

Between Fiction and Non-Fiction
Uppsala, 13-14 June

Organizer

Andreas Stokke

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Venue

Universitetshuset. Google maps: <https://goo.gl/maps/zGhS7jiTakaJRdBa8>. Room: Sal I. Coffee breaks will be outside our room, lunches (for the speakers) will be in the cafeteria in the same building, "Café Alma".

Program

13 June

9:30-10:45 Merel Semeijn, "Learning from fiction through analogy"

10:45-11:15 Coffee

11:15-12:30 Emmanuel Viebahn, "Storytelling, speech acts and the patchwork problem"

12:30-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:15 James Mahon, "Novel Assertions and Novel Lies"

15:15-15:45 Coffee

15:45-17:00 Richard Woodward, "The Normative Role of Fictionality"

18:00 Dinner for speakers at Domtrappkällaren (<https://www.domtrappkallaren.se>), S:t Eriks gränd 15. Google maps: <https://goo.gl/maps/91cva8ikbjjPY1sQ8>

14 June

9:30-10:45 Julia Langkau, "Reading Literary Fiction: A Creative Use of Imagination"

10:45-11:15 Coffee

11:15-12:30 Neri Marsili, "The Cooperative Principle in Fiction: Quality and Beyond"

12:30-14:00 Lunch

14:00-15:15 Louis Rouillé, "Names: fictional, real, full, and empty"

15:15-15:45 Coffee

15:45-17:00 Sam Cumming, "Truth-value clarity and tricky questions"

Abstracts of talks

Learning from fiction through analogy

Merel Semeijn

Consider this quote from Fleming's *Thunderball*: "New Providence, the island containing Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, is a drab sandy slab of land" (Example from Friend, 2008). Although it is part of a fictional narrative, we can learn empirical facts about the real world (e.g., that Nassau is on the island New Providence) from this sentence. The debate on 'export' (i.e., learning propositional truths about the real world by engaging in fiction) has mostly focused on such explicitly stated facts in fiction novels. Theorists have thus developed accounts of learning from fiction through (indirect) assertions or testimony in fictional narratives (e.g., Konrad, 2017; Stock, 2017; García-Carpintero, 2019). However, we often learn from fiction in subtler ways. We may export general implicit truths from fiction (e.g., 'love conquers all'); export mere presuppositional content of fictional statements (e.g., from reading "Bond rode to the airport" I can learn that there was an airport on New Providence in the 1960s); and export from non-verbal fictions such as paintings, film, theatre, comic books and (video) games.

Ichino and Currie (2017) suggest that propositions liable for export are in first instance merely established as "true-in-the-fiction, and that there are processes of inference available [...] to infer from 'P is true-in-the-fiction' to 'P is true'" (p. 70). In line with this suggestion, I develop an account of export in terms of analogical inferencing that can offer a uniform analysis of the varying types of export. The account borrows concepts and formal machinery from Bartha (2010) and Hesse's (1966) two-dimensional analysis of analogical argumentation. In this framework, similarities between clusters of properties of a 'target' and 'source system' (e.g., overlap in topographical facts between the *Thunderball*-world and real world) determine, amongst other things, whether a particular analogical inference is justified.

Storytelling, speech acts and the patchwork problem

Emanuel Viebahn

Many stories combine fictional and non-fictional elements. In this talk, I will explore what this aspect of storytelling can teach us about the speech acts authors perform in telling stories. Existing accounts of speech acts in fiction capture the combination of fictional and non-fictional elements by entailing that authors produce a patchwork of different kinds of speech acts. I will point to problems of such an approach and will argue for an alternative view of speech acts in fiction that avoids these problems.

Novel Assertions and Novel Lies

James E. Mahon

In her recent article, “Novel Assertions: A Reply to Mahon” (2022), Daisy Dixon rejects the position I defend in “Novels Never Lie” (2019), namely, that literary works in general, and novels in particular, cannot be lies and cannot tell lies, because they do not contain any assertions. She argues that novels can contain both ‘profound assertions’ and ‘background assertions’, and she provides examples of these putative novel assertions. Novel assertions, therefore, are possible. If she is correct, then it follows that novel lies are possible. She concludes her article by saying “so the burden of proof is to now show that these [“statements within fiction” that she has offered] are in fact not assertions, or that the literary works that contain them are not novels”. In this paper I do two things. First, I take up the challenge to show that these “statements within fiction” that she has offered are not assertions and I argue that novel assertions are impossible. Second, I return to the claim in “Novels Never Lie” that there is a contradiction in claiming something is both a literary work and a lie.

The Normative Role of Fictionality

Richard Woodward

A common idea in recent work on fictionality — the phenomenon of things being true ‘in’ or ‘according to’ works of fiction — is that fictionality bears an important normative relation to the imagination. The core idea here is that fictionality stands to the imagination in a similar way to how truth stands to belief, i.e. that just as belief aims at what’s true, imagining aims at what’s fictional. Exactly how these slogans and ideas should be understood, however, remains a vexed question. My goal in this talk is to move the debate forward by considering a number of ways of conceiving of the normative link between fictionality and imagining, informed by candidate epistemological principles linking belief and truth. As we shall see, to the extent that there is a normative connection between fictionality and imagining, it is one that is fundamentally disanalogous to the relationship between truth and belief. To close, I will suggest an alternative conception of the normative role of fictionality.

