VERGIL AND DIDO

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"Vergil and Dido"

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ABSTRACT

According to many realist philosophers of fiction, one needs to posit an ontology of existing fictional characters in order to give a correct account of discourse *about* fiction. The realists' claim is opposed by pretense theorists for whom discourse *about* fiction involves, as discourse *in* fiction, pretense. On that basis, pretense theorists claim that one does not need to embrace an ontology of fictional characters to give an account of discourse *about* fiction. The ontological dispute between realists and pretense theorists is mainly a dispute in the realm of the philosophy of language concerning the status relative to pretense of discourse *about* fiction. Realists are persuaded that there is a sharp line between discourse *in* fiction and discourse *about* fiction while pretense theorists deny there exists such a line. I suggest that realists may have a wrong picture of discourse *in* fiction since, in many cases, discourse in fiction already contains many occurrences of discourse *about* fiction. Consequently, discourse *about* fiction, instead of ending fiction, should be regarded, following pretense theorists, as adding extra layers of fiction.

1. The language dependent realist's motivation

Realists about fictional characters claim that there are fictional characters, that objects like Sherlock Holmes and Anna Karenina do literally exist and that the names "Sherlock Holmes" and "Anna Karenina", at least in some of their uses, do literally refer to these objects.

Some among realists take fictional characters to be created by our linguistic practices.[1] Let's call this kind of realism "language dependent realism". In what follows I consider the motivation behind such realism concerning fictional characters. In particular, I do not consider the motivations of realists from a Platonist or Meinongian tradition who treat fictional characters as objects that exist independently of all linguistic practices.[2]

What does motivate language dependent realism about fictional characters? Essentially the view that certain sentences spoken or written about works

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[1] See, e.g, Searle 1979, Kripke 1973, van Inwagen 1977, Crittenden 1991 and Thomasson 1999.

[2] See, e.g., Parsons 1980, Zalta 1983.

of fiction are uttered literally and truthfully. These sentences generally involve either names of fictional characters in subject position or existential quantifiers and often contain "literary" predicates like "is a character", "is fictional", "appears in", "is partly modeled on". Examples of such sentences are:

(1) "Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character"

(2) "The character of Falstaff has a long history in comic drama" (Evans 1982, 367)

(3) "There is a fictional character who, for every novel, either appears in that novel or is a model for a character who does" (van Inwagen 2000, 243)

Language dependent realists do not see any compelling reasons for supposing that such sentences about fiction are not uttered literally and truthfully. Consider the following:

> "Mr Slope is the villain of *Barchester Towers*', 'Mr Slope was one of Trollope's most felicitous creation', 'Mr Slope was modelled on a well-known bishop's chaplain', 'Mr Slope is emulated by a host of college chaplains'. Propositions of this sort can truthfully be made; they are not lines from *Barchester Towers*, and they cannot be truthfully prefixed by 'In the novel…'. (Barnes 1972, 50)

> Such remarks cannot be prefixed by 'in the story', and their truth conditions are not the contents of the story but empirical reality. (Crittenden 1991, 95)

> "It is critical theories that tell us that there are fictional objects, because it is critical theories alone that contain sentences like these:
> 'There are characters in some nineteenth-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any eighteenth-century novel.'
> 'Some characters in novels are closely modeled on actual people, while others are wholly products of the literary imagination, and it is usually impossible to tell which characters fall into which of these categories by textual analysis alone.'
> 'Since nineteenth-century English novelists were, for the most part, conventional Englishmen, we might expect most novels of the period to contain stereotyped comic Frenchmen or Italians; but very few such characters exist.'
> Such sentences can be vehicles of objective truth as surely as can the most humdrum sentences about rocks and chemicals and numbers. (van Inwagen 1977, 73)

2. The pretense theorists' reply.

Pretense theorists[3] defend anti-objectualist views concerning fictional characters and reject the language dependent realists' claim that one must embrace an ontology of fictional characters to give an account of statements concerning fiction. For pretense theorists, names of fictional characters are empty names and sentences containing empty names like (1) and (2) or what appears to be quantifications over a domain of fictional characters like (3), *taken literally*, do not express any proposition:

[3] See, e.g., Evans 1982, 363-368, Walton 1990, 385-430, Recanati 2000, 214-226.

