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FICTIONAL TRUTH*

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I

In order to analyse, evaluate or simply enjoy a piece of narrative fiction we must be able to extract from the text a series of events, together with a background against which the events take place. Even the most sparsely described narrative requires a "world" in which the protagonists act, though the features of this world may quickly shade off into indeterminacy. *Emma* takes place in Georgian England – at least its background is very similar to Georgian England; similar even in ways that are not made explicit by the text. Sherlock Holmes sleeps, eats and breathes, even though the text may not tell us that he does these things. Much, then, is "true in fiction" that is not *said* in fiction. Other things are left to the reader. What, exactly, does Dr. Watson look like? Presumably it is true in the stories by Conan Doyle that Watson has some definite look; but there is no definite look that it is true in the stories that he has. What exactly he looks like is something that it is up to us as readers to decide.

What, then, makes something fictionally true? How do we go about deciding what is fictionally true? These are the questions I want to answer in this paper. I shall also try, briefly, to answer some questions about the relation between fictional truth and interpretation. Is there an "intentional fallacy" that one can commit in deciding what is fictionally true? Is there an irremediable relativism involved in interpretation? What is the relation between fictional truth and literary style?

II

The notion of fictional truth that I am interested in here is applicable not to the author's own statements within his fictional text, but to the statements we make about the fiction. When Jane Austen writes that 'Emma made no

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answer, and tried to look cheerfully unconcerned' she writes falsely. If we repeat the utterance, or some paraphrase of it, what we say is true only if understood as elliptical for 'It is part of the story of *Emma* that Emma gives no answer to Mr. Knightley's rebuke', or something along those lines. To say that *P* is fictionally true is just to say that it is part of some story *F*, that *P*. Statements of this form may be abbreviated as 'In *F*, *P*'. The problem of fictional truth as I interpret it, is the problem of providing truth conditions for statements of this form.

David Lewis has given an account of the truth conditions for statements of the kind we are interested in.[1] His theory gives the right results in many cases and contains much that I shall preserve. But I believe it to be incorrect; not merely to the extent that it fails to accommodate certain intuitions about particular cases, but because it is mistaken about the *nature* of fictional truth. Locating the mistake will be a useful way to motivate my own proposal. Lewis offers us two distinct analyses to choose from. His first analysis goes like this. We consider a particular fiction *F* and we want to know whether a proposition *P* is true in it. Now consider all those worlds where *F* is told as known fact. Call such worlds *F*-worlds. *F*-worlds where a proposition *P* is true we will call *Fp*-worlds, and *F*-worlds where *P* is not true we will call $F^{\sim}p$-worlds. Then

(1) 'In *F*, *P*' is true iff there is an *Fp*-world which is closer to the actual world than any $F^{\sim}p$-world (p. 41).

We can reduce the basis for potential disagreement with Lewis by noting that this definition embodies a particular view about the truth conditions of counterfactuals. The right hand side is Lewis' attempt to explicate the idea that *P* would have been true if *F* had been told as known fact. So we may take Lewis' proposal to be simply that something is true in a fiction iff *it would have been be true were the fiction told as known fact*, without burdening ourselves with the extra task of deciding whether the machinery of possible worlds and their similarity relations is the right way to explicate the counterfactual construction. In this way we shall concentrate on the spirit rather than the letter of Lewis' proposal. So in discussing the prospects for (1), I shall construe the right hand side informally, as expressed by the italicized clause immediately above.

Analysis (1) makes fictional truth jointly the product of the story's explicit content, and what is true of the actual world. As Lewis notes, analysis

(1) will not suit everybody, since it will licence psychoanalytic explanations of character's behaviour (assuming psychoanalysis to be true) (p. 43). To some this will be no objection. But there are other difficulties. Suppose that *n* is the number of hairs on the head of Julius Caesar at the time he died. Nothing, I take it, in the Sherlock Holmes stories precludes this fact, or makes it to any degree probable or improbable. If the Holmes stories had been told as known fact it would still be true that there were *n* hairs in the head of Caesar when he died. Accordingly we must conclude that it is true in the stories of Sherlock Holmes that Julius Caesar had *n* hairs on his head at the time he died. This is not intuitively desirable. This fact, and countless similar facts that will be true in the Holmes stories on Lewis' view as expressed in (1) are quite extraneous to the stories.

