Predelli on Fictional Discourse[*]

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Abstract

Searle (1975) argues that (literary) fictions are constituted by *mere pretense* – by the simulation of representational activities like assertions, without any further representational aim. They are not the result of *sui generis*, *dedicated* speech acts of a specific kind, on a par with assertion. The view had earlier many defenders, and still has some. Predelli (2020) enlists considerations derived from Searle in support of his *Radical Fictionalism*. This is the view that a sentence of fictional discourse including a *prima facie* empty fictional name like 'Emma Woodhouse' in fact "is not a sentence, and it encodes no proposition whatsoever". His argument is broadly abductive; he claims that this view affords compelling explanations of features of fictions he finds well-established, among them that fictions without explicit narrators nonetheless have covert ones. Here I take up his arguments, in defense of the *dedicated speech act* view. I will thus address pressing issues about the status of fictional names and the nature and ubiquity of narrators in fictions.

Keywords: fiction, fictional names, fictional narrators, pretense, unreliable narrators

1. *Mere Pretense* vs. *Dedicated Representation* Views of Fiction

In one of a handful of 1970s works that shaped current philosophical debates on fiction, Searle (1975) argues for the view that (literary) fictions are constituted by *mere pretense* – by the simulation of representational activities like assertions or questions, in itself without any further representational aim.[1] Searle targets for criticism the view that, in proffering declarative sentences, authors of fiction are "not performing the illocutionary act of making an assertion but the illocutionary act of telling a story or writing a novel" (1975, 323). More in general, on his view fictions aren't *sui generis*, *dedicated representations* of a specific kind, on a par with assertions or commands.[2] Some researchers (Hoffman 2004, Alward 2009) endorse variations of Searle's argument; most however accept Currie's (1990, 17-8) and Walton's (1983; 1990, 81-3) objections.[3]

Inspired by Walton's 1970s work, Currie (1990) offers the sort of speech-act approach to fictionalizing and the resulting fictions that Searle explicitly opposed, taking Gricean reflexive intentions to invite imaginings to be essential to fictions. Walton thinks instead of fictions as social artifacts with a specific representational function, that of being "props in games of make-believe" (1990, 51).[4] I have presented a rapprochement of sorts (García-Carpintero 2013, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). I adopt Currie's speech-act approach, but I take an institutional view on fictionalizing, on which (like games) it is defined by norms.[5]

I'll assume that representational artefacts have a distinguishable "text" or meaning-vehicle (Currie 1991),[6] a locutionary meaning or content, and an illocutionary point. In prototypical cases, such points correlate with goals that producers of the vehicles mean to achieve, and attitudes that audiences form in response. They thereby also correlate with norms set to appraise the producers' acts and the audiences' responses. The debate between Currie, Walton, myself, and others concerns which of these attitudes and norms are constitutive or

defining. *Dedicated Representation* is the view that fictions are a communicative kind of its own, like *assertion* o *question*, defined by its instances inviting imaginings with specific contents, however this is theoretically elaborated – whether along Currie's Gricean psychological lines, the Austinian social ones that I prefer, or some other.

Predelli (2019, 2020) presents the most compelling defense of Searle's claims that I am familiar with, by developing Searlian themes into a more compelling argument against *Dedicated Representation* than Searle's.[7] His own sketchy view of fiction is close to Walton's than Searle's, though. Predelli offers a forceful response to a serious problem in this area for Millianism – which he (2017) defends in another important recent book. This is the view that "a proper name is, so to speak, *simply* a name. It *simply* refers to its bearer, and has no other linguistic function. In particular … a name does not describe its bearer as possessing any special identifying properties" (Kripke 1979, 239-240). This appears to entail that the opening sentence in Austen's *Emma*, 'Emma Woodhouse had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world.', doesn't have a content – doesn't express a proposition.[8] Like other philosophers attracted by Millianism (van Inwagen 1977, 306; Kripke 2013, 24-5; Walton 1990, 36, fn. 24), Predelli (2020, 23, 27) endorses the claim; he calls the view *Radical Fictionalism* ('<mark>RF</mark>' henceforth).

This creates a problem for Millians. Let's say that we take Austen's sentence to be a "prop in a game of make-believe" (Walton 1990), inviting a fiction-constituting imagining. Such imaginings have propositional contents (Stock 2017, 4-9). Millianism raises this question: how does the sentence found in Austen's text help to fix the content that audiences are to imagine? (Predelli 2021, 77, 89) If 'Emma Woodhouse' has "no other linguistic function" than "simply refer", then it appears not to have any meaning. How does its occurrence help to determine the propositional content of the relevant imaginings? Walton confronts this

question, but I have argued that he doesn't answer it convincingly (García-Carpintero 2010, 286-7; cf. also Zemach 1998). Predelli's RF does a better job.