> If there is no Gulliver and there are no Lilliputians, there are no propositions about them. So there would seem to be no such thing as the proposition that Gulliver was captured by the Lilliputians. (Walton 1990, 391)

Still pretense theorists claim that a speaker may, in the context of statements concerning fiction and of other "unofficial" games of make-believe[4], pretend that sentences like (1)–(3) express a proposition and may pretend to be asserting a proposition by means of these sentences. Most important: pretense theorists claim that they can give an account of our intuitions concerning the truth-evaluability of sentences (1)-(3), intuitions which motivate the realists to adopt an ontology of fictional characters. Walton, one of the leading pretense theorists, presents the task of pretense theorists in the following way:

> Our task is to explain what is being asserted in these cases. (The question is not what the sentences themselves mean or what propositions *they* express. My position is that the sentences have no meanings beyond their ordinary literal ones, and I prefer to regard those appearing to denote purely fictional entities as not expressing propositions at all.) (Walton 1990, 396)[5]

In discourse about fiction, at least as it is understood by pretense theorists, the speaker while pretending to make an assertion with (1)–(3) really asserts something about the particular role of these sentences in make-believe. The speaker in pretending to assert (1)–(3) indicates or exemplifies each time a particular kind of pretense and comments on it. If pretense theorists are right, the task of accounting for the real truth asserted with (1)–(3) does not require to concede to realists that the speaker of (1)–(3) would be referring to fictional characters: it is sufficient to admit that the speaker refers each time to particular kinds of pretense in which his audience and himself are engaged.

For instance, in (1), while pretending to refer by means of the name "Sherlock Holmes", the speaker really shows or indicates a kind of pretending to refer. Then, adding the predicate "is a fictional character", the speaker comments on this kind of pretending to refer making it clear that it is only fictional that he is referring to something with the name "Sherlock Holmes".[6] The speaker of (1) may also, as the speaker uttering (2), be regarded as participating in an "unofficial" game of make-believe, a game in which there are two kinds of people: "real" people and "fictional characters". On this different construal of (1), the speaker would be fictionally speaking the truth by fictionally referring to something with the name "Sherlock Holmes" and pretending that the words "is a fictional character" express a property. In making fictional of himself that he speaks the truth in this unofficial game, the speaker of (1) would be indicating that he is only pretending, in the official game authorised by the work, to refer by means of the proper name "Sherlock Holmes". In a

[4] On "unofficial" games of make-believe, see Walton 1990, 406.
[5] See also Walton 1990, 417.
[6] Cf. Walton 1990, 422.

different way, the speaker of (2) participates in the same unofficial game of make-believe pretending that fictional characters have, like real people, a history of their own. The main difference between (1) and (2) lies in that fact that the speaker of (2) deliberately betrays the unofficial game of make-believe by using the phrase "the character Falstaff" instead of the more neutral "Falstaff". As for the speaker of (3), Walton described him either as being engaged in or as speaking of various unofficial games of make-believe, like the game in which to say that a character appears in a certain novel is, fictionally, to locate a person in a certain realm. In both cases, the speaker of (3) would be, according to Walton, referring to a kind of pretense.[7]

3. Realists and pretense theorists on discourse about fiction

Among language dependent realists, many admit along with pretense theorists that discourse in fiction – by discourse *in* fiction, I mean the sentences that are contained and uttered in works of fiction – involves a kind of pretense. When an author uses sentences containing fictional names in writing the stories, many realists claim that she is engaged in a kind of pretense or that she intends that her readers engage in a kind of pretense:

> (…) [W]hen Dickens wrote, "Mrs. Bardell had fainted in Mr. Pickwick's arms," he was not saying anything about someone called "Mrs. Bardell" or about someone called "Mr. Pickwick". He was not saying anything about them because he was not saying anything about anything. What he was doing was crafting a linguistic object that his readers could, in a certain sense, *pretend* was a record of the doings of – among others – people called "Mrs. Bardell" and "Mr. Pickwick". (van Inwagen, 1977, 73)[8]

The main difference between realists about fictional characters and antirealists convinced by the virtue of pretense theory lies in the different ways they analyze discourse *about* fiction. Thomasson, who is a language dependent realist about fictional characters, claims that pretense theorists fail to take serious discourse about fictional characters as it is exemplified in (1)–(3) seriously.

