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## Standing in the last ditch: on the communicative intentions of fiction-makers<sup>1</sup>

Pre-publication version of a paper which appeared in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 72: 351–363

Philip Sydney, well known for having said that the poets assert nothing and so do not lie, added rather unhelpfully that they tell us what should or should not be, rather than what is. Perhaps Sydney was responding to the thought that it is not enough to say what fiction-makers don't do, which is (most saliently) the making of assertions; we need an account of what they do.<sup>2</sup> Agreed, but we need a better one than Sydney's. Poets (aka fiction-makers) do not always engage in advocacy or moralising, they engage in it less, probably, than authors of nonfiction do, and where they do it is usually much more indirect than telling. Some of us have suggested that what fiction-makers do is offer us things to imagine, that this is what is distinctive of fiction and what distinguishes it from narrative-based but assertive activities such as journalism or history.

Offering people things to imagine can be done in different ways. I might offer you something which, as a matter of fact, is an appropriate vehicle for imagining; perhaps it would not then matter to the fictional status of what is on offer that I intended it to be used in that way. Or my act of offering might make it clear that my intention is that it be used in that way; perhaps it is that manifestation of intention that is crucial. Kendall Walton emphasises the first way, holding that what matters for our judgements about fiction is whether the thing functions to authorise imaginings, not whether it was intended to do so.<sup>3</sup> I disagree, and hold that it is the maker's intention which confers

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was given at the Richard Wollheim memorial lecture at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, San Diego, October 2013. I am grateful to the society for the opportunity to return to this topic after a number of years, and to a number of people in the audience on that occasion for their comments, especially Neil van Leeuwen whose comment made me see a weakness in the defence I was offering. I am grateful also to Stacie Friend for a number of helpful discussions of this issue and for the insightful papers she has written on this topic, and to Anna Ichino for comments on an earlier version.

<sup>2</sup> Sydney says that "to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false", so not to lie is either not to affirm or not to affirm truly. But "though [the fiction-maker] recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true he lieth not" (*Defence of Poesie*, first published 1595, p.66 of the 1891 Cassell & Company edition). Perhaps assertion is a particularly strong form of saying, below which would come such things as suggesting and hypothesising, and Sydney is surely to be understood as denying that fiction-makers put forward what they say as in any way a candidate for truth. But for the sake of simplicity I will contrast fiction-making only with assertion in what follows.

<sup>3</sup> Walton might say that to be a fiction-maker one must intend what one offers to serve as a guide to imagining, and it must be true that it does so serve, but that things can be fictions via other routes, in which case they are fictions without fiction makers. Or he might say that one can be a fiction maker in virtue of crafting a story-telling artefact which comes to be used as a guide to imagining even though one does not intend it to be so used. What those two positions have in common is that there are fictions which are not the product of the intention to make fiction.

fictional status.<sup>4</sup> My view is parallel to the view of Wollheim on depiction.<sup>5</sup> We may see a face in many things—clouds, paintings, frosted windows. But of these only paintings are depictions, because only they are intended to be such that something is seen in them. Similarly, we may treat the Bible, *Middlemarch*, or a language-like combination of erosion marks as a guide to imagining. But of these only *Middlemarch* is a fiction because only it is intended by its maker to be a guide to imagining.

Many, I think, feel the intuitive appeal of this idea at the same time as they sense looming problems for any proposal about fiction's nature based straightforwardly on the identification of fiction with the to-be-imagined. I will formulate a very weak version of the proposal which is not vulnerable to some objections recently presented. But while this version is weak it is also quite precise, and its precision brings into view certain other problems which have not so far been attended to. To the extent that these problems are serious, the prospects for an intentional theory of fiction look, I'm sorry to say, poor; the version susceptible to the objections is weak, and anything weaker still but not so susceptible could hardly be thought of as a theory of fiction, though it might supplement such a theory.

### 1. Grice

The theory I advocate observes the principle, associated with Grice, that communicative acts are individuated by the communicative intentions of their agents. Grice did not endorse or even (so far as I know) consider the theory, but it may be well to spend a moment thinking about what Grice said that might be relevant to this. Two things he said are suggestive: one is that there is a distinction between (as he put it) saying and "making as if to say"; the other is that "to be ironical is, among other things, to pretend."<sup>6</sup> Since for Grice saying P entails meaning P, which requires the intention to induce or activate the belief that P, or at least the belief that the speaker believes P, we should say that a fiction-maker does not say that Holmes lived at 221b Baker Street, but merely makes as if to say this.<sup>7</sup> We might leave it an open question whether there are forms of making as if to say P which do not count as cases of pretending to say that P, but pretending is surely one way. Perhaps then the most authentically Gricean view of fiction that we have is that of

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Macdonald briefly endorses this idea in "The language of fiction", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 28 (1954): 171. The view is developed in Chapter 1 of my *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); see references there to related views. See also Lamarque, Peter and Stein Haugom Olsen 1994: *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Davies, David 1996: "Fictional Truth and Fictional Authors". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36, pp. 43-55; Stock, Kathleen, "Fictive Utterance and Imagining", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 85 (2011): 145-161. The view is adopted in the final chapter of Peter Goldie's *The Mess Inside*, Oxford University Press, 2012. Views of this kind usually go with some limitation on the extent to which, or the way in which, a work of fiction can be true (see e.g. *The Nature of Fiction*, p.46). It will not distort the present argument to ignore this here.