Nonetheless, I remain unconvinced. In this paper I'll address Predelli's arguments against *Dedicated Representation*. Like Searle, Predelli (2020, 37) opposes a "dedicated fiction-saying force". I'll first address his "uniformity" elaboration of Searle's (1975) points against *Dedicated Representation* (§2). Now, *Mere Pretense* usually comes with a commitment to what Matravers (1997, 79) calls the *Report Model*: "in reading a novel, a reader makes-believe he is being given a report of actual events. In other words, he makes-believe the content of the novel is being reported to him as known fact by a narrator". This fits fictions that have narrating characters, like the Sherlock Holmes stories; but it is controversial that it extends to all fictions. I agree that many have "effaced" narrators, who "fade into the background and have little or no significance for criticism or appreciation", Walton (1983, 83); but, like Walton (1990, 84) and Wilson (2011, 112), I don't think this applies *across the board* (§3). Predelli doesn't endorse *Mere Pretense*.[9] He upholds instead an inchoate ur-theory of fictions that appears close to Walton's: it is a "contentful exercise"; by really performing locutionary acts (i.e., by putting forward sentences with a given literal meaning), the (verbal) fiction-maker conveys the propositions constituting the 'storyworld' for them to be imagined (Predelli 2020, 37-8). Nonetheless, Predelli is equally committed to ubiquitous narrators, which he invokes in an argument for *Radical Fictionalism*. I will critically examine it (§4). All in all, I'll argue that the evidence favors *Dedicated Representation*.

2. Predelli's Elaboration of Searle's View

Predelli (2019, 2020) develops some of Searle's (1975) considerations against *Dedicated Representation*. Searle (1975, 323-4) offers an argument against that view that hasn't convinced many, cf. Currie (1990, 15-8), Walton (1983). Predelli presents his argument as a "reconstruction" of Searle's, based on a *Uniformity* datum: "any satisfactory theory of fiction must inevitably account for inter-force relationships that are parallel to the relationships between straightforward speech acts such as assertions or requests" (Predelli 2019, 316); "the regularities that govern actual speech acts continue to hold in the pretense, or in what I am asked to imagine rather than believe […] fictionality does not bring up yet another type of force, since its influence is detectable in all standard illocutionary acts" (Predelli 2020, 42). He illustrates this with an example: 'The cat is on the mat; is the cat on the mat?' This sounds jarring in a standard context: the erotetic force literally indicated by the second part is in tension with the assertoric force indicated by the first – why asking what has been just asserted? It sounds equally anomalous in a fiction. Predelli argues that we must reject *Dedicated Representation* to explain this apparent uniformity: "fictionality does not bring up yet another type of force".[10]

Searle's own argument – which, with a tad of rhetorical understatement, Predelli (2020, 41) grants is "overly enthusiastic" – is a *reductio* from the premise that illocutionary forces can be literally indicated (*op. cit.*, 324). Currie (1990, 15-6) rejects the premise, pointing out that forces may be only pragmatically conveyed. But I am happy to grant it; we can literally indicate that we are guessing that tomorrow it will rain by saying 'Tomorrow it will rain, I guess.', and that we are fictionalizing by such locutions as 'Once upon a time, …', or '…, let's imagine'. Indeed "overenthusiastically", Searle (*ibid*.) goes on to argue that we are thereby "committed to the view that words do not have their normal meanings in works of

fiction", from which it would absurdly follow that "to read any work of fiction, a speaker of the language would have to learn the language all over again, since every sentence in the language would have both a fictional and a nonfictional meaning". Why would that follow eludes me. To be sure, on *Dedicated Representation* we need to learn the meaning of indicators conveying fictionalizing force; but all other expressions may retain their ordinary meanings in fictions.

Predelli's quoted starting point, "any satisfactory theory of fiction …" suggests that his own argument is meant to be *abductive*. *Uniformity* appears to support *Mere Pretense*, in that *Mere Pretense* offers a good explanation for it: the *Uniformity* datum is explained in that fictional discourse is not a further kind of discourse with a dedicated illocutionary point, just the simulation of other forces.[11] I'll now show this argument to be wanting: (1) the measure of inter-force uniformity that fictions and non-fiction exhibit is compatible with a fictionalizing illocutionary force; (2) the uniformity is not as all-encompassing as Predelli assumes.

(1) The first consideration is that, by assuming *Dedicated Representation*, we can unproblematically account for the "parallel inter-force relationships" – when they obtain, as I agree they standardly do. We embark in pretense for all kinds of goals. What is pretense? For our purposes, Picciuto's & Carruthers's (2016, 317) account will do: "to pretend that P is to act as if P… while imagining that P".[12] Now, one of the goals for which we engage in pretense is that of conveying specific speech acts: this is how irony may work, according to a compelling account (Walton 1990, 222; Currie 2010, ch. 8). We pretend to assert something, or to apologize, to assert the opposite, or to scold. It is thus consistent with *Dedicated Representation* that the fiction-maker convey the dedicated speech acts that constitute fictions, thereby inviting imaginings, by having actors pretending to perform the illocutionary acts literally conveyed by the sentences she produces (as in dramatic performances or films), or by herself "playing" the role of the narrator of her novel: "fictional storytelling is best

viewed as a species of theatrical performance in which storytellers portray the narrators of the stories they tell" (Alward 2009, 321). In creating the Holmes stories, Doyle thus "plays" Watson.[13] This suffices to explain the *Uniformity* datum, showing Predelli's abductive argument against *Dedicated Representation* to be a *non-sequitur*. For her goals, the literary fiction-maker may play a character (the fictional narrator) who fictionally is using the sentences as if they were meant literally. She may thus *ceteris paribus* use the full panoply of resources that the language affords, which creates the uniformity that Predelli illustrates.