Reading Literary Fiction: A Creative Use of Imagination

Julia Langkau

Imagining in response to fiction is commonly considered as being constrained by what is true in the fiction and hence, at least for the most part, not as up to the reader. In this paper, I will argue that reading fiction, in particular literary fiction, nevertheless crucially involves a creative use of the imagination. I will work towards an account of creative imagining by giving three minimal criteria and by explaining how imagination can be the source of creativity. I will finally distinguish creative imagining from closely related phenomena both on the side of creativity and on the side of imagination.

The Cooperative Principle in Fiction: Quality and Beyond

Neri Marsili

Grice famously argued that discourse is governed by the Cooperative Principle, and by Quality Maxims that enjoin speakers to tell the truth. This talk will discuss whether fictional discourse represents an exception. On the one hand, authors of fiction are allowed to depart from the truth as they please – which suggests that Quality Maxims are simply suspended in fiction. On the other hand, there is an important sense in which we expect narrators to truthfully recount the fictional events of the story. Perhaps Quality Maxims demand contributions to be “true in fiction”, i.e. “Try to make your contribution one that is true in the fictional world”. However, even this suggestion is problematic, since we ultimately accommodate most “insincere” utterances in fiction as cooperative contributions by the author. Apparently, this is because the revised Quality Maxim can be overridden by aesthetic considerations. I will explore this idea, examining how we weigh aesthetic considerations against expectations of Quality, and considering whether other Maxims behave in similar ways.

Names: fictional, real, full, and empty

Louis Rouillé

Names can be either fictional or real, depending on their origin: if introduced within pretence, it is fictional; if introduced seriously, it is real. Names can be either full or empty, depending on whether the purported referent exists or not: if reference is successful, it is full; if there is no referent, it is empty. Prima facie, one might think that the two distinctions interact: a name is either full or empty; if a name is empty, it is either fictional (based on a pretence) or real (based on a mistake). Here are paradigmatic examples: Aristotle is full, Hamlet is empty fictional, Vulcan is an empty real.

(Kripke 1973) famously challenged this intuitive picture by arguing that the two distinctions are orthogonal. Based on his seminal analysis of metafictional statements, he argued that paradigmatic fictional names, like Hamlet, are actually full for they refer to a real abstract artefact. Following Kripke, full names can be either real or fictional. As for empty names: some originate in “serious” mistake, like Vulcan, and some originate in pretence, like Gonzago (originating in Hamlet's fiction within the fiction) or Moloch (originating in a mistake within the biblical myth).

I will challenge Kripke's claim that the real/fictional and full/empty distinctions are orthogonal, by offering three kinds of counter-examples to the view. First, Kripke's category of “fictional fictional” (e.g. Gonzago) is highly unstable: fictional characters often become fictional fictional characters (Hamlet is fictional in **Jane Eyre**), and fictional fictional characters can become fictional characters (one can write a sequel to Gonzago's fiction). Second, Kripke does not handle well fusion of characters: when two fictional names happen to designate one single individual in the fiction (like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde), Kripke has to posit two distinct full fictional names (and two

corresponding abstract artefacts). Third, there are nonexistent fictional characters (like Lieutenant Kizhe) whose names are predicted to be empty fictional though they are indistinguishable from full fictional names, like Hamlet, from a semantic point of view.

Truth-value clarity and tricky questions

Sam Cumming

Can a horse count as an athlete? This is a tricky question. (When we speak of athletes, or non-athletes, we are not usually talking about horses, so there is not much to go on, for example, in our *usage*.) Sometimes the truth-value of an assertion -- e.g. *Secretariat* (the racehorse) *was one of the greatest athletes of all time* (Ludlow 2014) -- will depend on the answer to a tricky question, and as a result we may be unclear about its truth-value. Note that a slightly different assertion -- e.g. *Rocinante* (Don Quixote's run-down nag) *was one of the greatest athletes of all time* -- is clearly false. This is because our evaluation of it can circumvent the tricky question. Rocinante doesn't count as an athlete, roughly speaking, because he is weak, slow, and awkward.

Strawson (1950) observed, against Russell, that the truth-value of certain sentences containing empty referring terms -- e.g. *the king of France is bald* -- was unclear. In this paper, I will focus on assertions with a *failed presupposition of existence*, and presume that, where the truth-value of such assertions is unclear, it is because it depends on the answer of a tricky question (in the case above, whether *a nonentity can count as bald*). This perspective provides insight into cases where an assertion is intuitively clearly *false*, despite such a failed presupposition. They correspond to cases where one can determine the truth-value *without* answering the tricky question.