Perhaps all this shows is that Lewis' definition (1) introduces irrelevant information into the story, and irrelevant information that does not interfere with the structure of the story as intuitively understood may not be harmful. But consider the following case. Suppose there is a Victorian novel in which Mr. Gladstone features as a minor character, without much being said about his personality or doings. No person's character was more widely regarded as exemplary in Victorian society than Gladstone's. Post-Victorian historical research, however, has suggested that Gladstone's 'rescue work' among London prostitutes was less nobly motivated than most Victorians were willing to believe. Suppose that, in fact, Gladstone was in many respects a morally monstrous person. What the story explicitly says about Gladstone is certainly consistent with this possibility; so the story being told as known fact requires no revision of actual world history with respect to Gladstone's character. So (1) has it that it is true in the story that Gladstone is immoral. But this is not intuitively true in our Victorian novel which, we will assume, adopts a complacent attitude towards the morals of the day. Its general tone is quite out of keeping with such a cynical view.

Here is another difficult case for (1). It has been argued that Henry James' story *The Turn of the Screw* is ambiguous between two very different interpretations.[2] Is the governess right in thinking that the ghosts of Quint and his lover threaten the children, or are the 'ghosts' merely figments of her own deranged imagination? Suppose one believes, as I think it is reasonable to do, that the actual world contains no ghosts but contains plenty of psychotic people. If the text is ambiguous between the two interpretations, then it can be told as know fact without requiring any changes in the actual world facts

about the absence of ghosts and the prevalence of mental disorder. So we are obliged to conclude that the governess is mad and that there are no ghosts in the story. But it seems wrong to make our interpretation of James' story depend so decisively on what we believe about the existence or non-existence of ghosts. Someone sceptical of ghosts is not *thereby* excluded from believing that *The Turn of the Screw* is a ghost story.

So we have reason to reject (1). For those who dislike psychoanalytic criticism, Lewis offers another definition that will also avoid the difficulties just mentioned. The idea is to make truth in fiction the joint product of what is explicit in the story, and what is commonly believed in the author's society. P is commonly believed if everyone believes P, everyone believes that everyone else believes P, and so on (p. 44). Let us call the class of worlds where what is commonly believed is true that the class of *belief worlds.* (All this has to be understood as relativized to a particular community.) Then we have:

(2) 'In F, P' is true iff for every belief world w there is an Fp-world closer to w than any $F{\sim}p$-world (p. 45).

Again, let us understand (2) in an intuitive way; something is true in fiction iff it would have been true if some belief world were actual and the fiction had been told as known fact.

(2) fares better than (1), because it gets rid of all those extraneous facts (like the number of hairs on Caesar's head) that are not part of common belief. It also preserves Gladstone's integrity in the case described above, and preserves the ambiguity of *The Turn of the Screw* (since the Victorian belief world was reasonably tolerant of ghosts). But what happens to fictional truth when there are no F-worlds? What is true in an inconsistent fiction? Lewis' original suggestion was to declare everything vacuously true in a fiction that has no F-worlds. If the consistency is a minor oversight, for instance as to the position of Watson's war wound, we are then to consider the various possible stories that would eliminate the inconsistency while staying close to the original in other respects. We then say that what is true in the original is not everything but rather what is true in all these revisions (p. 46). What about stories where the contradiction is not eliminable without wholesale destruction of the story? Lewis said that for stories about circle squarers and 'the worst sort of incoherent time travel fantasy story' we should just accept that the notion of fictional truth has no interesting applica-

tion (pp. 45–6). But this is not easily allowed. In order to work out whether a fiction is incoherent we sometimes have to work out what the story of the fiction *is*. Even if the story is wildly and manifestly incoherent – the main character turns out to be his own father and mother – there is still a story there. Incoherence of this kind may be regarded as a literary vice, but it does not prevent us from making the usual sorts of judgements about what is true in the fiction. And two utterly incoherent stories may be quite different in structure. Lewis' original analysis was not faithful to this requirement.

More recently Lewis has suggested that we adopt the following general strategy for inconsistent fiction: decompose the original story into consistent segments and then say that what is true in the story is what is true in any such segment. Thus we may get the result that P is true in F, $\sim P$ is true in F, but that $P \,\&\, \sim P$ is not true in F (since $P \,\&\, \sim P$ is true in no consistent segment), and nor is everything that follows from $P \,\&\, \sim P$; namely everything.[3] I can see two objections to this proposal. First, the shift from Lewis' original proposal to the new one (consider unions of consistent segments) is *ad hoc*. It is designed to solve the problem posed by inconsistent stories but sheds no light on any other aspect of fictional truth. It therefore represents a 'degenerating problem shift' in Lewis' programme. Secondly, the proposal does not cope well with fiction where the inconsistency is an obvious slip on the author's part. If Conan Doyle says that Watson's wound is in the leg on all but one occasion when he locates it in the shoulder, we surely want to say that the wound is in the leg and forget the reference to the shoulder. Lewis could get round this second objection by saying that for such non-seriously inconsistent fictions we are to go back to part of his original view: take the revision closest to the original story and work with what is true in that.[4] But then my first objection applies with renewed force: we have a further *ad hoc* move to distinguish fictions that are trivially inconsistent from fictions where the inconsistency is deeper. A theory that dealt with all these cases without having to make special provision for them would have much to recommend it. In the next section, after I have explained my own theory, we shall see that it has further advantages over Lewis' theory.