(2) A second consideration is that the *Uniformity* datum fails to obtain with the full generality that Predelli assumes, which makes the explanation afforded by *Dedicated Representation* better. In "discordant narration" (Koch 2011), the text is fictionally produced by a fictional narrator. However, it also provides indications that some assertions are wrong about the fictional world or fail to provide crucial information. Currie's (1995) cases of "global unreliability" (fn. 19) are another telling instance. Such textual relations among conveyed forces are non-standard in ordinary assertoric discourse; it is not at all common that part of what is conveyed in non-fiction undermines the assertoric status of what the teller asserts. Similarly, in non-fiction audiences are entitled to query the justification for speaker's claims; such retorts count as "inter-force relationships". But they are out of place when it comes to fictional narratives.[14] Hence, *Uniformity* doesn't hold in full generality. This rebuts Predelli's abductive argument: uniformity holds only *ceteris paribus*, *cetera* not always being *paria* – as in unreliability cases in which it furthers the fiction-maker's fictionalizing goals to do things in unusual ways by the standards of non-fiction discourse.

By taking the pretense not as *mere* pretense, but as a common convenient recourse for performing a dedicated speech act, *Dedicated Representation* evades Pratt's (1977, 91) and Currie's (1990) over-generation objection to *Mere Pretense*: verbal performances meant "to illustrate an idiotic line of reasoning, or to imitate the conversational manner of an

acquaintance" (Currie 1990, 17) – which show that the pretense of ordinary speech acts doesn't suffice for fiction – are just not cases of fictionalizing given *Dedicated Representation*.[15] But in contrast with how its proponents understand *Mere Pretense*, *Dedicated Representation* doesn't incur a commitment to the universal applicability of Matravers' *Report Model*. Conveying the content to be imagined by pretending to perform ordinary speech acts is on *Dedicated Representation* just *tactics*; the act might be done directly. I'll move now to elaborate on this.

3. Fictional Narrators: Explicit, Effaced, and Ubiquitous

Fictions like *Don Quixote*, the Sherlock Holmes stories, or *À la recherche du temps perdu* feature explicit narrators, who report to us the character of their fictional worlds. *Mere Pretense* is usually understood as committed to such fictional narrators across the board, because it characterizes fictions as constituted by the pretense of the speech acts standardly performed by the utterances they deploy. They will typically include declarative sentences; *Mere Pretense* suggests the pretense that they are asserted by a pretend, fictional assertor, even if covert (Lewis 1978, 266). Interrogative or imperative sentences may also have presupposition triggers, conveying pretend assumptions about features of the fictional world by a pretend utterer (Urmson 1976, 153-4). In this section I'll present a debate about covert narrators on which *Mere Pretense* motivates a wrong turn, on account of this commitment to ubiquitous narrators. Predelli's *Uniformity* argument makes him committed to them, which he is happy to accept for reasons that we will critically examine in §4.

The notion of a *fictional narrator* can be developed in several ways for different purposes. I'll articulate the one I need to rehearse this debate. Kania (2005, 47) ascribes narrators two

features: being *fictional*, and being *agents*. This doesn't suffice to pinpoint the debate at issue here. Fictions also have (actual, or "implied") authors; and they (or their *fictionalized* avatars) may be the agents fictionally conveying the story *as fiction*.[16] Such cases are counterexamples to ubiquitous narrators as Predelli or supporters of *Mere Pretense* understand them. Our debate concerns whether the fictionalizing activity of actual authors suffices to constitute fictions, without mediating *reporting* narrators when they are not explicit. These *fictional narrators* are thus fictional *tellers*, fictive *assertors* in acts made with declarative sentences in verbal fictions (Walton 1990, 355; Wilson 2011, 18): "Narrators […] are beings about whom it is sometimes appropriate to ask such questions as: 'how does he/she know about these things?', 'is he/she reliable?', 'what is the narrator's point of view'", Currie (2010, 66).

Our issue is thus whether all fictions have fictional reporting narrators, including those lacking explicit ones, or the fictionalizing act of the author suffices in that case. In adopting *Mere Pretense* for his account of *truth in fiction* (ascriptions of content to fictions, really), Lewis (1978, 266) assumes that all fictional worlds feature the reporting of their character "as known fact".[17] Other writers have provided arguments with similarly overarching consequences, like Chatman's (1990) "analytic" argument that any narration presupposes a narrator, or Levinson's (1996, 251-2) "ontological gap" argument that anybody capable of conveying to us the character of a fictional world must be "on the same fictional plane".

Critics like Kania (2005), Currie (2010) or Gaut (2010) show these arguments to be wanting.[18] The main critical point they raise is this. A declarative sentence can be directly, literally put forward for purposes other than assertion, including fiction-making: 'S, I suppose'; 'S, let's imagine'. This is the way imaginings are invited in thought experiments (Davies 2010, 389-91), so there might be fictions generated in this way (Walton 1990, 365). Wilson (2011, 32-3) offers a convincing illustration, "the production of certain hand shadows, a fictional story in which a certain hawk attacks and kills a hapless mole … there is no

obvious reason to postulate that the hand shadows are themselves the fictional product of some fictional activity of 'showing-as-actual' the elements of the depicted tale".

Any plausible argument for effaced narrators must hence appeal to specific features of the relevant fictions, but I am sympathetic to generalized covert narrators in fictions, for reasons given by Walton (1990) and Wilson (2011), on which I have elaborated elsewhere (García-Carpintero forthcoming-c). Among other considerations, Predelli's *Uniformity* point in the *ceteris paribus* way I accept it underwrites a phenomenological motivation for covert narrators: it intuitively seems that the contents of third-person narratives are reported to us. Predelli (2020, 56, fn.) sensibly complains that arguments against covert narrators boil down to (1) acceptable rejoinders to uncompelling arguments for them, and (2) a challenge to provide better ones. I share the sentiment. However, both *Uniformity* and *Radical Fictionalism* make Predelli committed to ubiquitous narrators in *all* fictional content. This goes beyond the default character I ascribe them; and it is at odds with the data, which can otherwise be explained perfectly well by *Dedicated Representation*. I'll now move on to showing this, by adding real examples to Wilson's hand shadows.