<sup>5</sup> Wollheim, "Seeing as, seeing in and pictorial representation", in *Art and Its Objects*, Second edition, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> See Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*, 30-31, 54.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed exposition of Grice's views concerning these interlocking notions and some important objections to them, see Stephen Neale, "Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language", *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 15 (1992): 509 - 559.

Searle, who has argued that fiction makers do not make assertions: rather, they (nondeceptively) pretend to make them.<sup>8</sup> That view is different from the view I am defending here, which is that when fiction-makers utter “P” they manifest Gricean intentions that we imagine P, and the manifestation of these intentions makes their utterances (real) cases of fictive utterances, and not cases of pretend assertive utterances. Some readers may feel that Searle’s view is preferable, or wonder how a reasoned decision could be made between them. To them I say that my defence of the view I call Intentionalism serves equally well (and, ultimately, equally badly) as a defence of the “pretend-assertion” view associated with Searle, as long as we are allowed to add to it the important provision that the purpose of the pretend utterances constitutive of fiction is to get the audience to imagine what the speaker pretends to assert.<sup>9</sup> That granted, one has then merely to take, in what follows, the expression “fictive utterance” as having a disjunctive meaning, namely “utterance which is either fictive in the sense defined immediately above or a case of pretended assertion”. The argument will go through, I believe, under that more inclusive reading as well as it does under the restrictive reading confined to the first disjunct.

Since I have mentioned Gricean intentions I should say one more thing about Grice’s own views by way of background to the present project. Grice argued that in order to mean something by what one does, one must (i) intend the audience to recognise one’s intention to affect them in a certain way, and (ii) intend to achieve that effect partly by means of their recognition of that intention. This requirement of a reflexive intention has proved controversial and Grice and others have proposed a number of amendments to the requirement, some of them quite complicated.<sup>10</sup> Others have sought to simplify rather radically. Sperber and Wilson point out that once intention (i) is satisfied communication has taken place; the addition of intention (ii) is an attempt to draw a sharp line between cases of merely showing, for which (ii) fails, and cases of genuine telling where (ii) holds. They argue that there is no such dividing line but rather a continuum of cases all of which fall within the theoretically more interesting class of what they call ostensive-inferential communication.<sup>11</sup> I won’t try to adjudicate this dispute here, because resolving the question that engages me—can we give an intentionalist account of fiction?—does not

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<sup>8</sup> Searle, “The logical structure of fictional discourse”, in his *Expression and Meaning*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> Searle does not discuss this audience-focused aspect of fictive communication though he does, at the end of his essay, ask why “we attach such importance and effort to texts which contain largely pretended speech acts.” Part of the answer, he says, lies in “the crucial role, usually underestimated, that imagination plays in human life, and the equally crucial role that shared products of the imagination play in human social life” (ibid, 332). Searle is thinking here about ways in which pretended utterances serve to convey serious messages, and is not making a point about the value that imagining has in itself. But the presumption seems to be that audience’s picking up of serious messages from fictions is mediated by acts of imagining on their part, an idea which comports well with the provision I suggest above that we add to his theory.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Grice, “Utterer’s meaning and intention”, Chapter 5 of his *Studies in the Way of Words*, Harvard University Press, 1989. I based the account in *The Nature of Fiction* on a version due to Kent Bach & Robert M. Harnish, 1979. *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*. Boston: MIT Press.

<sup>11</sup> See *Relevance*, Chapter 1, Second Edition, Blackwell, 1995, Section 10. Sperber and Wilson introduce a number of other changes to the Gricean account, resulting in a radically different theory.

depend on specific assumptions about the structure of the utterer's intentions. At least, the arguments that I will consider below do not so depend. When I speak, in what follows, about the communicative intentions of a fiction maker, I have in mind the minimally Gricean condition that one intends that one's intention that the audience should imagine some proposition be recognised.

Grice also advocated a distinction between what is said and what is implicated, and developed a taxonomy of implicatures, as he called them.<sup>12</sup> Later in this paper I will draw on these ideas.

## 2. *Supervenience*

In defending the Intentionalist view I argued that we should take the basic unit of fiction not as the work—the novel, say—but as the utterance. Utterances are productive of works; one produces a novel by engaging in certain acts of utterance.<sup>13</sup> And utterances have a finer structure than works; a work is usually the product of many utterances and it is natural to think that the many utterances that are productive of something we are happy to call a fiction need not all be fictional. But an utterance itself can easily be wholly fictional; it is so when what is communicated by means of that utterance is produced with a certain intention: the intention that the hearer/reader imagine, rather than believe, what is communicated. Many such utterances can easily be identified in works we call fictional, though I don't claim that it is always easy to distinguish fictive utterance from assertion. Nor do I say that all utterances associated with a fiction are wholly fictive or wholly non-fictive. The one below, which we can think of as appearing in a slightly arch novel, isn't:

1. Emily, being a heroine in a romantic novel, lived happily ever after.<sup>14</sup>

I don't think that we are being asked to imagine that Emily lived happily ever after and that she was a heroine in a novel. It is not easy to say what is going on in such cases, which seem to involve odd collisions between what is true—that Emily is fictional--and what is part of the story—that she lived happily ever after. But we need worry about this, as I will show in a moment.

I'll be slightly tedious at this point and introduce two bits of terminology. Suppose we have a work F, produced by a sequence of utterances. The *intentional profile* of the work will specify everything relevant about the communicative intentions behind those utterances—whether we are supposed to imagine or believe something and what it is we are to imagine or believe, or whether perhaps the utterance is intended to produce both effects, or whether it is indeterminate what the intention is, or that no coherent account

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<sup>12</sup> Grice, "Logic and Conversation", in *Studies in the Way of Words*.

