FICTIONALITY, POSSIBILITY, REALITY

Prague, April 20-22

SPEAKERS AND PAPERS:

-Andrea Bianchi (Parma): What does it take to exist? The case against fictional entities.

-Petr A. Bílek (Prague): Fictional Facts: Proper and Local Names in Fiction (from the Point of
  their Inter-cultural Transfer in Translation)

-Staffan Carlshamre (Stockholm): What Stories Mean

-Roberto Casati (Paris): Shadows of fictions: testing the limits of what can be depicted

-Josep E. Corbí (Valencia): The Real and the Imaginary in the Soldier's Experience

-Eros Corazza (Ottawa): Empty Names, Fictional Characters, and Existence

-Gregory Currie (Nottingham): Trying Not to Learn from Fiction

-Bohumil Fořt (Brno): Fictional Worlds between Philosophy, Semiotics, and Linguistics

-Anthony Grayling (London): Truth, Truths and Versimilitude in Fiction

-Leila Haaparanta (Tampere): The Identification of Fictional Characters

-James R. Hamilton (Kansas): Narrative, Fiction, Imagination

-Tomas Hříbek (Prague): What Good Is Fiction

-Alice Jedličková (Prague): Fictional Landscapes and Mental Imagery: Constituting and/or/vs.
  Experiencing A Fictional World

-Petr Koťátko (Prague): Who Is Who in the Fictional World

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-Anders Pettersson (Umea): The Role of Fictionality in Literature

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-Stefano Predelli (Nottingham): Fictional Names and Generics

-Göran Rossholm (Stockholm): Factual information vs „fictional information"

-Marcelo Sabates (Kansas): Characters at Work

-Barry C. Smith (London): Fiction as a Visual Cliff'

-Fredrik Stjernberg (Linköping): Conceivability and Imagination

-Karel Thein (Prague): Fictionality and Modality. An Ancient Story About the Mind and Its -Excesses

-Alberto Voltolini (Turin): How do I Know that I am Not a Fictional Character?

-Marián Zouhar (Bratislava): Frege on Fiction

ABSTRACTS:

Petr A. Bílek (Prague): Fictional Facts: Proper and Local Names in Ficton (from the Point of their Inter-cultural Transfer in Translation)

Had Tamina, the protagonist of Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, been born on the avenue of the Black Church or on Cernokostelecka Avenue or on Černokostolecká třída? And does it matter? Analyzing the role of proper and local names that modern fiction borrows from the actual world, I will try to consider the amounts of fictionality and contextual reference as they combine in a cultural encyclopedia which is, however, different across distinct cultural and regional backgrounds. The key question raised sounds: Do proper and local names with some reference opened towards the actual world stand for the same type of definite descriptions as fictitious proper and local names? And if not, is it a difference of some referential quantity or of more substantial quality?

Staffan Carlshamre (Stockholm): What Stories Mean

Ordinary readers and literary scholars take it for granted that stories mean something not just that the words used to tell them mean something but that stories themselves have meaning. Using Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse as my main source of examples, I present an account of story-meaning involving the basic operations of generalisation, abstraction, universalisation and application. I also discuss questions about whose meaning story-meaning is does it belong to the author, the reader or to the story itself? and about the motivation for using stories as vehicles of meaning.

Roberto Casati (Paris): Shadows of fictions: testing the limits of what can be depicted

Shadows in paintings have been alleged as examples of perceptual double dissociations: some perceptually acceptable shadows are physically impossible, and conversely some physically correct shadows are perceptually impossible. I discuss a larger set of cases that involve more topical inferences: shadows of invisible objects, of objects that should not cast shadows, of objects whose presence is only implied and not shown in the painting, cast by lights that are not visible. Interestingly, some shadows can be used to ascertain the original properties of a painting.