Unreliable narrators offer an initial case against ubiquitous fictional narrators.[19] When Huck Finn tells us that the Widow Douglas grumbled before supper, we understand that she wasn't grumbling but saying grace. This fiction has an explicit narrator, and a good part of the character of its fictional world is communicated to us in accordance with the Report Model. However, this aspect of its fictional world is not *internally* conveyed to us by its fictional narrator.[20] We get it by adopting an *external* perspective, through an inference that can be reconstructed as Gricean indirection based on the author's fictionalizing goals (Koch 2011, 60; Pratt 1977, ch. 5). Given *Dedicated Representation*, fictions themselves result from specific fictionalizing acts, and hence allow for indirection specifically based on them – as

when the literal expression of gratitude in the newsstand's declaration "thanks for not browsing our magazines" indirectly conveys the request not to browse them.

In these cases, it is only some features of the fictional world that cannot be accounted for as fictionally told; the fiction does have a narrator. Walton's *storytelling narrators* (fn. 17) provide more thorough counterexamples. Walton mentions Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, but Wilson (2011, 118) raises a serious objection, namely, that Thackeray's remarks can be taken as "authorial intrusions", i.e., ordinary assertions that are not part of the fictional text. Moving beyond the literary case, Wilson's (1986, ch. 8) interpretation of von Sternberg's 1935 film *The Devil is a Woman* affords a clearer case. Wilson notes the director's choice of an actor playing the *Don Pasqual* narrating character who looks very much like him. He mentions a turning point at which the character, magically (by shooting a Queen of Hearts card through the heart) and psychologically implausibly turns to his favor the romantic attitudes of the character played by Dietrich. On Wilson's view, von Sternberg is inviting us through his fictional avatar to take the film as made for fiction-making purposes: the whole of it "shot by shot, can be viewed as the extended expression of a psychic drama that has putatively been played out in the mind or soul of its creator, von Sternberg himself" (Wilson 1986, 164). The Report Model cannot explain Wilson's interpretation: it is the fiction-maker who presents himself as inviting us to imagine the relevant content.

De Vigan's 2015 novel *D'après une histoire vrai* and the 2017 Polanski film based on it, or Bergman's 1966 *Persona*, also illustrate the point.[21] Let me develop a final example. It is manifest that Hitchcock's 1954 *Rear Window* has a meta-filmic character. It presents the visual and auditory point of view of a spectator, Jeff, placed in the physically passive position we occupy at the movies, as mentally active as we should be in establishing what is going on in them. He can be naturally seen as the author who creates the film, when he is imaginatively contemplating the fiction he is producing. Oneirically, the window-framed scenes presented

to Jeff are a sometimes farcical, sometimes tragic, exhaustive and terse projection of his anxieties about possible bonds: the happy family, the contented childless couple, the lonely spinster, the nagging, ungrateful wife and unfaithful husband, the heated passion turned into discontent, the sexually pliant partner. The plot in which he is imaginatively immersed ends up materializing itself, in part with the cooperation of his acting confederates;[22] his projected anguish thus comes back to haunt him. Only a flimsy, unsteady resolution is attained.

These examples gainsay that "in reading a novel, a reader … makes-believe the content of the novel is being reported to him as known fact by a narrator" (Matravers 1997, 79). Given *Dedicated Representation*, we don't need a narrator: contents can be directly conveyed by acts of fictionalizing. They thus uphold the intuition prompted by Wilson's hand shadow thought experiment. It is irrelevant how common they are, although I agree with Pettersson (1993) that they can be found across the history of fiction and cannot be "brushed away as … postmodern inability to let things alone" (*ibid*., 93). The point is that they are real, and *Dedicated Representation* accounts for them as a matter of course.

Predelli does not endorse *Mere Pretense*. Like Walton, he could disclaim ubiquitous narrators and allow that, in those cases, the relevant contents are directly conveyed for them to be imagined by the fiction-maker. But he is independently committed to ubiquitous narrators, see §4. The suggested move is in tension with his *Uniformity* argument, which is meant to show that "fictionality does not bring up yet another type of force" (Predelli 2020, 42), and that "fictional discourse is no discourse at all, just as fictional women are not peculiar women" (Predelli 2021, 90). It may be consistent with this to claim that in the indicated cases authors of literary fictions directly convey the relevant contents for them to be imagined, this not amounting to their endowing the sentences they use with a dedicated fictionalizing force. But this would at the very least need elaboration and motivation.

4. Ubiquitous Fictional Narrators and *Radical Fictionalism*

Like Predelli, I accept covert narrators that skeptics disallow; there are good reasons for them, cf. García-Carpintero (forthcoming-c). Predelli is skeptical about the scope of Searle's commitment to *Mere Pretense* (2019, 318; 2020, 43 fn), and he assumes an inchoate alternative Waltonian account, so he could accept the midway position that there are covert fictional narrators, but they are not ubiquitous. But he is committed to ubiquitous fictional narrators: he needs them for his defense of *Radical Fictionalism*, his controversial view about fictional names.[23] In closing, I'll critically examine whether this view offers good reasons against *Dedicated Representation*. I'll argue that it doesn't.