<sup>13</sup> For the sake of simplicity I individuate utterances sententially: each sentence in the text counts as one utterance. For certain purposes we may need more complex ways, some of which would involve expanding a given sentence of the text into two or more sentences. I'll ignore that possibility here.

<sup>14</sup> For more subtle examples of this kind see the final pages of *Northanger Abbey*.

of the intention can be given (see 1 above). Now we might say of a work that it is fiction, or that it is nonfiction, or that it is largely fiction or non-fiction, or that it is about equally both, or that it is indeterminate what its status is. Whatever of this kind it is correct for us to say about F will be its *fictional status* (so having a fictional status is not at all the same as being fiction). We may now express a supervenience thesis: a work's fictional status supervenes on its intentional profile. Or: works with the same intentional profile have the same fictive status. Or we might give this a more controversial formulation: once you fix the facts about the maker's communicative intentions, you fix the facts about the work's fictional status. We will see why this is controversial.

### 3. *Fiction, more or less*

I'll say more about how we should understand the supervenience claim in a moment but now I want to comment on the idea of fictional status. How fine grained can these distinctions within the category *fictional status* get? Should we think of this as something that comes in degrees, which we could represent, probability like, with a continuous variable between 0 and 1, with pure nonfiction and pure fiction as the respective end points? That's not how we commonly speak: we don't say that this is more fictional than that, or that this is very (slightly) fictional. We do say that this is mostly fiction, that it contains a significant amount of fiction, that it is an unusual mixture of fiction and nonfiction. But these judgements are not, I think, ones of strict quantity, allowing us to say that fictional status is a monotonically increasing function of the ratio "fictive to nonfictive utterances". That would ignore the significance of what is said, which is a matter of content. Everything depends on the particularities of the work: two works with the same proportions of fictive/nonfictive utterance intentions but with quite different story-contents might get quite different fictionality ratings. We might put one on the fiction shelves and the other somewhere else.

Should that bother me? No. Recall, my claim is that works produced by utterances with the same mix of fictive and assertive intentions are productive of works with the same degrees of fictionality. That does not mean "with the same ratio of fictive to nonfictive intentions". It means "works produced with *the very same* communicative intentions", where a communicative intention is fully specified in terms, not only of the intended response to the communicative content, but the identity of content. Intending someone to imagine that it is raining is a different intention, for our purposes, from intending someone to imagine that it is snowing.

Note that supervenience theses are in a sense extremely weak. Take ours: all it specifies is some of the conditions under which we should say the same thing about the fictionality of two works.<sup>15</sup> It does not tell us *what we should say* about their fictionality. (Compare: the claim that the mental supervenes on the physical does not tell us *what* physical condition is a supervenience base for being in pain.) Suppose we know everything there

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<sup>15</sup> Some, and not all. It is compatible with supervenience (and very likely true) that two works with quite different intentional profiles will have the same fictional status, just as two biologically distinct entities may have the same total mental state.

is to know about the fictive status of the utterances productive of some work F. We may still be entirely unclear about what weightings to give to distinct utterances within this class; we might even be locked in disagreement about what weightings to give and hence about whether, as a whole, the work is best classified as fiction or as non-fiction. The supervenience thesis will not help us resolve any of these issues. What it does say is that, whatever weightings we give in this case we must give also in the case of any other work with the same intentional profile, and where we disagree about the status of this work, we must reproduce that exact same disagreement in the case of any other work with the same intentional profile.<sup>16</sup>

We may strengthen the Intentionalist theory by adding to the Supervenience thesis a couple of—I hope—uncontroversial claims concerning extreme cases: Where the illocutionary profile is uniformly fictive, the work is fiction; where it is completely not fictive, the work is nonfiction. Those are the easy cases. How should we think about the harder cases, where the illocutionary profile of F is non-uniform?

One answer would be to opt for a kind of relativism. In cases where there is an uneven profile, we leave it to individuals to decide what to say about the fictionality of the work, and there are no right or wrong answers outside the extreme cases. But there is a constraint on individual's attributions; your attributions (better, your tendency to make attributions) must respect supervenience, just as a person who judges *this* case to be immoral ought to judge a case which is naturalistically *similar in every relevant qualitative respect* as just as immoral and in just the same way. This way of understanding supervenience shows why my earlier formulation-- once you fix the facts about the maker's communicative intentions, you fix the facts about the work's fictional status—is controversial. For the relativistic interpretation denies that we are fixing facts and claims we are fixing only the opinions of individuals.

This kind of relativism is surely too extreme. Someone who identifies just one assertive intention behind *Anna Karenina* (productive of its first sentence about happy and unhappy families) but who wants to insist that this is enough to make it predominantly nonfiction by weighting is surely wrong, even if they are willing to make the same judgement about any other work with the same intentional profile. Without denying the possibility of irresolvable disagreements we ought to be able to be able to identify cases of erroneous judgements of fictional status for works with non-uniform intentional profiles. And surely we can. Take another case of supervenience. We know first-order formalisations of arithmetic do not capture the standard model, since no such

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<sup>16</sup>Note also how demanding the antecedent of a supervenience claim generally is. Take a simple version of physicalism: persons physically the same are mentally the same. But physical sameness requires qualitative indistinguishability down to the level of elementary particles. Similarly, our supervenience thesis about fiction allows us to conclude that works have the same fictional status only when we know that they are the product of communicative intentions which are sequentially identical both in the content of what is intended to be communicated and the intended effect of that content. Of course, the absurd strength of a supervenience thesis's antecedent does not make it trivial. Mental sameness between persons is a strong condition but the claim that the physical supervenes on the mental is (very likely) false.

formalisation has every arithmetical truth as a theorem. Yet two systems syntactically alike will be semantically alike in this sense: something is a model of the one just in case it is a model of the other. So I wish to understand the supervenience thesis for fictional status as telling us, similarly, that what sameness with respect to intentional profile guarantees is sameness with respect to the class of legitimate judgments concerning fictional status. In some cases, perhaps, this will be a unit class.

