \) is identical to \( b \) but that \( b \) is distinct from \( a \). But, as I argued earlier, we can pretend these things. So pretense-theoretic accounts of fictional objects can avoid the difficulties with indeterminacy, inconsistency, and asymmetry of identity, which face fictional realism.

IV. THE ARGUMENT FOR FICTIONAL REALISM

At this point, we must turn to the argument for fictional realism noted earlier. Since that argument turned upon the alleged literal truth of utterances of certain FO\(S\), such as (1a)–(1e), we must deny that such utterances are literally true. And we must explain our mistaken intuitions to the contrary. Before doing this, however, I want to pause and raise a further doubt as to whether the fictional realist can really take FO\(S\) to be literally true. For consider the following:

(6) (a) Some nineteenth-century fictional characters dote on their mothers more than any eighteenth-century character does.

(b) Conan Doyle’s most famous character, Sherlock Holmes, saves the life of Queen Victoria.

Now, \textit{prima facie}, utterances of both (6a) and (6b) seem true. Indeed, they strike me as equally plausible candidates for literal truth as (1a)–(1e). Unfortunately, it is not immediately clear what the fictional realist should say here. For fictional objects do not literally and straightforwardly have mothers in the sense that you and I do. Nor are they the sorts of things that can literally save the Queen. It seems the fictional realist must allow that, despite our intuitions to the contrary, (6a) and (6b) are not literally true. But in this case, it is not clear why we should take (1a)–(1e) to be literally true either.

If the fictional realist is to avoid this conclusion, she must presumably maintain that there is, after all, a genuine sense in which fictional characters can have mothers and save the Queen. But, since a fictional object cannot bear the ordinary property of having-a-mother or saving-the-Queen in the ordinary way, the fictional realist must either distinguish two different but equally genuine senses in which an object may bear properties, or two different but equally genuine sorts of properties an object might bear. On the first option she will distinguish between the ordinary way in which objects may bear properties (call this \textit{exemplification}) and a special way in which fictional objects may bear the properties ascribed to them in stories (call this \textit{encoding}). Sherlock Holmes will not \textit{exemplify} the property of having-saved-the-Queen but he may nevertheless \textit{encode} that property. Likewise, while fictional characters will not \textit{exemplify} the property of having-a-mother, they will nevertheless \textit{encode} that
property. On the second option the fictional realist might distinguish between the ordinary extra-nuclear properties of having-a-mother and saving-the-Queen and special nuclear correlates of those properties which an object may bear in virtue of being ascribed those ordinary properties in a story. Sherlock Holmes will not bear the extra-nuclear property of having-saved-the-Queen but he might nevertheless bear the nuclear correlate of that property. And, while fictional characters will not bear the extra-nuclear property of having a mother, they will nevertheless bear its nuclear correlate.

Now I do not want to consider this approach in detail but I want to point out that it faces a number of serious problems. It depends upon our making an obscure and unexplicated distinction between two sorts of predication or two sorts of property where intuitively there seem no such distinctions. It postulates a potential ambiguity in FOXs where intuitively there seems to be no such ambiguity. And consider the following piece of discourse:

(7) Both Oedipus and Freud were devoted to their mothers. But while Freud was a real person, Oedipus is only a fictional character.

I think it is natural to regard (7) as true but the first sentence in (7) seems to predicate exactly the same property in exactly the same way of both Oedipus and Freud. This means that in order for (7) to be true, it must be possible for fictional characters and real people to bear the same properties in the same way. In particular, it must be possible for a fictional character to have a mother in exactly the same way that a real person has a mother. And this is a problem for the approach we are considering. For, on that approach, Oedipus merely encodes or he merely exemplifies the nuclear correlate of the properties

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26 See Zalta, Abstract Objects and Intensional Logic and the Metaphysics of Intensionality. Van Inwagen, “Existence and Ontological Commitment,” pp. 145–49, distinguishes between the properties a fictional object has and those it holds while van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction,” distinguishes between the properties a fictional object has and those ascribed to it (van Inwagen treats the latter relation as an unexplicated primitive). In both cases he takes the apparatus of predication to ambiguous between the two relations.