Predelli (2017) defends Millianism for proper names. Millianism shares Kaplan's (1989) *Direct Reference* claim that names, unlike descriptions, contribute just their referents to an aspect of semantic meaning: *propositional content*. Unlike indexicals, however, and in accordance with the quotation from Kripke at the outset, names do not make additional descriptive contributions to a Kaplanian character-like semantic meaning.[24] The *prima facie* empty names in fictional discourse pose a problem for the view. Some Millians reject the view that the names are empty, contending that they in fact refer to exotic entities, perhaps *abstracta* (Salmon 1998, Abell 2020); Predelli (2002) held this view earlier. Other Millians deny that they are names; Currie (1990, 131) declares them to be disguised descriptions when they occur in discourse constituting fictions, and hence, he thinks, not really names, cf. Lewis (1978, 267).[25] Currie's characterization of their contribution to fictional content is rather like Predelli's, but Predelli's arguments are original and eminently worth-considering.

Predelli's Millianism is compatible with empty names (2020, §1.5, 2021, 84); he accepts "gappy propositions" (Braun 2005), so emptiness is not for him the problem with fictional

names. His worry is that real names must be "launched": something like a Kripkean "initial baptism" must have taken place; but it hasn't, he claims, which is why they are not real names (2020, §2.1; 2021, 88-9). Nonetheless, when we speak, we convey (or "impart", as he says, 2020 §1.5) information (or misinformation) beyond what our words semantically encode, and also beyond what they pragmatically communicate: say, that they are uttered with a certain tone, or that they belong to a given language. When Austen "displays" the sentence-looking expression 'Emma Woodhouse had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world.' she *imparts* that a bearer of 'Emma Woodhouse' had lived nearly twenty-one years. Austen didn't really produce a *sentence*: 'Emma Woodhouse' not being a name, the expression she used cannot be a sentence; hence 'display' (2020, §2.3).

As we saw, Predelli accepts an inchoate proto-theory of fiction, on which it is a "contentful exercise"; by really performing locutionary acts, the (verbal) fiction-maker conveys the propositions constituting the "storyworld" for them to be imagined (Predelli 2020, 38). Now, Austen cannot be inviting us to imagine a singular proposition signified by the sentence-looking expression she displayed; because according to Predelli, there is no such sentence, and there is no proposition, not even a "gappy" one (2020, 23). However, Austen can in principle ask us to imagine the metalinguistic, reflexive proposition that she imparted, and this is what, according to Predelli (2020, 29), she is doing. Predelli (2020, 31-2) conjures up a vast array of examples of our tendency to revert to metalinguistic description when we want to report on what authors like Austen are asking us to imagine in such cases.[26]

How does Austen invite such imaginings? Doyle does it through the pretense of a teller, Watson, fictionally asserting the sentence-like expressions that Doyle writes down; the same applies to Austen, according to Predelli, but now through the pretense of a covert teller (2020, 46; 2021, 95). This is how a commitment to ubiquitous fictional narrators helps Predelli to uphold *Radical Fictionalism*. It provides him with an agent who, by displaying 'Emma

Woodhouse had lived … .', pretends to assert it and pretends to refer with 'Emma Woodhouse', thereby imparting in the pretense metalinguistic information. It is through such pretenses that the fiction-maker asks us to imagine the imparted proposition *that a bearer of 'Emma Woodhouse' … .* This requires a fictional narrator in all fictions deploying fictional names, and, to prevent adhocery, in fact in all.

We can summarize Predelli's progress thus. He contends (1) that name-types are semantically evaluable only when "launched" as names, and (2) that authors of fiction do not introduce them as such. From here he derives (3) the need for impartations, to obtain plausible contents for fictions; and from this (4) the inevitability of the fictional teller. He says that the crucial step (2) is *de facto* plausible, but, more importantly he claims abductive support for it (Predelli 2020, 21). Its main explanatory virtue lies in that it motivates (4), on the assumption that we have independent justification for it from *Uniformity* (§2) and from a "standard narratological approach to *heterodiegetic* narrative" (2021, 95).[27] In sum, Predelli's argument is that ubiquitous fictional narrators are not so much an *ad hoc* commitment he needs to incur in order to assign plausible contents conveyed by fictions by means of so-called fictional names, given that on his view they are not names. They are independently well-established, and this confers abductive validity on (2). For this central tenet of *Radical Fictionalism* explains/predicts that narrators must be ubiquitous: otherwise, the fictions conveyed by means of fictional "names" wouldn't get to have the contents we intuitively think they do.

The problem with this interesting and original argument is that, as I have argued, properly understood both the *Uniformity* datum and "heterodiegetic" narrative (i.e., the one without explicit narrators) do not support the "inevitability" of fictional narrators; we have good reasons to reject (4). Therefore, (2) doesn't get any support from the fact that it requires (4); on the contrary, it is jeopardized to the extent that (4) is compromised. Besides, (2) is really implausible; it can hardly offer any support itself:[28]

First, most currently popular semantic theories of names work on the assumption that (2) is false – cf., e.g., Maier (2017), Stokke (2020), Zucchi (2017). On several current accounts (predicativism, indexicalism, my own presuppositional view, see García-Carpintero (2018) for details and references) a name *N* is semantically related to the metalinguistic description *being called N*, not just pragmatically by the use-mechanism of impartation. This accounts for Predelli's (2020, 31-2) data on the resort to such descriptions when reporting the content of fictions. On my account, proper names are not indexicals, but, like them, they trigger a descriptive presupposition deploying such metalinguistic information. In fictions, the presupposition is not to be accommodated by the standard common ground of shared beliefs, but by one consisting of the contents afforded by the fiction. As I have shown (García-Carpintero 2020), this explains Friend's (2011) intuitive datum that fictional contents feel as singular as non-fictional content. In contrast, the specifically fictional contents that Predelli gets through the mechanism of impartation, as he emphasizes, are purely general.