III

Lewis' strategy is to base the notion of truth in fiction on truth in a possible world. This seems natural enough. Truth in fiction is rather like truth, and

truth in a possible world is just an extension of the notion of truth. But is truth the right model for fictional truth? I believe not. I believe that truth in fiction is more like *belief* than truth. Consider the following parallels.

(A) Beliefs are "negation incomplete". There are propositions that a person does not believe either true or false. Similarly, some propositions are neither true nor false in a given fiction.

(B) Beliefs are not closed under deduction. People do not believe all the consequences of their beliefs. In particular, people do not usually believe contradictions that follow from their beliefs. We have already seen that fictional truth in the intuitive sense is not closed under deduction either. If what is true in the story has contradictory consequences, it may still be the case that nothing contradictory is true in the story.

(C) Beliefs can be contradictory. Someone may believe P and believe $\sim P$. We shall see reason for saying that in certain stories both P and $\sim P$ may be treated as part of the story. By feature (B), this may not lead to disaster. From a contradiction everything follows, but from a contradiction believed we cannot infer that everything is believed.

(D) If A believes P or Q it does not follow that A believes P or that A believes Q. Similarly, it may be true in *The Turn of the Screw* that the governess is either mad or sees ghosts. But it may still not be true in the story that she is mad, or true in the story that she sees ghosts.

(E) Someone may have an 'existentially quantified' belief without believing any substitution instance of the quantification. E.g., someone may believe that there is a perfect number without believing that 4 (or any other number) is perfect. Similarly, it may be fictional that Holmes has some teeth, but not fictional that he has n teeth, for any particular n.

(F) On at least some theories of belief there is a distinction to be made between explicit and implicit beliefs. Some beliefs may be stored in the brain, encoded in sentences of mentalese; others are purely dispositional. Similarly, some things are explicitly true in a fiction – because the text says they are – while others have to be arrived at by subtle methods of interpretation.

I do not mean to suggest that the truth-in-a-set-of-worlds approach to fictional truth cannot mirror at least some of these features. Perhaps it can mirror all of them (though I think it will do so only by a series of *ad hoc* approximations). But the lesson to draw here is that the truth-in-a-set-of-worlds approach gives us the right results about fictional truth only to the extent that

it succeeds in mirroring the familiar algebraic features of belief that I have just described. How much better, then, to derive fictional truth from belief itself? That is the strategy I shall adopt.

But there are difficulties for anyone who wants to mesh the two together. The most obvious is that readers do not normally believe fictional stories; nor is it intended by authors that readers should do so. I have argued elsewhere that the mark of fiction is the illocutionary intentions of the author: the author of fiction intends the reader to adopt the attitude of make-believe towards the text, and in normal circumstances the reader recognizes this intention.[5] But of course we can be mistaken about a speaker's or writer's illocutionary intentions. We can read a fictional work not knowing it to be fiction; believing it instead to be the product of non-deceptive assertion on the writer's part. Someone in that position might make various inferences about what the utterer believed and some of these inferences would be very widely assented to as rational in the light of the reader's beliefs. This, I think, gives us the connection between belief and fictional truth that we are looking for. Let *A* be the author of the fictional work. Then my proposal is this:

(3) 'In *F*, *P*' is true iff it would be reasonable for the informed reader of *F* who thought that *F* was the product of non-deceptive assertion to infer that *A* believed *P*.

Thus the proposal is not that fictional truth coincides with what the author believes – the author of fiction does not normally believe his story – but that it coincides with what the text provides evidence for him believing. To make this proposal a workable one we must assume, in addition, that the reader has some collateral information. We want it to be true that Holmes is human rather than a Martian in human shape, but the reader described in (3) would not, so far as I am aware, be able to infer this from the text alone. Where to fix the boundaries of legitimate collateral information seems to me decidable largely by seeing how various proposals conform to our intuitions about particular cases of fictional truth, though in Section IV I shall try to show that my own proposal has some weight of principle behind it. I suggest that our imagined reader has, in addition to the text, a knowledge of what is or was commonly believed in the author's community. That is what I mean by an "informed reader". Thus I follow Lewis' analysis (2) in making what is true in the fiction to be in some sense the product of the text and common

belief. I differ from him in how this product is to be calculated. How it is, on my view, to be calculated we shall see when we come to test the proposal against some problem cases that I take over from Lewis himself. And let us assume, temporarily, that we are dealing with a fiction that contains no contradictions, hidden or otherwise.