27 For the distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties, see Parsons, Nonexistent Objects. Parsons himself takes ordinary properties such as being-green and being-human to be nuclear properties while he takes logical properties such as existence and being-possible to be extra-nuclear properties. For Parsons fictional objects bear the nuclear properties ascribed to them in the texts where they occur and nuclear correlates of the extra-nuclear properties ascribed to them in those texts. Since I do not think we can make sense of a fictional object genuinely having a mother in the sense that real people have mothers, I would argue that Parsons must take the property of having-a-mother to be an extra-nuclear, rather than a nuclear, property and take fictional texts to ascribe its nuclear-correlate rather than the extra-nuclear property itself.
he is ascribed in the Sophocles’s plays. But Freud exemplifies the extra-nuclear property of having a mother. The coherence of (7) suggests that, in the end, the distinction between encoding and exemplification and the distinction between nuclear and extra-nuclear properties are not tenable. We predicate the same properties of fictional characters that we do of real objects and we predicate these properties in the same way. This appears to leave the fictional realist with no alterative but to admit that, despite our intuitions to the contrary, (6a) and (6b) are not literally true. And this, in turn, must call into question our intuitions that (1a)–(1e) are literally true.

But why do we think that (1a)–(1e) are literally true if they are not? I think the answer has two components. First, although all talk and thought of fictional characters takes place within a $P_2$ pretense, we nevertheless use utterances of FOSs such as (1a)–(1e) to convey information about the real world. More precisely, a $P_2$ pretense and the $P_1$ pretenses it extends will be governed by a complex system of principles of generation, some of which will be bridging principles which tell us that certain things count as true within our $P_2$ pretense just in case certain other things are really true. Now, if a bridging principle tells us that $\chi$ is true in our pretense just in case $\psi$ is really true then the assertion that $\chi$, made within the scope of our pretense, may be used to convey the information that $\psi$ is the case. Taking our mud-pie game as an example, I might exclaim “Little Johnny is eating his cake” in order to tell you that Little Johnny is eating a mud pie. I speak within the pretense in order to convey information about the real world.

In the same way, I think, our talk of fictional characters is used to convey information about the real world. I suspect that, at least in very many cases, we intend to convey various sorts of information about how the author of a story, or those reading that story, imagine the world portrayed by that story. For example, to a very rough approximation, if I say that fictional character $\alpha$ in fiction $f$ was the model for fictional character $\beta$ in fiction $g$, I am saying that during the creative process the author of $g$ imagined $\beta$ to be a certain way (and then described $\beta$ accordingly) as a result of her imagining $\alpha$ to be a certain way when she read $f$. If I say that the character of $\gamma$ in fiction $h$ is an appalling instance of Orientalism, I am saying that during the creative process the author of $h$ imagined $\gamma$ in a way which reflected the worst sorts of Western stereotypes about the East. And so on. We engage in talk of the fictional characters in $f$ in order to convey information about how we or others imagine the denizens of $f$ to be and why we imagine them to be the way we do. This is real information about the real world. And utterances of a FOS made
within the scope of a $P_2$ pretense will count as true within that pretense just in case they convey truths about the real world.

Now, of course, nothing I have said as yet explains why it is that we take utterances of FOSs to be literally true. After all, we might recognize that my utterance during the mud-pie game of “Little Johnny is eating his cake” is both true in our pretense and conveys a truth about the real world. Still, we feel no temptation to regard my claim as literally true.

I think there are two pertinent differences between our talk of fictional characters and my warnings about Little Johnny. First, and less important, the primary purpose of our talk of fictional characters is the serious business of conveying information about the real world. This is not the primary purpose of our talk within the mud-pie game. Rather such talk functions primarily as part of the mud-pie game itself and conveys information about what is true in that game to those participating in the game. And, although mudpie-game talk can be co-opted for serious purposes, it is hard to ignore the contrast between those infrequent cases in which we use such talk seriously and our normal employment of it. Noticing this contrast brings home to us that what I am literally saying when I claim that Little Johnny is eating his cake is rather different from the information about the real world that I convey. Hence we can recognize that what I say is not literally true.

The second difference, which is much more important and much more interesting, is this. We judge that my utterance of “Little Johnny is eating his cake” is not literally true because we can distinguish between the claim this utterance makes within the scope of our mudpie pretense and the information I am using it to convey about the real world. Within the scope of our pretense it makes a claim about cake eating. Outside of that pretense it conveys information about eating mud pies.

Crucially, we do not seem to get an analogous phenomenon in the case of $P_2$ pretenses. For the information we seek to convey when we utter FOSs is primarily information about how the author or readers of a text imagine the world portrayed by that text to be and why they imagine it that way. And there seems no way available for me to describe the content of such imaginings except by adopting the perspective of those engaged in them. I must describe the content of these imaginings from the inside, as it were, talking and thinking as if the objects imagined were real things. There might be creatures who were able to communicate the content of their imaginings externally, simply by describing the neural and physical states underpinning their acts of imagination. But we are not them. If I imagine a tree then
the only way I can talk about certain aspects of my imagining—the color, size, and shape that I imagine the tree to have, for example—requires me to describe these features from within the perspective of my imaginative act. I must describe the tree I imagine as if it were before me, in the same way I would describe a real tree.