Eros Corazza (Ottawa): Empty Names, Fictional Characters, and Existence

In this essay I'll defend a Frege-inspired picture concerning fictional discourse. The picture is Fregean inasmuch as I endorse the view that on top of referring to an entity a singular term expresses a mode of presentation of that entity. Unlike Frege, though, I don't assume that the reference relation is mediated by a Fregean sense that the referent must satisfy. The Frege-inspired picture I have in mind is consonant with the direct reference view that the propositional constituents are entities inhabiting the real world; they aren't Fregean sense. We thus have Russellian propositions whose constituents are the referents themselves. The picture I defend is inspired by Perry's distinction between reflexive content and referential content: an utterance of a simple sentence comes equipped with at least two semantic contents, it reflexive truth conditions and its referential ones. While the former classify the cognitive profile of the utterance (and as such it comes closed to Fregean senses), the latter gives us the referential profile of the utterance and determines the truth value of the utterance. The picture I have in mind is faithful to two Fregean main insights: (i) that a name possesses a sense regardless of whether it is empty or not and (ii) it is also in virtue of the name's sense that we succeed in communicating and understanding each other whenever we use referential terms or empty terms.

Josep E. Corbí (Valencia): The Real and the Imaginary in the Soldier's Experience

In the battlefield, the soldier he can hear the bullet hitting his mate's body.
He acknowledges it as a fact and, nevertheless, he experiences it as a unreal, as
part of a nightmare The sound of a bullet hitting his mate's body is so strange that
his mind takes it as an event within a dream; but why should such a sound be
strange at all? Didn't he already know about it? Haven't we all heard that noise in
movies, read about it in novels? I want to explore such a strangeness in this paper,
and a fruitful tool will be the notion of a human world as it was introduced by Jean
Améry to account for his experience as a victim of torture.1
When the soldier goes for the first time to the battlefield his sense of reality
is still shaped by the hospitable world he assumes to have departed from, namely:
a world where bullets do not hit human bodies. The bullet hitting a mate's body
seems so strange because such a fact is excluded from the homely world he has just
abandoned and such that still permeates his experience:
When a bullet hits a person you hear it. It's an unmistakable sound you
never forget, like a kind of wet slap. Your mate next to you falls face down
in the sand, sand that tastes bitter as ash. You turn him over on his back.
The cigarrette you just gave him is stuck between his teeth, and it's still
alight. The first time it happens you react like in a dream. You run, you
drag him, and you shoot, and afterwards you can't remember a thing about

it and can't tell anyone anyway. It's like a nightmare you watch happening behind a sheet of glass. Your wake up scared, and don't why.2

At the outset, the soldier experiences the bullet and his mate's dead body as a nightmare, as alien to his conception of what may be a fact, but he soon realizes that it is really a fact, though of a rather different world. He thereby perceives his life as divided into two worlds: home and the battlefield. Some may reply that there is only one world and, therefore, that home and the battlefield should rather be construed as two aspects (or, perhaps, regions) of a single world. And an appropriate description of such a unity should show then how these two aspects or regions do relate to each other. The soldier's experience is in need of explanation precisely because it seems to resist that obvious truth: what happens in the battlefield is so strange that he cannot experience it as real, as an aspect of the world that he inhabited before his departure. How can we make sense of this experience?

It is true that those who stay at home, away from bullets, know that in the battlefield people are injured and killed, and also that bullets make noise as they hit a human body; but there must be another sense in which they do not know, in which they are not aware of what actually occur in such places, in which they do not entirely apprehend that the armed confrontations the news talk about are not fictions, stories invented to entertain, but facts that involve actual injuries and deaths. Those who feel away from the battlefield know that in such places people kill and die; nevertheless, there is a relevant sense in which what happens there comes to their minds as if such deaths did not really occur, since they do not let such facts to proportionally shape their conduct and emotional attitudes. So, it seems that the distinction between knowing that and being sensitive to might play a role in understanding the soldier's experience; more specifically, I will conclude that merely knowing that people die and are severely injured in the battlefield is not only consistent with regarding such facts as unreal or imaginary, but almost inevitably lead to such an understanding.