The only thing our reader knows about the author is that he belongs to a community with certain common beliefs. The best strategy for him to pursue in trying to infer the beliefs of the author will be to assume that his beliefs are conventional unless the text indicates that they are not. The ways in which deviations from conventionality are to be inferred will be rather complicated. Thus if the text indicates a belief on the author's part in dragons, it may be reasonable to infer also that he believes in unicorns, even though there is nothing said about unicorns in the text. I say this to indicate that it will not do to adopt the very simple strategy: assume that the author's beliefs are as close to being conventional as the explicit content of the text will allow. I have no rules to substitute for this one, but I take it that there would be considerable agreement in practice about how such inferences as this ought to proceed. We shall examine some of these inferences immediately.

I have said there are more truths in a fiction than are stated in or implicated by the text. Lewis gives an example:

> I claim that in the Holmes stories, Holmes lives nearer to Paddington Station than to Waterloo Station. A glance at the map will show you that his address in Baker Street is much nearer to Paddington. Yet the map is not part of the stories; and so far as I know it is never stated or implied in the stories themselves that Holmes lives nearer to Paddington. There are possible worlds where the Holmes stories are told as known fact rather than fiction which differ in all sorts of ways from ours. Among these are worlds where Holmes lives in a London arranged very differently from the London of our world, a London in which Baker Street is much closer to Waterloo Station than to Paddington (p. 41).

Lewis' analyses (1) and (2) can cope with this; so can my theory. I claim that it would be reasonable for our reader of Sherlock Holmes to suppose that Conan Doyle believed that Baker Street is closer to Paddington than to Waterloo. The inference would be this; Conan Doyle writes about events that he is acquainted with, many of which take place in London and into which many of London's actual buildings and other landmarks are incorporated. Someone who knew these things would probably also know the location of the main railway terminii. So it is true in the stories that Baker street is closer to Paddington than to Waterloo.

Lewis discusses another example, which leads him from (1) to (2). In *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* Holmes solves the mystery by showing that the victim succumbed to a Russell's viper that escaped up a bell rope. As a matter of scientific fact, this kind of snake is unable to climb a rope (it is not a constrictor). The story does not actually say that Holmes' solution is the correct one. So on definition (1), Holmes bungled the case (p. 43). Our definition (3) handles the case perfectly. The reader may reasonably infer that Conan Doyle believes that a Russell's viper can climb a rope; if Conan Doyle thought that Holmes had bungled the case he would surely have said so. And if he thought that this particular snake was some amazing exception to the species' general inability to climb ropes, he would have said so too. So it is reasonable to attribute to him the (erroneous) belief that Russell's viper is the kind of snake that can climb a rope. So this is true in the story, as it should be.

Now we come to some cases that Lewis presents as difficulties for both his (1) and (2).

> In the *Threepenny Opera* the principal characters are a treacherous crew... There is also a street singer. He shows up, sings the ballad of Mack the Knife, and goes about his business without betraying anyone. Is he also a treacherous fellow? The explicit content does not make him so. Real people are not so very treacherous, and even in Weimar Germany it was not overtly believed that they were, so background does not make him so either. Yet there is a moderately good reason to say that he is treacherous: in the *Threepenny Opera*, that is how people are ... everyone put to the test proves treacherous, the street singer is there along with the rest, so doubtless he too would turn out to be treacherous if we saw more of him (p. 45).

My definition will help us to get the right result here. Our reader, confronting the *Threepenny Opera*, may reason as follows.[6] Brecht describes a community in which everyone who is tested turns out to be treacherous. It would be reasonable of him to believe that untested members of that community are treacherous too. So it is reasonable to infer that Brecht believes this. So it is true in the fiction.

Here is Lewis' other example:

> Suppose I write a story about the dragon Scrulch, a beautiful princess, a bold knight, and what not. It is a perfectly typical instance of its stylized genre, except that I never say that Scrulch breathes fire. Does he nevertheless breathe fire in my story? Perhaps so, because dragons in that kind of story do breathe fire. But the explicit content does not make him breathe fire. Neither does background, since in actuality and according to our beliefs there are no animals that breathe fire. (It might just be analytic that nothing is a dragon unless it breathes fire. But suppose I never call Scrulch a dragon: I merely endow him with all the standard dragonly attributes except fire-breathing.) (p. 45).