There are good reasons for such a rejection of (2) in current semantics. A crucial role of names is to help *de jure* co-identification, i.e., to help speakers to put together information or misinformation on their purported referents by "trading on identity";[29] somehow ironically, they uniformly play that role in fictions (García-Carpintero 2020). Predelli's only justification for his claim that fictional names are not "supported by any actual, non-fictional launching" (Predelli 2021, 89) is that the fiction-maker's "aim was not that of putting forth a referential device, but rather that of making things up" (*ibid*., 88). But 'rather' is unwarranted here: making things up as fiction-makers do *requires* referential devices, for a central aspect of it is that readers put together the information to be imagined about the names' fictional bearers by "trading on identity", exactly in the way this is done with real names.[30]

Perhaps some fiction-makers don't represent themselves as baptizers, but this is neither here nor there. After all, launching a proper name is not a momentous act that we need to pay

attention to. We do it when we put a number beside a sentence to help to refer to it, or when we nickname somebody in a fleeting round of gossip; we may even do it inadvertently, as when a name we use changes its reference without our realizing it.[31]

Secondly, Predelli's motivation for *Radical Fictionalism* – such as his Sainsbury quotation that "creators of fiction do not use their name-like expressions to purport to refer", Predelli (2020, 21) – extend to indexicals and kind terms; but it is clearly wrong for them. We read a narrative that starts: 'He was happily married.' We take this to be part of an act of telling, aiming to afford a piece of information. We assume that the teller, with a token of 'he', has picked out a male from the context, and she is aiming to let us know thereby that that male was happily married. Suppose that the speaker's referential attempt was unsuccessful. This gives no plausibility to the notions that she was thereby not using a token of an English word, 'he'; that she was not producing an utterance of an English sentence; nor even that there is no content that she put forward as asserted. This is unproblematic if we assume a minimal view of propositions as properties of truth-making situations, which can be expressed in different media, verbal or depictive, as I think we should (García-Carpintero forthcoming-d). The implausibility remains if we now suppose that the utterance was the beginning of a fictional narrative. On my view, the only difference is that the presupposition that the speaker was picking out a male with the token of 'he' is now not something believed, but rather imagined; as of course it is the conveyed "information" that the male was happily married.[32]

Nothing of substance changes if the sentence in the non-fictional telling was 'The material was lacking in phlogiston.', and the one in the fictional narrative 'The material was lacking in kryptonite.' Is not 'phlogiston' there a token of an English word? As a tool to make successful simple acts of telling, it is a failed one. But failed tools are tools; and, in any event, this one has successful uses – say, to report on the attitudes of those who thought it to have a referent. After all, the understanding they had and articulated with the expression doesn't differ from

the one most of us associate with kind terms like 'molybdenum', which do have successful uses in simple acts of telling. The services that 'kryptonite' successfully serves are similar: in particular, it helps concocting contents that we can be asked to consider, or imagine.

The lack of plausibility extends to names. This is clear if we consider indexical views that assign to a name N the character *being called N*; but it is equally so if we assume instead a presuppositional non-indexical view like mine (García-Carpintero 2018). To sum up: there are semantics on which names, like indexicals and kind terms, can be referential, "rigid" in an appropriate sense, and nonetheless convey descriptive reference-fixing information, even when they fail to refer (García-Carpintero 2021). Fiction-makers can "launch" them for their fictionalizing purposes, using them with their locutionary meaning, be it through the pretense of a fictional narrator, covert or otherwise, or directly. Utterances including them are fully meaningful and convey a content with a dedicated illocutionary force; (2) thus fails.

I thus conclude that Predelli's book-length abductive argument for *Radical Fictionalism*, which depends in part of his equally abductive argument for *Uniformity*, doesn't succeed. The *Dedicated Representation* view of fictionalizing that he disparages in the process offers better accounts for the data that he brings forward. The view eschews a problematic commitment to ubiquitous fictional narrators, and it has the resources to explain why fictionalizers may introduce names as part of their activity. The book offers no solace for supporters of Searle's views on fictions and fiction-making either.

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Notes

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[1] Macdonald (1954), Beardsley (1970, 58-61), Armstrong (1971), Ohmann (1971), Gale (1971), and Urmson (1976) are other early proponents of *Mere Pretense*. "After repeated readings", Predelli (2019, 319 fn.) says, he "could not identify any overt, or for that matter indirect commitment" to definitional goals in Searle. Let's see. Searle (1975, 319) warns about confusing "a definition of fiction with a definition of literature"; he declares his aim to be "to analyze the concept of fiction". but not that of literature because it lacks defining "necessary and sufficient conditions" (*ibid.*, 320). He thus at least intimates that we can do better for fiction, which supports the standard identification of his view as *Mere Pretense*, according to Predelli (2020, 43 fn) a "common misunderstanding". It is certainly common, assumed by critics like Currie (1990) and Walton (1983), or by Berto, Davies and Lamarque in works that Predelli mentions; Abell (2020, 54-5) is a recent addition.