#### **4. Supervenience, strong and weak**

There are further choices to be made in interpreting the supervenience thesis. In particular there is a well-known choice between formulations of distinct logical strengths. These formulations have been subject to searching analysis, mainly by Jagwon Kim, which have exposed some difficulties in the simplifying assumptions needed for a straightforward statement of the options.<sup>17</sup> But for present purposes I will offer a schema relating fiction and authorial intention which corresponds to what is often called “strong” supervenience:

- S If anything *x*, in any possible world *w*, has a certain intentional profile *P* and a certain fictional status *F*, then anything in any possible world, different from or the same as *w*, also with *P*, will have *F*.

The important point to note is that this is a claim to the effect that two things which are intentionally the same, *even in otherwise completely different circumstances*, will be the same with respect to fictionality. In other words, there are no background, contextual conditions which have to hold concerning the two object for their sameness with respect to intentional profile to guarantee their sameness with respect to fictionality.<sup>18</sup>

In particular, this strong formulation rules out the possibility of understanding supervenience in an historically or culturally relative way. So to say, for instance, that supervenience holds, so long as we are thinking about works within the same culture (however narrowly or broadly defined), would be to say something weaker than what I am claiming. Nor would it be consistent with *S* to say that works within a given genre will satisfy the supervenience claim, but that works in different genres which are the same with respect to intentional profile may differ in fictionality.

Many people will say that *S* is *too* strong, though they have some sympathy with the idea that intentional profile determines fictionality within some contextually given constraints. They may point to the fact (if it is a fact) that standards of historical responsibility and accuracy have changed and that works were once counted as history which we would now count as fictional, or at least as less historical and more fictional than they previously were regarded. Take cases of a kind to which Stacie Friend has

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<sup>17</sup> See papers in Part 1 of his *Supervenience and Mind*, CUP.

<sup>18</sup> This does not rule out there being background contextual factors which contribute to their having the same intentional profile, but that is another matter.



drawn attention.<sup>19</sup> People used to think differently about the category history; in the time of Tacitus they were more tolerant than we are of narrative elements which were rather obviously invented or at best speculated about; works with that degree of invention we would not easily call history, though we might think of them as partially history or history-like. Can we really afford to claim that we are right and they are wrong, which is what we presumably would have to say if we insisted on the supervenience thesis I am offering.<sup>20</sup> If not, don't cases like that sound like cases of "same intentional profile but (because of changing background conditions) different fictional status"?

I agree it sounds that way. If they are really counterexamples to strong supervenience (*S*), we might try for a weaker supervenience thesis. There are many options here but the one most directly comparable with 1 would be this:

*W* Works with the same intentional profile in a given world will have the same fictional status in that world.

Supervenience theses formulated in this way have been accused of "modal magic", and I think there is something to the accusation.<sup>21</sup> But for present purposes it is probably enough to observe that a weak thesis would not provide us with the basis for an intentional theory of fiction, because weak supervenience theses allow that something other than the work's intentional profile contributes to its fictional status. Take what seems to be a modally respectable weak supervenience thesis: two sentences with the same meaning, produced in a given world, will have the same truth value in that world. Does that sustain the idea that truth depends only on meaning?<sup>22</sup> Of course not: truth depends on the facts as well. The retreat to weak supervenience would leave us able to say, at most, that intentional profile and something else, determines fictional status.

### **5. When are things flat?**

I think we can explain the Tacitus case and others like it without abandoning strong supervenience. I begin with another case of supervenience. Notoriously, very little if anything is literally flat. Yet the notion is an important one we use all the time and about the application of which we agree a great deal. We say that paintings differ from sculptures in that the former are flat, though of course we know that paintings have uneven surfaces. We complain that the road or the writing surface is not flat enough. We say that bowling surfaces are flatter than freeways. Now surely there is a sense in which

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<sup>19</sup> See this important series of papers by Friend: 'Imagining Fact and Fiction'. In Kathleen Stock and Katherine Thomson-Jones (eds.), *New Waves in Aesthetics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 150-69; "Fictive Utterance and Imagining II", *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 85 (2011): 163-180; "Fiction as a genre", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 112 (2012): 179-209.

<sup>20</sup> Strictly speaking the supervenience thesis would be consistent with the supposition that they are right and we are wrong, but I take that combination to be ruled out on grounds of pragmatic paradox.

<sup>21</sup> See Simon Blackburn, "Supervenience Revisited," in Ian Hacking, ed., *Exercises in Analysis: Essays by Students of Casimir Lewy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 47-67.