Here again, my theory gives the right results. Even if the author does not say so, we may reasonably infer from his description of the beast that he believes it to be a dragon. It is common belief in the author's community that if something were a dragon it would breathe fire. Without evidence to the contrary, we should assume that he believed that this dragon breathed fire. There is no such contrary evidence, so it is true in the story that he breathed fire.[7]

How does my theory handle the various kinds of impossible fiction? Suppose that the inconsistency is a minor one: the positioning of Watson's wound from the Afghan campaign. Suppose that there are a number of occasions in the text where the wound is referred to; on one occasion it is said to be in the shoulder, on the others it is said to be in the leg. The reader will reasonably assume that Conan Doyle believes it to be in the leg (one slip being more likely than several). This will be what is true in the novel. If there is nothing in the text to indicate which hypothesis was actually believed by Conan Doyle, no inference can be made and it will not be true that it is in the leg, and not true that it is in the shoulder, though it will be true that it is in one or the other. These I take it are the intuitively desirable results. Suppose the fiction is unreconstructible without the contradiction. There may be no special problem here. We have to attribute to the author a belief in the falsity of some mathematical truth, or in the possibility of a kind of time travel that is incoherent, but we probably will not have to attribute to him a belief in any of the manifest contradictions that follow from these things. So nothing manifestly contradictory will be true in the story. And, certainly, not every proposition will be true in the story.

Now a story may contain an explicit contradiction of this irremediable kind. Thus a time travel story may say explicitly that an event both did and did not happen. There is no special problem here. It can be right to attribute to someone a belief in a proposition and a belief in its negation, though it would be unusual to do so. If someone avows both *P* and its negation, and his other beliefs are tightly connected with those beliefs, it seems to me that we should be willing to attribute contradictory beliefs to him. Such would be the reasonable inference with respect to the author in the case of this story. So it will be the case that contradictory propositions are true in our story. But it by no means follows that everything is true in our story, for people do not believe all the consequences of what they believe.

Now I come to what appears to be a difficulty for my own proposal.

Suppose we have a story that ends with the destruction of all life in the universe. Is the reader to attribute to the author the belief that he is dead? For that is surely how it is in the story. We could, perhaps, assume a reader who believes the author to be making predictions about what will happen (cast, for stylistic reasons, in the past tense). The proposal sounds rather *ad hoc*. But Lewis' theory faces this problem too; for such a fiction there are no *F*-worlds.[8] Even if my theory cannot cope adequately with these cases, I believe that I have shown it to be better than Lewis' theory for the reasons already explained.

IV

The reader whose activities I have been describing is not the typical reader of fiction. He is a reader who systematically mistakes the fictional work for serious, assertative utterance. But as readers of fiction not operating under this delusion we are able, in a rough and ready way, to work out what is true in the fiction; to supplement the text with assumptions about the world of the story. How do we do this?

I have already referred in passing to a theory that I favour, according to which what is distinctive of fiction is the nature of the author's illocutionary intentions. In simple cases the author of fiction utters the proposition *P* intending the audience to make-believe that *P* is being asserted, by means of the Gricean mechanism.[9] The author thus extends to the reader an invitation to play a game of internalized make-believe with the text. This involves making-believe that the author believes certain things which he wants the reader also to believe as a result of reading his text. Thus the reader make-believedly explores the belief world of the author, using the text as a map to guide him: he 'make believes' that the text is evidence for what the author believes. Discovering what is true in the fiction is, for the reader who knows that he is reading fiction, constituted by a series of inferences about what the author believes, these inferences occuring within the scope, so to speak, of the reader's make-believe. Often the inference is more or less immediate; the author says '*P*', therefore he believes *P*. In some cases the inference is more extended, as when we infer that the author is using irony, metaphor, metonomy or some other non-literal device. Thus we do not take Chaucer's uniformly approving remarks about his characters in the *Canterbury Tales* at face value. We conclude that much of what he says about the friar, for

instance, is the very opposite of what he believes; the very opposite, indeed, of what is true of the friar. Thus we often infer the author's beliefs (and thereby what is true in the fiction) by working out what is conversationally implicated (in the sense of Grice) by his words, just as we do in the course of a conversation.[10] (Reading a fiction is thus very like having a one sided conversation with the author.) We also infer, if we want to explore the world of the fiction in a more exhaustive way, beliefs not explicit in or implicated by the text, but reasonably attributable to the author on the assumption that he shares the common beliefs of his community. We have seen in the previous section how this can be done and how it leads to intuitively correct results about what is true in fiction. Thus we arrive at our decisions about what is fictionally true, not by mistakenly believing the text to be asserted, but by making-believe that it is. But the inferences that it is reasonable to make in the case of mistaken belief are exactly the inferences that it is reasonable to make in the case of make-belief – since make-belief is a conscious mimicking of belief. So we can afford to spell out the conditions for fictional truth as we have done in (3), without commiting ourselves to the view that fictional stories are meant to be believed. The way in which make-belief mirrors belief guarantees the extensional correctness of (3).