> It certainly seems (…) that we sometimes step *outside* the pretense when we stop pretending that there are really such people and animals and instead talk of them straightforwardly as fictional characters that appear in stories, are created by authors, thought about by readers, and so on. (Thomasson 1999, 97)

Realists insist that in discussing fiction, we are literally talking about a certain part of the real world, the part which contains fictional objects and characters. Discourse *about* fiction is, for the realists, discourse about reality, a reality which includes more than flesh-and-blood people. Still Thomasson admits in

[7] On (3), cf. Walton 1990, 416–419.
[8] See also Kripke 1973.

the same paragraph that Walton is to be credited with revealing the central role of pretense in much of our experience of and discourse *about* fiction. Thomasson labels "fictional contexts" those contexts of discourse *about* fiction where pretense is involved and she concedes that, in "fictional contexts", people often pretend that what the story says is true.[9] Another realist about fictional characters, van Inwagen, relying on the distinction between story and history, explains the occurrence of pretense in discourse *about* fiction in the following way:

> If authors in laying their stories before the public are, in a certain sense, pretending to have produced histories, then it is not surprising that critics should at least sometimes pretend, in that sense, to be discussing histories. (van Inwagen 1983, 76)

If critics, introducing some pretense in their way of talking, imitate authors (what they themselves are not), this is nothing more than a sign of their respect for the conventions of literature which is the object of their study. The occurrence of pretense in their discourse about fiction does not manifest anything else than their true respect for the conventions at work.

In a different way, for Thomasson, the pretense involved in discourse *about* fiction has only a stylistic function: it is a way for critics not to mention such phrases as "according to the story". There is here a source of disagreement between realists like Thomasson and pretense theorists. Thomasson, after having conceded to the pretense theorists that serious discourse about what goes on in the story often involves pretense, claims, this time *contra* pretense theorists,[10] that serious discourse about what is true in the story can be adequately represented as involving a story operator. The statements made in "fictional contexts" should always be understood, according to Thomasson, as implicitly prefixed by a story operator. For instance, when a critic says:

"Hamlet is a prince"

pretending that what the story says is true, the appropriate reading of her statement is:

"According to the (relevant) play, Hamlet is a prince".

When uttered in a "fictional context", the sentence "Hamlet is a prince" should be read, according to Thomasson and *contra* pretense theorists, as genuinely describing a state of affairs which, according to the relevant play, does obtain and regards the existing fictional character Hamlet.[11]

Leaving aside the way Thomasson construes sentences about fiction uttered in "fictional contexts", it remains true that Thomasson and other realists agree that pretense is involved in "fictional contexts" of discourse *about* fiction. The

[9] Cf. Thomasson 1999, 97, 105.
[10] See, e.g. Evans 1982, 364–365.
[11] Cf. Thomasson 1999, 105–107.

main source of disagreement between both camps concerns the next step, when Thomasson adds that serious discourse *about* fiction does not always remain at the level of "fictional contexts". Discourse *about* fiction often occurs, according to Thomasson, at the level of "real contexts",[12] "external claims about fictional objects",[13] "real predications about fictional objects".[14] In "real contexts" of discourse *about* fiction, one does not speak:

> (…) from the internal perspective of what goes on in the story but from the external critic's perspective, speaking of these [creatures represented in the story] straightforwardly as fictional characters, created by authors in particular circumstances, providing paradigms of the 19th century Romantic heroine, and so on. (Thomasson 1999, 106)

The pretense theorists' main mistake is, for Thomasson, not to separate sharply "fictional" and "real" contexts of discourse *about* fiction. On the basis of that non-distinction, pretense theorist wrongly do not feel the need to postulate existing fictional characters and run into major difficulties and useless complexities when dealing with "real contexts" of discourse *about* fiction as exemplified in (1)–(3):

> Once we separate the two contexts in which claims about literature may occur and allow that there are fictional characters to which we may refer, (…) the resolution to the various difficulties surrounding fictional discourse is breathtakingly simple. (Thomasson 1999, 106)

Here lies what is at stake between, on one side, many language dependent realists like Thomasson and van Inwagen and, on the other side, pretense theorists like Walton. For Walton, there is no way to follow the language dependent realists and to separate sharply what Thomasson calls "fictional contexts" and "real contexts" of discourse *about* fiction. For Walton, *both* contexts of discourse *about* fiction rely on pretense and must be read as referring to kinds of pretense.