[2] The debate between *Mere Pretense* and *Dedicated Representation* is primarily about the act of fictionalizing from which fictions result, but it has implications for what fictions are. Thus, on the view I prefer they are artefacts constituted by fictionalizing acts. But I'll mostly ignore ontological issues here.

[3] In addition to the works mentioned in fn. 1, aside from Walton's other groundbreaking 1970s work espouse *Mere Pretense*: cf. Kripke (2013, 24), Lewis (1978, 265-6), van Inwagen (1977, 306; 1983, 73). True, Kripke and Lewis might be understanding 'pretense' in their suggestions about fiction-constituting discourse not as *mere* pretense, but in the way consistent with *Dedicated Representation* indicated in §2. But Lewis moves on that basis to

the *Report Model* and ubiquitous narrators (§3); and Kripke grounds on his "Pretense Principle" the claim that "the propositions that occur in a work of fiction would only be pretended propositions" (*ibid*.). On *Dedicated Representation*, both are non-sequiturs; those propositions are genuine ones, meant to be imagined. Van Inwagen (1977, 1983) also readily moves from the contention that Dickens is not "writing about anything" and is "asserting nothing" (1977, 301) – right, in general – to the claim that he doesn't "express any proposition" (*ibid*., 306; 1983, 73) – wrong, on *Dedicated Representation*.

[4] I take Walton's work to be mostly responsible for *Mere Pretense*'s fall from favor, through the deserved impact of his views. Walton rejects *Dedicated Representation* too, but his reasons are not compelling (Currie 1990, Carroll 1995). He points out that there are fictions in different media, films, or drama; but even defenders of *Mere Pretense* may avail themselves to the fact that assertions are regularly made in those other media, as witnessed by maps, documentaries, and judiciary reenactments. Walton also contends that fictional content doesn't require intentional fiction-making; but social, practice-based views of speech acts may agree with this, cf. Abell (2020). Moreover, his account is excessively revisionist; Walton (2015) himself has come to accept that "prescribing imaginings" is too inchoate a notion for a theoretically adequate account of fiction.

[5] Wolterstorff (1980), Lamarque & Olsen (1994), and Abell (2020) advance related views.

[6] As usual (Grice 1989, 118), I use 'text' and 'speech' in an extended sense in which it applies to communicative acts in different media, like depictions including the moving image.

[7] I'll ignore Predelli's (2019) distinction between versions of *Dedicated Representation* that take fictions to be a determinate *species*, and those that present it as a determinable kind; his arguments question both (*op. cit.*, 321).

[8] Cf. the quotations in fn. 3. I say "appears" because Millians may contend that 'Emma Woodhouse' as used by Austen does refer, to some exotic entity; others may say that the

utterance expresses a proposition, but a "gappy" one (Braun 2005). Cf. García-Carpintero (forthcoming-a) for review and discussion. Predelli rejects both moves, see below, §4.

[9] According to him (2020, 43 fn), Searle doesn't endorse *Mere Pretense* either, see fn. 1 – he ventures that "much of what Searle actually suggests is in fact close" to his view.

[10] Searle (1975, 326) does say that while "vertical" norms are suspended by fictionalizing pretense, "horizontal" norms stay in place. The 'vertical' metaphor points to *direction-of-fit* relations linking speech acts and the conditions they represent; roughly, assertions should depend on them, commands should bring them about. The 'horizontal' norms are the relations among forces that Predelli finds uniformly in fiction and non-fiction – say, that a question shouldn't be asked when an answer for it has already been given. Hicks (2016, 1568-1570) offers a reconstruction of Searle's point like Predelli's, and a response analogous to mine.

[11] As Predelli (2021, 90) (overenthusiastically) puts it, "fictional discourse is no discourse at all, just as fictional women are not peculiar women and fictional names are not a special type of names".

[12] In the elided part they write "(without believing it)". This is wrong. Actors sometimes pretend to drink whisky by drinking tea, but sometimes they drink the real stuff, believing that they do in so doing. Actors (in particular, fiction-makers portraying fictional narrators) sometimes portray their characters asserting P by truly asserting it.

[13] Cf. also Ohmann (1971, 18), Gale (1971, 337). In support of *Mere Pretense*, Alward argues against *Dedicated Representation* on this basis; cf. García-Carpintero 2019b, 278, fn. 13 for a reply.

[14] It "would be reasonable for a listener to conclude, were he told a supernatural tale such as *The Master and Margarita*, that the narrator was completely off his head and none of what he said was true; we all know that cats do not smoke cigars, neither are they dead shots with Mauser automatics" (Matravers 1997, 79).

[15] *Dedicated Representation* can also evade Walton's (1990, 82-3) under-generation objection: we assert with pictures and performances (maps, judicial reenactments); hence, we may also fictionalize by them (or by pretending to assert with them), §3.

[16] This would be a *storytelling narrator* (Walton 1990, 368), as opposed to the *reporting narrators* that our debate targets. Walton mentions Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* for illustration; I offer better examples below. Like Wilson (2011, 18, 114), I speak of a "fictionalized avatar" of the author to circumvent controversies over the status of real characters in fictions. Also, for reasons that Predelli (2020, 36, fn. 11) sums up, I'll disregard "implied" authors in favor of actual ones, cf. Wolterstorff (1980, 178), Ryan (2011).