This explains how what is true in a fiction transcends the author's intentions. It is true in the Holmes stories that Holmes lives close to Paddington, regardless of whether Conan Doyle intended that this proposition be part of our make-belief. Indeed, the author may intend a proposition to be true in a fiction without it thereby being true in the fiction. Thus if Conan Doyle had all along planned to reveal Holmes as a Martian changeling in a final story that for some reason he never got round to writing, we would not, I think, want to say that it is true in the actual stores that Holmes is a Martian changeling, even if Conan Doyle's private correspondence definitely revealed this intention. And the reason why is clear from the foregoing discussion: a knowledge of the text together with a knowledge of what was commonly believed in the author's society would not enable someone playing our make-believe game to infer that the author believed this.

Wimsatt and Beardsley, in the course of their attack on the "intentional fallacy", argued that the author must be judged, not by what he merely intended to do, but by what he did do.[11] The method favoured here for determining fictional truth is entirely in accordance with this reasonable

demand. The author can make something true in fiction only if he can make his utterances such that what he intends can reasonably be inferred from those utterances. But in other respects we get results more acceptable than theirs. Wimsatt and Beardsley go wrong, as many have pointed out, when they insist that the text must be judged entirely on its own account and that inferences that employ information not available in the text itself are fallacious. From the Sherlock Holmes stories, considered, merely as a sequence of words, we cannot infer that Holmes lives near Paddington, and is not a Martian in disguise. Filling out the story in a way that is intuitively correct demands that we treat the text as the intentional product of an historically situated agent. But there is an intentional fallacy in supposing that something can be true in a story simply because the author thought of it as being so. Interpreting the text is not a matter of plumbing the author's private beliefs, beliefs that one would not suspect the author of holding given only a knowledge of the text and its context of shared belief. The beliefs that determine what is true in the fiction are those and only those that the text and its context suggest that the author holds (given, of course, that we are readers engaged in the intended game of make-believe).[12] Where, exactly, do Wimsatt and Beardsley go wrong? The following quotation illustrates both their mistake, and how close they are to the truth of the matter.

> ... what is (1) internal is also public: it is discovered through the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general all that makes a language and culture; while what is (2) external is private or idiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact: it consists of revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem. ...[13]

For them, what is internal is legitimate evidence for interpretation; what is external is not. If we fix on their claim that what is internal is what is public we see their mistake, for what is public ("all that makes a culture") goes beyond what is internal to the text. It is also constituted by what is commonly believed in the author's community – for common belief is, so to speak, maximally public knowledge. In part the subject matter of this knowledge is the conventions of language, which Wimsatt and Beardsley wish to include as legitimate evidence, but it also concerns matters of non-linguistic fact – the locations of famous buildings, the characters of famous persons, the means of transport most likely to be adopted in a particular situation, etc. Drop the restriction to "internal" evidence, retain the distinction be-

tween public and private, and Wimsatt and Beardsley's proposal falls in line with my own – at least when we restrict ourselves to the question of fictional truth (more on this restriction in Section VI).

We can quickly summarize my thesis by formulating it in terms of supervenience: fictional truth supervenes on the text together with the context of its utterance. If two texts are linguistically indistinguishable, and are both produced in communities with the same common beliefs, the same propositions are true in them.

V

What are the consequences of this view of fictional truth for the problem of interpretative relativism? There are various views that one might subscribe to as versions of interpretative relativism, because they are opposed to interpretative absolutism: the view that for every fictional work there is a unique correct interpretation of that work. An extreme view is this: since a text has no meaning in itself, any interpretation of it is as good as any other. In so far as I understand him, this is what Derrida is telling us. A less extreme view is that correctness of interpretation is not a matter of conformity to the meaning of the text (there is no such thing) but rather of conformity to current community wide standards of interpretation. This is the sort of picture that Stanley Fish presents us with; it gives the critic a narrower range of interpretative options than does the first, "anything goes", version of relativism, but it does not allow us to say that there is more wrong with an interpretation than that most critics do not like it.[14] Less extreme again is the view that, while there are objective (that is, community transcendent) standards of interpretation that will enable us to eliminate some interpretations, these standards are not such as to guarantee that some one interpretation will satisfy them to a degree greater than any other. This is Quine's picture of the underdetermination of theory by evidence applied to literature. It may be called 'objective relativism', to distinguish it from the other two versions of relativism that I have mentioned and which are subjectivist in denying the existence of community transcendent standards of interpretation.

I see no paradox in the term "objective relativism", for the objective-subjective contrast is different from the absolute-relative one. What is at stake in the first is the existence or otherwise of a unique, determinate fictional reality; what is at stake in the latter is the existence or otherwise

of objective standards according to which we can say that some interpretations are better than others. The position I am advocating here is a version of objective-relativism. There are objective standards of interpretation – they are the standards which ought to (and to some extent do) regulate our interpretation of people's ordinary speech behaviour. But these standards do not always guarantee a winner in the interpretation stakes. While there are beliefs that it certainly would be unreasonable to attribute to the author, there may be distinct sets of beliefs that it would be equally reasonable to attribute to him, and no other set of beliefs that it is more reasonable to attribute to him. And on my view there is no "hidden reality" that can break such a tie; the limits of reasonable inference are the limits of fictional truth. In particular, the tie cannot be broken by comparing the rivals with what the author actually intended for his work. To believe that it could is to be caught in a very real "intentional fallacy".