Walton does not use Thomasson's recent distinction between "fictional contexts" and "real contexts" of discourse *about* fiction. But at least part of what Thomasson says about "fictional contexts" of discourse *about* fiction corresponds to what Walton describes as contexts where the speaker is involved in the activity of "appreciation" while discussing fiction. In the activity of appreciation, Walton describes the speaker discussing fiction as "caught up" in the spirit of the work he talks about, as "participating" in a game in which the work he talks about is a prop.[15] In the same way, at least part of what

[12] Cf. Thomasson 1999, 106.
[13] Cf. Thomasson 1999, 99.
[14] Ibid.
[15] As I have said above, pretense theorists are certainly not ready to follow Thomasson and to read the statements the speaker makes while discussing fiction in "fictional contexts" as prefixed with a story operator. I thank Alberto Voltolini for having reminded me of the limit of the analogy I draw between Thomasson's "fictional contexts" and Walton's contexts of "appreciation".

Thomasson says about "real contexts" of discourse *about* fiction corresponds to what Walton describes as contexts where the speaker is involved in the activity of "detached criticism" while discussing fiction. A speaker discussing fiction in an activity of sober criticism or "cold academic analysis" is described by Walton as considering the work she talks about and the games to be played with it "from an onlooker's point of view", "from a perspective outside of it".[16] But Walton adds that it is not possible, *contra* Thomasson's suggestion, to treat separately the remarks people make in the course of engaging in the activities of "appreciation" and "detached criticism":

> Appreciation and criticism, participation and observation, are not very separate. One can hardly do either without doing the other, and nearly simultaneously. (…) Appreciation and criticism are intimately intertwined. (Walton 1990, 394)[17]

Even the coldest and most detached discourse *about* fiction is, for Walton, a way of continuing the pretense initiated by the author :

> In pretending to refer by means of a name such as "Falstaff" or "Santa Claus" or "Oedipus", speakers play along with, connive with, the pretense of the relevant fiction or myth. To attach the predicate, "does not exist," or "is a fictional character," or "is a mythical beast," is to continue the pretense further, pretending to attribute a property to the thing supposedly referred to, even while one actually declares the reference unsuccessful. (Walton 2000, 83)

Do then pretense theorists feel obliged to group discourse *in* fiction and discourse *about* fiction in the same category? If this were the case, this would certainly be a damaging consequence of the pretense theory since it seems obvious that what authors of fiction say when they write fictional sentences cannot be equated with what critics say when they talk about fiction: whereas critics literally assert genuine truths about fiction, authors of fiction just make pretend assertions. Evans has traced the distinction between both kinds of discourse in Gricean terms. The difference between discourse *in* fiction and discourse *about* fiction is, for a pretense theorist like Evans, a matter of the presuppositions about the intent of the speech act.[18] If one admits, with Walton, that to say (1)–(3) is to speak truly in the context of a certain unofficial game of make-believe, then the difference between uttering (1)–(3) and sentences uttered *in* fiction is that, in uttering (1)–(3), the speaker manifests her intention that her utterance should be up for as really correct or incorrect according to whether or not the statement she makes is correct or incorrect in an unofficial game of make-believe. By contrast, when Doyle, writing the stories, says that Sherlock Holmes lives 221 B Baker Street, he has no such communicative intentions. For a pretense theorist, although pretense is operative in both

[16] Cf. Walton 1990, 392-393.
[17] See also Evans 1982, 340, 353-63.
[18] Cf. Evans 1982, 359.

kinds of discourse, only discourse *about* fiction involves serious evaluative intentions, the intentions to be evaluated as genuinely true or false. This is the reason why to admit with pretense theorists that discourse *about* fiction involves, as discourse *in* fiction, pretense does not entail that one should group statements *about* fiction with statements *in* fiction in the same category.