<sup>22</sup> See Brian McLaughlin and Karen Bennett "Supervenience", *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supervenience/#4.1>

the flatness of a surface (whether or not it is flat and if it is, how flat it is) supervenes on something else, namely the exact geometry of the surface as you might represent it analytically in three dimensions. We might disagree about whether something is flat or how flat it is, or not be sure whether it is flat, or think that it is indeterminate whether it is flat or not. But once we have agreed that these two surfaces have the exact same equation in analytic geometry, we surely have to agree that whatever we say, however complicated, about the flatness of the one we should say about the flatness of the other. That sounds like the view that flatness strongly supervenes on the geometry of the surface: independent of any contextual background factors, two things with the same geometrical profile will be the same with respect to flatness (or with respect to “what it is right to say about how flat or non-flat they are”).

And that seems correct. If we are comparing two surfaces and we find them analytically the same it would be wrong to argue about which one is flatter than the other. But consider judgements of flatness arising in somewhat different circumstances. Suppose we consider two surfaces with the same analytical geometry, but produced in different ways in different communities. In one there are only relatively crude methods of shaping surfaces available, while in the other techniques are more refined. As a result, people in the first community judge their sample of surface as flat while people in the second don't—they have higher, more demanding standards of what counts as flat. But if you brought the two communities together and got them to compare their surfaces they would agree, surely, that they are equally flat—it would be bizarre to say that, of two surfaces point-for-point identical in bumpiness, one is flatter than the other. Or imagine that the two communities have equally good methods for making things flat but that they wish to put the two surfaces to different uses. One of them wants to use theirs for bowling balls along, while the other wants to use theirs as a road surface for trucks. One can imagine again that they would make different, but appropriate judgements about the flatness of these two surfaces—a surface flat for trucks is not necessarily flat for bowling balls—while being willing to acknowledge, if they were brought together, that there is in fact no difference in the flatness of their surfaces.<sup>23</sup> The people in these two communities would not, in such cases, be denying the supervenience of flatness on geometry. But neither, I think, should we say that one community's previous judgment in the matter was wrong. What they are both saying about the flatness of their own surface is entirely appropriate to their circumstances; for the one to adopt the other's way of speaking would be misleading.

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<sup>23</sup> The same point can be made in terms of an intriguing example offered by Paul Bloom (“Water as an artefactual kind”, in E. Margolis and S. Lawrence (eds) *Creations of the Mind*, Oxford University Press, 2007. Bloom points out that we don't regard *Sprite* as water, though much we do count as water turns out to contain no more actual water proportionately than *Sprite*—pond water, for example. Bloom suggests that we are driven by considerations of artefactuality: *Sprite* has non-water deliberately mixed with water in order to fulfil some function and that's not true of pond water. But suppose it turned out that some sample of pond water contained materials in exactly the *Sprite*-proportions; it is unlikely that anyone who had the chemical facts in question explained to them would say that the *Sprite* and the pond water differed in wateriness.

If this is right then it would seem that when we compare objects for flatness we look only at their geometries—we treat flatness as strongly supervenient on geometry. But when we make judgments about the flatness of single surfaces which are sensitive to the *use* of those things we take other things into account. But our doing that, for those purposes, does not falsify the claim that flatness supervenes on analytical geometry.

The question is then whether we should treat the notion of fiction in the same way as this. My present suggestion is that we can. Here is an illustration of how, based on an example Stacie Friend gives, though her conclusions about the case are different from mine.

Returning to an earlier example. It is possible that people in Tacitus' community regarded the *Annals* as very much non-fiction, whereas we would regard it as nonfiction but only roughly or marginally so. Suppose that is true. Would that be evidence against the supervenience claim? We can see now that it might not be. For it would be available to us to say that the disagreement here is a pragmatic one. Arguably, standards of historical fidelity and responsibility have improved over time, just as tools for making things flat have got better. And just as people with better tools make more demanding judgements of flatness, so people with more demanding standards of historical responsibility make more demanding judgements about whether something is fiction or non-fiction, or about the extent to which it is central or marginal for either of those two categories.

I've taken this example from Friend in order to illustrate the difference between what we might call pure and pragmatic judgements of fictionality: the fact that different people at different times make different judgements about the fictionality of works with the same illocutionary profile (and, in the case just described, different judgments about the fictionality of the same work) does not refute the supervenience claim which is at the heart of the Intentionalist's program, as long as we can point to plausible pragmatic factors—in this case changes in standards of historical responsibility—which account for the different judgements.

Friend also offers a number of objections to the Intentional theory which are best understood, I think, as variations on a single theme: that there is in general a mismatch between, on the one hand, what we judge to be fiction and fictive intention and, on the other, what we judge to be nonfiction and assertive intention. Thus she points out that

The class of works that invite make-believe or imagining is substantially broader than our ordinary notion of fiction. Anyone who reads Ernest Shackleton's *South* (1920), an account of his failed expedition to Antarctica, without imagining the terrible odyssey that unfolded after his ship was crushed by ice has simply not engaged properly with the story. Vividly told non-fiction narratives invite us to imagine what it was like for people to live in different times and places, to undergo wonderful or horrible experiences, and so on.

But this point—with which I entirely agree—is no objection to the supervenience claim, which does not commit us to the idea that nonfictional works are free from invitations to

imagine. Nor is it committed to the corresponding principle for fictions—“no assertions allowed”—suggested by Friend’s observation that:

Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* opens with this sentence: ‘There are some fields near Manchester, well known to the inhabitants as –Green Heys Fields, through which runs a public footpath to a little village about two miles distant’.... This statement is not only true, it was intended to be true and any informed reader of Gaskell will believe it.<sup>24</sup>

To repeat, the supervenience thesis does not say that fictional works are the products of wholly fictive utterances while non-fiction ones are wholly the product of assertive ones. It says only that once we fix the work’s intentional profile, we fix its fictional status.