VI

All this is said in connection with that aspect of literary interpretation that is concerned with finding out what is true in the fiction. There is a great deal more to literary interpretation than this, and my theory will not, I think, apply to all of it. Here is one kind of example where it does not apply. (The example is due to Dennis Dutton, and it was brought to my attention by Graham Oddie.) We are given to understand that *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* is a seriously meant novel about religious experience. It is not a parody of such a novel. But this may well not be inferrable from the text together with the community context. Indeed, if charity has anything to do with interpretation, it may well be that it is reasonable to interpret it as a parody. Its not being one is a matter of the author's actual intentions, even if there is nothing in the text to indicate what they are.[15] Indeed, a moment's reflection will show us that questions like this – is the work a parody of the genre or a serious contribution to the genre? – are quite beyond the scope of the methods I advocate for determining truth in fiction. For these methods require that we make believe that the text is the product of assertive utterance, and this excludes the raising of questions about what *kind* of fiction we are reading. It shows also that fictional reading is not just a matter of making-believe that the text is assertively uttered. Suppose I am reading a detective novel; a novel that appears to have all the features standard for the genre.

Awareness of the work's genre will create in me all sorts of expectations about what is likely to happen later in the work (it will be the least likely suspect that will be revealed to have done it) and about what things are relevant to the outcome (the apparently least relevant thing will be the vital clue). But these sorts of expectations – often an integral part of our aesthetic response to the work – are not produced within the "make-believe" framework. If I simply make believe that the test is assertively uttered – a report of occurring events, for instance – it will be ridiculous to suspect the least likely character, *just because* he is the least likely one. The response to fiction is a complex product of make-believe and judgements about the work that do not occur within the scope of the make-believe at all. Exactly how our interpretative strategies concerning genre and the like connect with our strategy for determining fictional truth is an important question, but it falls outside the rather narrow scope of the present essay.

Another point I want to make concerns the relations between fictional truth, as I conceive it, and the literary concept of style. In an interesting article, Jenefer Robinson argues that individual style – as opposed to the style of a group or period – is the way in which the author expresses his personality through the text.[16] Stylistic elements are just those aspects of the text that contribute to the expression of that personality. On this hypothesis we can see a close connection between the individual style of a fiction and what is true in that fiction. Stylistic features will be crucial determinants of what is true in the story. For inferring the author's beliefs will require us to make all sorts of assumptions about what kind of person he is. Is the author cynical or idealistic; credulous or sceptical? Two authors may write roughly similar stories, but stylistic features of their work may indicate very different outlooks. If they do, there may be only a narrow area of intersection between what is true in the two fictions.[17] Thus we see why style is so very important in fiction. It is not just a matter of literary elegance; it is a matter of the very identity of the fictional story itself. Style and content are thus not independent features of a fictional work.[18]

VII

Finally a comment on the problem of 'authorial voice' in fiction. Sometimes we identify the author with a narrator (who may or may not be the actual author) who appears explicitly as a character in or commentator on the action of the work. Sometimes there is no explicit narrator, the story being

told in the third person. To work out what is true in such a fiction we have to assume that the story is being told to us by someone who does not signal his presence in an explicit way. Sometimes, indeed, we must identify the utterer with such an unobtrusive narrator even when there is a narrator who draws attention to himself. Thus we sometimes have to conclude that the narrator is a crushing bore; but we do not work this out by inferring that he believes himself to be a crushing bore. Sometimes, as in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, the explicit narrator is unreliable: what Kinbote the explicit narrator believes and what is true in that story come apart. What is true in such a story is a matter of what beliefs it is reasonable to attribute to the unobtrusive narrator who, by putting words in the mouth of the explicit narrator in a certain way, signals his scepticism about what the explicit narrator says.[19]

NOTES

* I am grateful to Alan Hazen, Graham Oddie, Denis Robinson and Aubrey Townsend for comments on an earlier version of this paper. Special thanks are due to David Lewis for discussions which enabled me better to understand the strengths and weaknesses of my theory and of his own.

[1] D. K. Lewis, 'Truth in fiction', American Philosophical Quarterly 15 (1978), pp. 37–46. Further references to this work are given, by page number only, in the text.

[2] See G. Willens (ed.), A Casebook on Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (New York: Crowell, 1960).

[3] See Lewis, 'Postscript to "Fictional Truth" ', Philosophical Papers, Volume 1 (Oxford University Press, 1983).