This is equally true when we try to talk about the imaginative acts of those who write fiction. Suppose we want to describe how Virginia Woolf was influenced by Vita Sackville-West when Woolf wrote her novel *Orlando*. This will require our describing how Woolf’s imaginative processes were influenced by the way she perceived Sackville-West. More precisely, we will have to describe how Woolf imagined that the world she described in *Orlando* was real, that Orlando was a real person, and that Orlando had certain of the characteristics Woolf perceived in Sackville-West. Now in order to describe all this we must enter into the world of Woolf’s story ourselves, as Woolf herself did when writing it, imagining it to be real. We must talk and think as if Orlando exists and shares certain characteristics with Sackville-West. We must, in short, engage in a $P_1$ pretense. If we do not do this, if we resolutely stand outside the world of Woolf’s story and refuse to imagine Orlando, then it seems impossible to talk about the ways in which Orlando resembles Sackville-West. And it will be impossible to isolate the ways in which Sackville-West influenced Woolf’s imaginative processes.

Of course, in order to describe Woolf’s imaginative processes when writing Orlando, it is not enough merely to engage in a $P_1$ pretense and imagine that the world of *Orlando* is real. We must also recognize that Woolf determined which features Orlando has, what happens to Orlando, and so on. And we must recognize that Orlando may be viewed in various ways by different readers. We must, in other words, recognize that the objects we are imagining are the creations of authors and the objects of interpretation for readers. And this involves our extending our initial $P_1$ pretense to a $P_2$ pretense.

What I am suggesting, then, is that when we try to describe the information about the real world conveyed by utterances of *FOSs*, we find we cannot describe it except in so far as we enter into a $P_2$ pretense and talk and think as if there really were fictional characters. We cannot step outside of our $P_2$ pretenses in order to describe this information from an external standpoint. This does not prevent the information we convey from being about the real world. Our acts of imagining are real things with real properties. It is just that the only way to describe many of the most interesting features of these acts requires our participating in the very sorts of imaginative process we seek to describe. Because of this, I think, there is a crucial difference
between our talk within the mud-pie game and our talk of fictional characters. In the former case, we are able to clearly distinguish between the claim I made about Little Johnny within the scope of the pretense and the information about the real world conveyed by my utterance for we are able to characterize this information from a perspective external to our pretense. In the case of our talk about fictional characters, this is simply not the case. It is primarily because of this, I claim, that we mistake utterances of POSs such as (1a)–(1e) for literal truths.

I want to conclude by briefly considering how the arguments I have presented against fictional realism are related to the objections leveled by Russell against Meinong’s Theory of Objects. Now it is not always easy to follow the course of the Russell-Meinong debate and I do not intend to enter into the niceties of Russell exegesis here. But I think the objections presented above are in the general spirit of Russell’s objections though they differ from them in detail and are more general, applying not merely to Meinongian objects but to fictional objects in general.

Russell is concerned to argue that Meinong’s objects lead to various violations of the law of noncontradiction and he presents at least two arguments to this effect. The first of these is that, since Meinong is committed to there being a nonexistent object which satisfies the description “the existing King of France,” and since presumably the existing King of France exists, Meinong is committed both to the existent king of France existing and to the existent king of France not existing. The second objection is that Meinong is committed to the existence of contradictory objects, such as round squares, for he is committed to there being an object which satisfies the description “the existing round square” and this object must be existent and round and square. It has become customary for Meinongians to try and avoid Russell’s objections by distinguishing between two sorts of properties or two forms of predication. Thus, as we have seen, some distinguish between the normal form of predication (exemplification) and a special form of predication (encoding). These theorists hold that while the existent King of France and the existent round

square encode the property of existing they do not genuinely exist because they fail to exemplify it. 30 Others, as we have seen, distinguish between so-called nuclear and extra-nuclear properties. And these theorists hold that while the existent King of France and the existent round square have the nuclear property of existing they do not genuinely exist because they lack the extra-nuclear property of existing. 31 Now I do not intend to evaluate these responses to Russell here though I have already expressed some doubts as to the tenability of the exemplification/encoding distinction and the nuclear/extra-nuclear distinction. Rather I simply want to point out that the objections I have raised to fictional realism cannot straightforwardly be blocked by invoking these sorts of distinctions. If my objections are correct, then, the present-day followers of Meinong, as well as other fictional realists, are in worse shape than commonly supposed.

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30 This, basically, is the strategy of Zalta in his *Intensional Logic and the Metaphysics of Intensionality*.

31 This, basically, is the strategy of Parsons in his *Nonexistent Objects*.