[17] García-Carpintero (forthcoming-b) argues that assuming *Dedicated Representation* in the metasemantics of fictional content – which Lewis' 1983 Postscript A suggests he might approve – evades objections, including issues raised by commitment to ubiquitous narrators.

[18] Wolterstorff (1980, 178) has an early version of the main objection. Köppe and Stühring (2011) offer a helpful presentation of the arguments.

[19] I understand "unreliable narrator" in Booth's classical sense (i.e., a narrator who ascribes to the fictional world a character that the fiction as a whole disclaims; cf. also Koch's (2011, 63) generalization of Cohn's (2000) notion of *discordant narration* (but cp. Currie 2004, 139). Currie (1995, 22) characterizes another type of "global unreliability" that allegedly doesn't require a narrator, illustrated by Wilson's (1986) interpretations of Lang's 1937 *You Only Live Once*. These are fictions allowing for a superficial interpretation, and a deeper, not-so-easy-to-get but also justifiably correct one.

[20] "The internal perspective on fiction is that of *imaginative involvement*; the external perspective, that of an awareness of artifice" (Lamarque 1996, 14). Cf. Currie (2010, ch. 3.

[21] In De Vigan's story, the protagonist (an avatar of De Vigan herself), fresh from the success of a self-fiction whose publication has enraged her family, finds herself afflicted with

writer's block, imagining her problematic relation to a fictional woman (perhaps another fictional avatar of herself) – which ends up being the very story we are reading/viewing. In *Persona*, the famous breakdown of the film in the second part, anticipated in the prelude, plus the later intrusion of the filming crew in the fictional world are the telltale indicators; the equally famous merging of the faces of Liv Ullmann and Bibi Andersson is an invitation to imagine the characters they play as two different projections of the author's psyche (cp. Wood 2013, 186-205). Resnais' 1961 *Last Year in Marienbad*, on García-Carpintero's (2013, 353) interpretation, also illustrates the point well. Pettersson (1993, 93) makes a very similar point, with another literary example of a literary storytelling narrator. Epistolary novels are another example: the novel as a whole may well lack a narrator, Walton (1990, 356).

[22] Pippin (2020, 41) points out that, tellingly, Jeff's confederate Lisa climbing to the Thorwalds' apartment through their window-frame looks very much like an allusion to Keaton's protagonist dream avatar walking into the movie screen in his 1924 *Sherlock Jr.*

[23] A casual reader of Predelli (2020, 56, fn. 6) may think that he agrees that fictional narrators don't need to be ubiquitous – which Kania (2005) illustrates with Graham Greene's "tragic tale of Scobie" in *The Heart of the Matter* – when he declares that "not admitting of Scobie, I can hardly admit of his tale". A more thorough reading establishes that Predelli is in fact not doing anything of the sort. He admits that Graham Greene's tale has a content that we are invited to imagine (*ibid*., 38) and, as we will see, his views require that *that* tale (for him that of *a bearer of 'Scobie'*, not Scobie) has a narrator.

[24] Predelli (2020, 33) characterizes Millianism as "the view that names are rigid non-indexical devices of direct reference". I don't think this is a good characterization, for it fits non-Millian views like my own, sketched below (García-Carpintero 2018).

[25] García-Carpintero (2019d) is a review of recent contributions to this debate.

[26] Here is another: "in my view, there are no propositions "about" mere fictions, and hence none that are make-believe. It is make-believe not that Gulliver visited Lilliput, but that a man named 'Gulliver' visited a place called 'Lilliput'", Walton (1978, 12 fn).

[27] Thanks to Stefano Predelli for this reconstruction of his "argument for the inevitability of the narrator … from best explanation of aesthetic facts" (personal communication). The book announces the abductive argument (*ibid.*, 21), and adds further pieces: the claim helps to discriminate "external" features of narratives like the temporal order of their telling, from the "internal" course of fictional events (*ibid.*, 60), and also the misleading contents that unreliable narrators put forward from the "true" ones competent readers derive (by assuming a true covert narrator behind the unreliable explicit, *ibid.*, 116). My discussion aims to challenge that Predelli's is the best explanation for such data.

[28] Von Solodkoff (forthcoming) makes critical points overlapping with what follows.

[29] Cf. Campbell (1987/8), Fine (2007), Recanati (2016), and further references there.

[30] Predelli (2020, 26) and I agree that fictionally 'Holmes' is a real name that has been launched in the worlds of the stories. (I am ignoring here a distinction that Predelli makes between the *storyworld* and its *periphery* (*ibid.*, 47), as far as I can tell co-extensional with my own (García-Carpintero 2019b, forthcoming-c) between *constitutive* and *ancillary* imaginings prescribed by fictions.) Given *Dedicated Representation*, any utterance of a declarative sentence in the Holmes stories has a dual role. It is a vehicle for Watson's fictional assertions; and it is also one for Conan Doyle's act of fictionalizing. 'Holmes' has a corresponding dual role. It is for its second role that I assume that Conan Doyle (like, fictionally, Holmes' fictional parents) has launched the name found in his discourse. Realists about fictional characters who, like Salmon (1998), Predelli's (2002) previous self, or Abell (2020), extend their view to fictional discourse make the same assumption.

[31] García-Carpintero (2018, §4.1) offers this as a good metasemantic account of 'Madagascar'-like cases. Stojnić (2021, §3.1) defends a similar view.

[32] This assumes the view sketched in the first point above, cf. García-Carpintero (2018); Maier (2017) offers a formal DRT model implementing a similar view.