If what has just been said is right, it appears that the dispute between language dependent realists and pretense theorists is at root a dispute within the framework of the philosophy of language on the status of discourse *about* fiction and only derivatively an ontological dispute. The only thing that radically distinguishes language dependent realists and pretense theorists is that the former claim that absolutely no pretense is involved in discourse *about* fiction in "real contexts" whereas the latter claim that even this kind of discourse relies on pretense. More precisely, when one speaks, as in (1)–(3), of creatures represented in stories straightforwardly as fictional characters or as created by authors in such and such circumstances, language dependent realists claim that no pretense is involved, that one literally steps outside the pretense.[19] How to decide this issue?

4. The reflexivity of fictional narratives

I suggest that we leave the theoretical discussion and have a look at fictional narratives themselves, the realm of discourse in fiction. Consider the following:[20]

> *Leaving* it [the coach] to pursue its journey at the pleasure of the conductor aforementioned […] *this narrative may embrace the opportunity of ascertaining* the condition of Sir Mulberry Hawk, and to what extent he had, by this time, recovered from the injuries consequent on being flung violently from his cabriolet, under the circumstances already detailed. (Dickens, 1982, ch. 38, inside the chapter)

> He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! We have no choice left but confess – he was a woman.
> The sound of the trumpets died away and Orlando stood stark naked. No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. […] Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing signs of discomposure, *and went, presumably, to his bath. We may take advantage of this pause in the narrative to make certain statements.* Orlando has become a woman – there is no denying it. (Woolf 1989 137-8)
> Mrs. Tow-wouse […] began to compose herself, and at length recovered the usual serenity of her temper, in which *we will leave her, to open the reader* the steps which led to a catastrophe, common enough […] yet often fatal to the repose and well-being of families, and the subject of many tragedies, both in life and on stage [i.e. adultery]. (Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* I, xvii)

[19] Cf. Thomasson 1999, 97

[20] For the literary extracts mentioned below, I am indebted to Monica Fludernik's talk given at the Metalepsis conference in Paris in December 2002.

> As we have now brought Sophia into safe hands, the reader will, I apprehend, be contented to *deposit her awhile, and to look a little after other personages,* and particularly poor Jones, whom we have left long enough to do penance for his past offences, which, as is the nature of vice, brought sufficient punishment upon him themselves. (Fielding, *Tom Jones,* Book XI, end)

Fictional narratives, the realm of discourse *in* fiction, contain themselves, as these examples amply illustrate, many instances of discourse *about* fiction. In the first three extracts of Dickens, Woolf and Fielding, the narrator engages in commenting on the events occurring in the fiction. In the last extract of *Tom Jones,* the narrator talks to the reader about the fictional universe and its personages *as* personages: the narrator invites the reader to deposit one personage and to focus on another one. These are four instances of fictional narratives where discourse *about* fiction is entirely intertwined with discourse *in* fiction. Contrary to the traditional language dependent realist's wisdom,[21] critical literary theories are not the only ones to tell us that there are fictional objects: stories themselves do tell us, at least within the scope of a pretense, such things.

In these extracts, these bits of discourse *about* fiction – be they comments on the narrated events or invitations for the narratee to leave such personage and to look at another one – do not end or even interrupt the development of discourse *in* fiction. These intrusions of discourse *about* fiction within discourse *in* fiction accompany the narrative in a smooth way and even, in many cases, facilitate it. One may wonder whether these intrusions of discourse *about* fiction inside fictional narratives are not the modern follow-ups of the ancient formula like "Now leve we" or "Now turne we" one finds in mediaeval narratives. Before the invention of chapters, mediaeval narratives used standard formula like "Now leve we" or "Now turne we" to guide the reader from one scene to another:

> *Now leve we* sir Launcelot in joyus Ile wyth hys lady, dame Elayne and sir Percivayle and sir Ector playyinge wyth them, and *now turne we* unto sur Bors de Ganys and unto sur Lyonell that had sought sir Lancelot long, nye by the space of two yere, and never coude they hyre of hym. (Malory 1971, 504)

Finally one could put forward the hypothesis that these quasi-intrusions of the narrator or of the narratee into the narrated world are not a marginal feature of fictional narratives but constitute a central property of narratives. Without going as far, one should admit at least that fictional narratives have the reflexive capacity of representing themselves as fictional – the capacity of speaking of creatures they represent as fictional characters or as created by authors – without stepping outside the pretense or breaking the rules of fiction. This conclusion goes against the language dependent realists' claim that in such con-

[21] See, e.g., van Inwagen 1983, 73.

texts of discourse one would always need to step outside the pretense. In the extracts mentioned, the narrator or the narratee is supposed to step into the narrated world sometimes to comment on it, sometimes to focus on such and such personage or scene. This, I believe, goes against the realist's idea of a strict separation between discourse *in* fiction and discourse *about* fiction.

Realists often insist on the important distinction between the internal and the external perspectives available in our talk about fictional objects. The internal perspective on fictional narratives is that of imaginative immersion in the fictional world while the external perspective is an awareness of the artifice of the narrated world. Realists claim that from the internal perspective, characters are imagined to be actual persons possessing human qualities while from the external perspective of the real world they are conceived as bearers of literary properties such as being created by Doyle, first appearing on page 35,… But their mistake may be to believe that these perspectives cannot be hold simultaneously, contrary to what the literary extracts mentioned above suggest.

Fictional narratives require from the reader that he adopt *both* a point of view from within the world of the story, an internal point of view and an external point of view, the perspective of the author (or of the narrator) of the story. There is no such thing as a total or complete imaginative involvement of the reader into the narrated world. Reading the literary extracts mentioned above in which the narrator or the narratee literally enters into the narrated world do not create any unease in the reader's mind or any feeling of transgression. It does not seem that the narrator or the narratee violates an ontological boundary while intervening in the fiction to comment on it. In fictional narratives, metafictional passages are often embedded in fictional passages – or the other way round – without in any way disrupting the fictional involvement of the reader. It is as if the reader was already, maybe in a tacit way, attentive to the literary properties of the work, already considering the history as a story made of a narrator and personages, when the narrator fictionally addresses him. Let's quote Walton:

> We, as it were, see Tom Sawyer *both* from inside his world and from outside of it. And we do so simultaneously. (…) The dual standpoint which appreciators take is (…) one of the most fundamental and important features of the human institution of fiction. (Walton 1978, 21)

The nature of our imaginative engagement in fiction with its dual aspect is something that language dependent realists do not really take into account: already at the first level of discourse in fiction, the reader immersed *in* the fiction still knows that what he or she reads is not history but a fictional story. The fictive stance is a dual awareness: the awareness of the world of the story

with its flesh-and-blood creatures living their lives by themselves, and the awareness of the literary work as such, including the linguistic origin of its characters. This dual awareness explains why the reader may be aware that in a fictional narrative the same subject may be a strong person and a weak character, a very exceptional person and, at the same time, a conventional character. These are not contradictory judgments but different aspects of a twofold subject.

5. "Metalepsis" in critical discourse: a problem for language dependent realists

Recently, Genette has labeled "metalepsis" the intrusions of the narrator or narratee into the narrated world exemplified in the literary extracts mentioned above.[22] Metalepsis is defined as:

> […] any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse (as in Cortazar)[…] (Genette 1980, 234-235)[23]

A very similar intrusion, a metafictional "metalepsis", is at work when, say, a literary critic writes:

(4) "Vergil has Dido die at Book IV of *The Aeneid.*"

Here, the critic has a serious intent and there is a sense in which an utterance of (4) would be true. This is the main difference with the metafictional "metalepsis" mentioned in the literary extracts of Dickens, Woolf and Fielding which, at least for some of them, are not used in a non fictional intent. Still the critic uses the "metaleptic" fiction of the intrusion of Vergil into the fictional world of Dido to say what she could have said in a non "metaleptic" way like in:

(4') "Vergil organised *The Aeneid* in such a way that his character Dido left the narrative at Book IV."