### **6. *Is this Intentionalism too weak?***

At this point it will be said that I am evading criticism of the Intentional theory by opting for an extremely weak version of it. To this I make two responses. The first agrees that the supervenience thesis is weak—I have said as much—but goes on to make the point that even weak Intentionalism is Intentionalism, and that this appears to be a version of that view immune to Friend’s objections. The second is that we may strengthen our Intentionalism by supplementing the supervenience thesis with other principles. For example, it would be reasonable to say something like this: “The presence of a fictive intent in the work’s intentional profile tends to support the judgement that the work is fiction, while the presence of an assertive intention in the profile tends to support the judgement that the work is non-fiction”.

Several things need to be said by way of interpretations of this principle, all of them discouraging a strong reading. First of all, in putting it in terms of “tending to support”, I have in mind an analogy with attributions of certain aesthetic properties. Thus it is said that such predicates as “graceful” *tend* to support the judgement that the work concerned is of positive aesthetic merit, though they need not always do so, since the desired effect of certain works calls for harsh, squat or otherwise ungraceful forms.<sup>25</sup> Also, the degree of tending will vary considerably from case to case because, as I have said, some individual communicative intentions (think of them, for the sake of simplicity, as intentions to communicate single sentences) will be more important than others so far as the work’s story is concerned. Also, their importance will be determined holistically—partly, that is, in virtue of their connections with other communicative intentions associated with the same work. Finally, while there will be differences between the degrees of tending of distinct individual communicative intentions, the degree of tending of any one of them is likely to be very small; to point to any one sentence in a text and declare it to be the product of a fictive or an assertive intention is almost never going to

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<sup>24</sup> Both quotations are from “Fiction as a genre”.

<sup>25</sup> See Sibley, “Aesthetic concepts”, *Philosophical Review*, 68 (1959): 421-450.

tip the balance of our “all up” judgement of fictionality from fiction to nonfiction or vice versa; at most it would move it marginally up or down the scale.

All that said, this supplementary principle seems to me to have a good deal of appeal, which we can bring out in the following way. Suppose the two of you are arguing about whether a work should be regarded as fiction or not. If you think that the work should be regarded as fiction, would you ever cite in support of that the fact that a particular sentence in the work was the product of an assertive intention? If you think that the work should be regarded as nonfiction, would you ever cite in support of that the fact that a particular sentence in the work was the product of a fictive intention? The answer in both cases has to be “virtually never”.

### ***7. Higher order intentions***

There is another objection offered by Friend to which I would like to respond, but at this point I need to somewhat complicate the picture by considering some communicative intentions an author might have which are not associated with specific utterances but which, as it were, form the background to them, and which one would have to take into account in order properly to assess the fictionality of the whole work. So the intentional profile of a work will include not only the utterance-specific intentions we have been dealing with until now, but additionally such higher-order intentions as the intention to convey such and such a serious message by conveying these fictive intentions. Presumably Jesus had certain higher-order intentions of this kind in telling the parables; he manifests a fictive intention in telling of the Samaritan who helps one injured by robbers, and in so doing, manifests an intention to testify to his questioner that someone far removed from your own community is your neighbour.<sup>26</sup>

With that in mind consider the passage below cited by Friend from an opinion piece in the *New York Times* with its invitation to imagine a scenario for future conflict in Sudan:

JAN. 18 The South declares that 91 percent of voters have chosen secession. The North denounces the vote, saying it was illegal, tainted by violence and fraud, and invalid because the turnout fell below the 60 percent threshold required.

JAN. 20 The South issues a unilateral declaration of independence.

JAN. 25 Tribal militias from the North sweep through South Sudan villages, killing and raping inhabitants and driving them south. The governor of a border state in the North, Ahmad Haroun, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and organizing the janjaweed militia in Darfur, denies that he is now doing the same thing in the South.

Since we are being asked to imagine this (I agree with Friend here) this cannot, she says, be categorised as non-fiction by an Intentional. Why would anyone want to categorise

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<sup>26</sup> “But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”(Luke, 10.29).

it—this passage, that is—as non-fiction? It is, surely, an imaginative story, not intended to be believed and I have no difficulty categorizing it, taken in isolation, as fiction. But we might want to take it in conjunction with the rest of the text, much of which is argumentative, and with unarticulated propositions which are nonetheless communicated by the text. We are not meant *merely* to imagine this scenario; we are intended to have certain beliefs about it: that, for example, this is the sort of thing which will probably happen if the administration does not take a tough line with the Sudanese government. Manifestly, the imaginative story is told not because of its own intrinsic interest or merit but because it serves the furtherance of an argument which, along with a certain amount of implicit testifying to the truth of propositions, constitutes the purpose of the article. The message behind the little fiction embedded in the text is itself a piece of testimony—things as bad as these are likely to happen.

In light of all we know about the communicative intentions behind this essay, including those concerning how its imaginative part is intended to serve wider purposes and what those purposes specifically are, it seems to me reasonable to say that it is primarily non-fictional in intent and to say, when pushed to give an all-up judgment, that it is “nonfiction”. Now it is likely that Proust had serious communicative intentions in writing all that stuff in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdue*, though I am not inclined to call the result nonfiction. Why not? For one thing, the opinion piece manifests an urgency and definiteness with respect to the testimonial component that is lacking in the case of Proust, whereas Proust’s text is much richer in the structure of the fictive intentions it manifests. The mix of intentions manifest in the NYT piece is quite different from that we would typically find in the production of a detective story or even a Proustian novel, where the story-telling intentions, while they relate to certain implicitly communicated bits of testimony, certainly seem more to the fore, more significant and self-justifying than do the story telling intentions manifested in the NYT piece.

