

The Nature of Fiction Workshop, University of London, 01/05/2013

This workshop grabbed my attention as it was bringing together four philosophers who have been locked in debate for some time on a topic of much interest to me; what makes a fiction? However, what particularly excited me was the notion of a workshop that placed philosophers and papers together that seemed to relate to each other in a very direct way, thus allowing the attendees to really map and engage with the topic whilst watching these thinkers respond to each other live. I was hoping to get some ideas for a conference I am organising in 2014 which will bring together philosophers and literary critics in a similarly, if not even more, direct and active way. The workshop has certainly given me much to think about in terms of how to structure such a conference. If this sounds like something that would interest you, keep an eye out for 'Broadening Horizons: Philosophical and Literary Approaches to Meaning and Interpretation' – an interdisciplinary conference due to take place at Warwick University at the end of March 2014.

Stacie Friend – 'Defining fiction without imagination'

As an exemplar for other such workshops Stacie Friend spent the majority of her talk outlining the debate in this field thus far. She did so clearly and quickly and although I may not have picked up all the points I did feel orientated enough that nothing for the rest of the day made me feel as though I was stranded at sea.

The standard view when it comes to the literature on the nature of fiction, Friend explained, held that fiction extended an invitation to imagine/make-believe to the reader. However, there is a minority, which includes Friend, which denies this as such a criterion does not cover many of the difficult cases or intuitions about certain works.

Friend also rejects the notion that fictions are defined by the nature of the fictive utterances that constitute the parts of the work. This approach appears to lead towards something an 'infection' theory. In other words, one fictive utterance can 'infect' the utterances surrounding it and thus make the whole a fiction and every utterance a fictive one, when it appears as if the majority of the work is fact.

The alternative account that Friend briefly finished with suggested that the categories of fiction/non-fiction acted much more like *genres* insofar as membership in their 'club' comes via a variable cluster of non-essential (as opposed to necessary and sufficient) conditions and that classification affects our appreciation of them as works. The analysis of fiction/non-fiction as genre and the difference this makes to our appreciation is, argues Stacie, a much more fruitful line of inquiry than other models' attempts at defining effects of classification *a priori*.

David Davies – 'Fictive utterance, fictional works, and fictional narratives'

Davies presented us with his notion of (in)fidelity in relation to fictive utterance. Non-fiction is bound by *fidelity* – i.e. it must attempt to be faithful to what is the case. This is not so in fiction. Fiction is potentially bound by a number of other things (to be entertaining, morally illuminating, etc.) but does not have a constraint on its fidelity to reality. In fact, fiction prescribes to us that we imagine certain things that are not part of reality. However, not all fictions must purely be made up of utterances that are not true to reality – for example, Sherlock Holmes lived in London does not require us to imagine London in the same way it requires us to imagine Sherlock Holmes as London is a real place. We seem to have a situation where a fictional event or character is prescribed *of* a real setting. We are prescribed to imagine Holmes and his antics but *not* London – at least not in the

same sense. London is the real setting *against which* we are supposed to imagine these other things. London is one of the things we are *not* being *asked* to imagine.

Davies is ultimately dealing with worries that a fictive utterance account could not give a comprehensive account of what counted as a work of fiction, for fictive and non-fictive utterances often seem to intertwine in multiple ways across a variety of texts. His account can continue to define fiction by fictive utterances (via a fidelity/infidelity criterion) as we have located which are the fictive utterances, the ones that are asking us to imagine, and these make up the fictive content of a fiction, whilst separating them from the non-fictional elements (those against which we are asked to imagine the fictive).

Kathleen Stock – 'Why be generic when you can be imaginative?'

Stock reminded us that amongst all this talk of carefully constructed works we should not lose sight of those other fictions that we come across in our day to day life; jokes, the stories our children tell, and so on. To start with her basics, a fiction just is something composed of fictive utterances and a fictive utterance is an utterance that is part of a set of utterances that go beyond what you believe to be true (the set of utterances and the things you believe may well be largely co-extensive, but they cannot be *completely* coextensive otherwise it wouldn't count as imagining and thus fiction on Stock's account).

Stock used this to argue that whilst the text may *contain* a fiction, we don't say the text *is* a fiction as the larger set of utterances can be isolated from that fiction. A fiction just is a set of utterances, all of which are intended to be imagined together and may be put to the services of belief but go beyond what is believed. A non-fiction is a set of utterances which *in total* is not a fiction.

Greg Currie – 'Fiction, Imagination, and Supervenience'

Currie also takes the basic unit as the utterance and maintained that utterances have a fine enough structure that not all utterances in a fiction must be fictional, although the fictionality of a work can be explained via the fictionality of the utterances. He further held that an utterance can be fictional when what is communicated by means of that utterance is produced with the intention that the hearer/reader imagine, rather than believe, what is communicated.

These were the basics he took Friend to be rejecting but he maintained that she had made a mistake in interpreting her work. Friend's mistake was that she saw works of fiction in his theory as a case of "natural kinds" (i.e. they have an essence). However, he clarified to us that his actual view is only that there can be no difference in the fictive state of works without there being a difference in the fictive state of utterer's intentions. There is no appeal to essences here.