A critic has at his disposal many different ways and manners to discuss fiction. One such manner is the theoretical one exemplified in (1)–(3) and in (4') and, at the other extreme of a continuum, the same critic might have chosen to say (4) instead of (4').[24] In the light of this, it seems that the pretense theo-

[22] Note that I disagree with Genette 1980, 234–235 when he describes these intrusions as transgressions. According to me, these intrusions manifest, at the level of discourse *in* fiction, the dual awareness characteristic of the fictional stance.

[23] The diegesis of a narrative is its entire created world, the time-space continuum described by the story which is told. Any narrative includes a diegesis. But Genette distinguishes among diegetic narratives (the primary story told); metadiegetic narratives (stories told by a character inside a diegetic narrative); and extradiegetic narratives (stories that frame the primary story told). Cf. Genette 1980.

[24] Walton gives an example of a statement concerning fiction very close to (4): "Oscar Wilde killed off Dorian Gray by putting a knife through his heart." (Walton 1990, 409) In Walton's example, the intrusion of the author in the narrated world is even more explicit than in (4).

rist has an advantage over the language dependent realist: whereas the pretense theorist is in a position to give an account of the truth expressed by both (4) and (4'), the realist theorist who is in a position, *via* the postulation of an ontology of fictional characters, to explain the truth of (4'), might have difficulties to explain (4).

For a pretense theorist, (4) and (4') taken literally do not express any proposition since "Dido", in both sentences, has no reference. Once (4) or (4') are understood as relying on the interplay of various unofficial games of make-believe – the critic pretends to assert a proposition, she pretends that Vergil has literally killed Dido, she pretends that there are fictional characters… – (4) or (4') may be understood by the pretense theorist as expressing a truth in the context of these unofficial games of make-believe.

A language dependent realist might be tempted to say that (4) is really true with respect to a "fictional context", while (4') is really true with respect to a "real context".[25] However, this move creates other difficulties. First of all, statements made in "fictional contexts" like "Hamlet is a prince" are understood as implicitly describing what is true according to the story.[26] And it is at least doubtful that one could consider that it is true in the story of the *Aeneid* that Vergil has Dido die. The only way out for the language dependent realist would then be to include in the so-called "fictional contexts" unofficial games of make-believe. But this move would certainly endanger the realist's project of demarcating clearly between "fictional" and "real" contexts of discourse *about* fiction: once unofficial games of make-believe are included into "fictional contexts" of discourse *about* fiction, it is not easy to see what is left for "real contexts" of discourse *about* fiction.

A language dependent realist insists on sentences like (4') while a pretense theorist insists on sentences like (4) to make her points. Both theorists agree that (4) and (4') have a serious intent and that they are true metafictional sentences. Both theorists agree that (4) involves some degree of pretense. The difference between the realist and the pretense theorist lies in the fact that the realist does not bring in pretense to give an account of (4'). The question one would like to ask to the language dependent realist is whether or not she admits that both (4) and (4') have the same core meaning or may be used to assert the same content. If this is the case, the language dependent realist needs to give an account of the content asserted with (4) without endangering her distinction between "fictional" and "real" contexts of discourse *about* fiction. If this is not the case, the realist must then show where lie the meaning differences between (4) and (4').

[25] I owe this suggestion to Alberto Voltolini.
[26] See above.

Conclusion

Language dependent realist claim that critical discourse breaks the rules of fiction, it creates a barrier between fictional discourse and itself: it is a way of stepping out of the fiction while discussing fiction. To this picture of critical discourse and on the basis of the meaning similarities between (4) and (4'), one may oppose – and I think this is the gist of the pretense theorist's move – that our understanding of (1)–(3) depends on our grasping the fact that these statements do not break the rules of fiction but, only, of 'normal' fiction. Speaking in a critical or theoretical manner as in (1)–(3) is a way to draw our attention to the rules of 'normal' fiction without breaking the rules of fiction. And to draw attention to the rules of 'normal' fiction never ends fiction: it is more the work of a meta-fiction, not the end of fiction.

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