Of course I have been appealing, in this argument about the NYT piece, to much more than supervenience. I have made a number of judgements about the weighting of elements within the text—judgements which do not follow from the supervenience thesis. Someone might dispute these judgements and the argument that follows might resolve part or all of the dispute. The situation is somewhat like that which has been said to hold of aesthetic judgement. We think that the evaluative properties we ascribe in making aesthetic judgements are supervenient, but we acknowledge that we cannot mechanically infer those properties from whatever we take them to supervene on. Aesthetic attribution is a matter of, exactly, judgement, and so, on the theory I have been outlining, are judgements about fictionality.

### ***8. New problems for Intentionalism?***

So far I have been defending the Intentionalist theory. But the way I have formulated it, in terms of strong supervenience, brings into focus certain worrying features to which I now draw attention. The first difficulty that arises stems from a proviso (I won’t call it a

concession) announced early on. I said that the intentional profile of a work includes a full specification of the *content* of what the utterer wants to convey and not merely a specification of whether the utterer wants the hearer to believe or to imagine the content. And the reason for this was that the content of what is conveyed is obviously relevant to deciding the *significance* of any particular bit of text (a sentence, say) and significance is going to affect our decisions about a work's fictive status. Consider a very crude example. We have a text with 100 sentences in it, and we construct an intentional profile for the work, giving a specification of the communicative intention behind each sentence, and come up with an intentional profile which contains 50 instances of fictive intentions and 50 instances assertive ones. What should we say about the place of this work on the scale of fictionality? Surely we cannot say anything unless we understand what was meant. Where we decide to put the work on the fictive scale will be influenced by the significance for the overall discourse that the work represents of each. Fifty narratively trivial sentence weigh much less than fifty narratively significant ones.

The worry I want to highlight is that there are factors that contribute to weighting decisions which are not determined by author's intentions. These factors could be of two kinds: one is factors that contribute to content (and hence to weighting) without being determined by author's intentions; the other are factors that contribute to weighting but without contributing to content, and without being determined by author's intentions. So let's take these in turn: content, and non-content factors respectively.

Trouble with content factors arises when we consider the role of implicatures in determining content. Grice distinguished between conventional and non-conventional implicatures, while among the latter he discussed in any detail only conversational implicatures. Also, the category of conventional implicatures is somewhat controversial, so I will focus just on conversational implicatures (calling them simply "implicatures"). Grice seems to have thought of implicatures as dependent on intention; a hearer might think that something was implicated—might think it implicated that the speaker has only two children when she says "I have two children"—but this will not be implicated if the speaker did not intend to convey that she had only two children.<sup>27</sup> If that is so then what is implicated will be captured by the work's intentional profile and works with the same intentional profile will not differ with respect to implicature. And the worry that differences of implicature may lead to differences of content and hence to differences in fictional status would be avoided. But is it really plausible that implicature is wholly intention dependent? Is it easy to argue that in many contexts at least, the woman who says "I have two children" does implicate that she has only two, though she does not intend this implication, because a fully rational and appropriately informed hearer would naturally conclude that this is part of what was communicated by the utterance. One might want respond by distinguishing between intention-dependent and intention-

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<sup>27</sup> That is how Stephen Neale reads the situation citing both Grice's very early characterisation in "The causal theory of perception" and the general consideration that "This follows... from the fact that... what U [the utterer] implicates is part of what U means, and... what U means is determined by U's communicative intentions" ("Paul Grice and the philosophy of language", p.18).

independent implicatures, but if we allow a kind of implicature which is intention-independent, that is the kind of implicature that is going to be most relevant to the determination of a story's content. For it is natural to say that what ends up as part of the story cannot depend on private facts about the speaker unavailable to well-placed and rational readers; that is the sensible kernel of the otherwise unacceptable idea that an "intentional fallacy" threatens when we try to understand a literary work.

If we allow that implicatures may be intention-independent, what sort of factors does this mean we will have to admit as contributing to the determination of content? The answer is "limitless kinds". Consider the following exchange.

Q: Is Smith tall?

A: He is five foot two

Has A given an answer? Yes, if what is said implicates something about whether Smith is tall or not. But what is implicated? If, as a matter of fact, being five foot two is distinctly not being tall, then it is implicated that Smith is not tall. But not otherwise. So the average height of male humans is capable of influencing content. Or:

Q: Is he a good dancer?

A: Was Gene Kelly a good dancer?

It is easy to see that just about any fact, taken into the presupposition set for the conversation, can generate or block an implicature.

I turn now to non-content factors. I will consider just one. Recall that the question is whether there are non-content factors relevant to determining the weightings that we give to utterances productive of a work and which therefore help to determine its intentional profile. And when it comes to imagining, there is much we can say that goes beyond content. In particular judgements of fictionality can be thought of as rationally sensitive to the intensity of the imaginings they provoke. And this is not a matter of intended intensity, for writers simply may not have intentions concerning intensity of imagining, and if they do it is extremely difficult for them to make those intentions manifest to their audience; intentions about the intensity of imaginings are rarely communicative intentions.