[4] See Lewis, 'Postscript', p. 277.

[5] See my 'What is fiction?', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 43 (1985), pp. 385–92.

[6] The fact that operas and plays are not writen in conventional narrative form may be thought to be a problem here. Perhaps it is best, when working out what is true in an opera or play, to work out the beliefs it would be reasonable to attribute to the author on the assumption that he is staging this drama as a re-enactment of events that he believes to have taken place.

[7] There is a kind of fiction that will have to be handled rather carefully on my analysis. Suppose a contemporary author writes a novel set in the Middle Ages. There are two different ways in which such a novel can be given a setting. It may be set in the mediaeval world as we, from our contemporary perspective, presume that world to be, or it may be set in the world that we presume mediaeval people to have believed themselves to be living in. If the latter is true then we have to be careful about which of the author's beliefs we are trying to infer from the text. We will go wrong if we try to decide what is true in the fiction by deciding what the author thinks the mediaeval world was like. We must decide instead what he thinks that mediaeval people thought their world was like.

[8] See Lewis, 'Truth in fiction', p. 45.

[9] See my 'What is fiction?', especially p. 387 and Note 8. For important work on the notion of make-believe in fiction see Kendall Walton, 'Pictures and make-believe', Philosophical Review 82 (1973), pp. 283–319, and 'Fearing fictions', Journal of Philosophy 75 (1978), pp. 37–46.

[10] See H. P. Grice, 'Logic and conversation', in P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.), Semantics and Syntax, volume 3: Speech Acts (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 41–58.
[11] See W. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, 'The intentional fallacy', Sewanee Review 54 (1949). Reprinted in The Verbal Icon (University of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 3–18.
[12] Kendall Walton makes a distinction within the class of fictional truths between make-believe and imaginary truths. What is make-believe, unlike what is imaginary, depends upon facts other than simply facts about what someone merely imagines or stipulates to be the case. Reading *The Brothers Karamazov,* I make it fictionally true that I smile at Alyosha, merely by imagining that I do. Looking at Goya's portrait of the Duke of Wellington, I make it fictionally true that I smile at the Duke by smiling at his image in the picture. The first is an imaginary truth, the second a make-believe one (see Walton 'Pictures and make-believe', especially Note 12). My claim about what is true in fiction can be put in Walton's terms by saying that everything that is true in fiction is make-believe rather than imaginary. The author makes something true in his work, not merely by imagining it to be true, or by deciding that it is true, but by performing the right kind of illocutionary act.
[13] Wimsatt and Beardsley *ibid.*, p. 10 of the reprint.
[14] See Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? (Harvard University Press, 1980). Fish's view of interpretation has obvious affinities with Kuhn's view of scientific method and with Polanyi's. There are also parallels between Derrida and Feyerabend's 'methodological anarchism'.
[15] For a similar example see P. D. Juhl, Interpretation (Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 121–2.
[16] See J. Robinson 'Style and personality in the literary work', Philosophical Review 94 (1985), pp. 227–47.
[17] The personality that Fielding reveals in *Tom Jones* is a good example. As Wayne Booth says 'It is his wisdom and learning and benevolence that permeate the world of the book, set its comic tone between the extremes of sentimental indulgence and scornful indignation, and in a sense redeem Tom's world of hypocrites and fools' (The Rhetoric of Fiction, University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 217).
[18] Thus I disagree with Kendall Walton: "... style is not *intrinsic* or *essential* to fictional representation. We can consider the fictional world and the apparent action of creating the world separately. In understanding a work of fiction we do not *need* to think of it as a vehicle of someone's action, as something with a style. In this sense *style* can be separated from *content*. 'Serious' discourse allows no such separation. Nonfictional utterances are *essentially* vehicles of illocutionary actions and essentially have styles" ('Fiction, fiction making, and styles of fictionality', Philosophy and Literature 7 (1980), p. 87; italics in the original). Walton is wrong twice over. Not only are style and content inseparable in fiction, they are separable in non-fiction. Could not Einstein have presented us with exactly the same theory in his 1905 paper on relativity if he had adopted a different style? For an argument to the effect that fictional utterances are also essentially vehicles of illocutionary actions see my 'Response to Kendall Walton', Philosophy and Literature, forthcoming.
[19] Alexander Nehamas puts the point well when he says "The author is postulated as the agent whose actions account for the text's features; he is a character, a hypothesis, which is accepted provisionally, guides interpretation, and is in turn modified in its light.... The regulative end is to construct, for each text, a complete, historically plausible author – a character who may not coincide with the actual writer's self understanding, fragmentary and incomplete as it probably is" ('The postulated author: Critical monism as a regulative ideal', Critical Inquiry 8 (1981), p. 145 and p. 147).

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