To understand the idea of intensity of imagining, consider a familiar question: what is the difference between, on the one hand, imagining something and, on the other merely assuming, supposing or considering it.<sup>28</sup> One answer is "nothing". As Walton puts the view: to imagine is to entertain, to attend to, to consider. These are things we do whenever we have some proposition in mind. But, says Walton, this is not imagining, which is more active than any of these things are: Imagining is *doing something with* a proposition one has in mind. Tamar Gendler takes a similar view, arguing that

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<sup>28</sup> I'll assume (suppose or consider) for the purposes of this argument that these three are the same.



“imagination requires a sort of participation that mere hypothetical reasoning does not... What this suggests is that imagination is distinct from belief on the one hand, and from mere supposition on the other”.<sup>29</sup> On her view the kind of participation that imagining requires is responsible for our being resistant to imagining certain things—slavery being morally right, for example. But supposing is non-participatory and we no difficulty supposing, for the sake of the argument, that slavery is morally right.

I’m inclined to see things differently. I want to develop this line with the help of another suggestion, due to Neil van Leeuwen: that recent thinking about the imagination has not sufficiently emphasised the role of *perceptual imagery* in one’s imaginative projects, having been largely focused on propositional imagining—which is what I have been talking about so far. (In this I am as guilty as anyone.) And the thought is that we see a difference between barely imagining something—which now we are invited to think of as a case of occurrent understanding or contemplation—and the kind of elaborated and intense imagining which is, in various ways, *more than* bare imagining. It is this elaborated imagining which we should think of as being typical or at least paradigmatic of our engagements with fiction. And this imagining is elaborated in a number of ways. The first, as I have indicated, is through a close link with perceptual forms of imagine. We don’t simply imagine that Anna Karenina commits suicide: we visualise her fall under the wheels, we imagine the sound of the brakes, and we may proprioceptively simulate the act of falling. This is relevant partly because van Leeuwen notes that “There is reason to think that imagining in, say, visual or auditory detail, has far greater emotional impact than bare, propositional imagining”, and he suggests that this is because of the very direct neural pathways from perceptual areas to the brains emotion centres.<sup>30</sup>

This is one difference (or one category of difference) between imagination as understanding and fictive imagining. Another I will call degree of narrative density. The impact on me of imagining Anna’s suicide is highly sensitive to the context of imagining to that point. Presumably I have followed a long (very long), narratively structured path of connected imaginings to this point in such a way that the shadows of prior imaginings continue to make themselves felt by enriching my perceptual imagery and, independently, contributing to my affective experience. In other words, we don’t have to think that when I imagine that P while being engrossed by some fictional story, and when I occurrently comprehend P in an affectively neutral way, two quite different state-types are tokened. It could be instead that it is the tokening of states of the same type but in such radically different contexts and with other, different things going on as to give the impression of more difference between them than there is. For merely contemplating P is likely to be less enriched by perceptual imaginings (though some may still be present) and is likely to lack rich, narrative connections to other imaginings.

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<sup>29</sup> Gendler, “The puzzle of imaginative resistance”, *Journal of Philosophy*, 97 (2000): 55–81, see pp.80-81.

<sup>30</sup> “Imagination is where the Action is”, *Journal of Philosophy* 108(2011), 55-77. See also his “The Imaginative Agent” (forthcoming) in *Knowledge through Imagination*, eds. A. Kind and P. Kung, Oxford University Press

With these considerations in mind I am inclined to say that cases of entertaining, supposing and considering are also cases of imagining, but that imaginings can vary a good deal in certain respects. In particular, imaginings vary a good deal in their perceptual; and emotional intensity. And it is not plausible to suppose that our judgements about the fictional status of a work depend partly on the intensity of the imaginings they provoke. One additional thing to say in defence of the idea that the NYT article discussed earlier is, all things considered, nonfiction is that its description of the admittedly fictional scenario embedded in it is not apt to generate especially vivid imaginings. How much weighting one ought to give to this in particular cases is, once again, a matter of judgment, but the answer “none at all” does not strike me as plausible. And while there are no doubt cases where a reader’s imaginings are inappropriately bland or vivid, it is difficult to argue that a set of upper and lower limits to intensity (along all the dimensions that intensity might be measured on) can be extracted from the author’s communicative intentions manifested in the work. If that is so, then there are non-content factors that are at once independent of the maker’s intentions and contributors to the determination of fictional status.<sup>31</sup>

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If, as I suspect, these difficulties cannot be argued away, a friend of Intentionalism will have to retreat to something weaker than the supervenience thesis on display here, and that thesis is already a comparatively weak one. Of course it is weak as a *thesis* but strong as a *supervenience* thesis, so we might retreat to a version of weak supervenience. But by then we have given up, for weak supervenience theses do not embody the claim that it is only communicative intentions that determine fictional status. We may continue to insist that communicative intentions contribute, in some way, to fictional status, but that is a comparatively uninteresting claim.

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<sup>31</sup> Stacie Friend, rejecting the Intentionalist theory, has urged us to see fiction as a genre. Genres are, she says, “essentially what Kendall Walton (1970) calls ‘categories of art’” (see Walton, “Categories of art”, *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970): 334-69. The thought that fiction is a category in Walton’s sense is from my point of view a helpful one, for Walton’s point about painting as a category is that two works of visual art might be visually indistinguishable but aesthetically and artistically distinct because features of the one have a significance which corresponding features of the other lack. What I am suggesting here is that two works of narrative art could be indistinguishable with respect to the intentional profile of their utterances but distinct in terms of fictionality, because utterances in the one have a significance—an imagistic or implicative power—which corresponding utterances in the other lack.