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1 Cf, Jean Am鯵, At the Mind's Limit (London, Granta Books), ch. 2.
2Alexievich, S. , Zinky boys. Soviet Voices from a Forgotten War, London, Chatto & Windus

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Gregory Currie (Nottingham): Trying not to learn from fiction

Fictional stories are, people say, a source of moral knowledge. Not a source of moral propositional knowledge, but rather a way of exercising and improving our capacities for finely grained moral discriminations. I suggest that there is good reason to doubt this idea. To find the idea

credible we would have to attribute to authors powers of psychological insight which they probably lack; at least, there is no good evidence that they have them. I suggest that the pleasures of reading high-end fictional narratives are to some extent the pleasures of imagining ourselves to be exercising powers of moral and psychological discrimination which in reality we lack. In this sense novelists like Henry Jams are fantasy writers.

Bohumil Fořt (Brno): Fictional Worlds between Philosophy, Semiotics, and Linguistics

The contribution views fictional worlds against the background of its three essential sources: philosophy, semiotics and linguistics. Doing so it primarily examines the connection between fictional-worlds theory and theoretical suggestions which this theory adopted from logical calculus and action theory, from semantics and pragmatics, and from stylistics and structuralist linguistics and literary theory. It also shows the ways in which the fictional-worlds theory both uses and changes the terms and strategies it 'borrowed' from the three disciplines in question.

Leila Haaparanta (Tampere): The Identification of Fictional Characters

One who is able to identify a person *knows who* the person is. The ability to identify a person presupposes knowledge of her identity. This paper asks what it means to claim that a reader is able to identify a fictional character in or after the process of reading a literary text. Even though the author's methods of introducing and constructing fictional characters will also be considered, the main focus will be at the reader's end; hence, on what she knows or believes about the characters. The paper will consider various methods of identifying individuals discussed in the philosophy of language, especially in the theory of possible worlds. It will argue that an analysis of attitudes *de re* inspired by Frege's concept of *Sinn*, where individuals are taken to be the subject's constructions, helps to understand what it is for a reader of a literary text to be able to identify fictional characters.

James R. Hamilton (Kansas): Narrative, Fiction, Imagination

I show that the distinction between fictional narrative and narrative *per se*, although well-motivated and substantially correct, does *not*, *pace* its defenders, leave us with a conception of "narrative *per se*" that is too minimal to be of any real interest. I present a quick sketch of what it is that is of continued

interest about the uptake and the appreciation of narrative *per se*. I then argue that a mistaken assimilation of fictional narrative with narrative *per se* has driven research projects in philosophy, cognitive science and evolutionary psychology to focus on only one (albeit a very important) aspect of imagining, namely, pretending. Another aspect of imagination – that required for the uptake and appreciation of narrative *per se* – has not been examined. I argue that it involves a distinct kind of mental state that is neither belief, pretense, nor "alief." I comment on what we might learn about this mental state from recent empirical studies in the realm of event perception and schemas/scripts and give an initial characterization of the factors to which this mental state is sensitive.

Alice Jedličková (Prague): Fictional Landscapes and Mental Imagery: Constituting and/or/vs. Experiencing A Fictional World

While some fictional worlds´ theorists consider textual lacunas to be particular semiotic devices that are intended to guide the process of reader´s comprehension (such as Lubomír Doležel), others admit that narrative gaps are expected (or at least allowed) to be filled in, while employing reader´s extratextual experience and imagination (such as Marie-Laure Ryan). Moreover, while the former invite the readers to participate merely in the process of constituting the meaning of a *semiotic structure*, the latter allow them to *experience* fictional worlds. This kind of experience is referred to as *immersion*, a mental state of the reader induced during the process of reception of a fictional text (or lingering on after it), involving a variety of images and quasi-experiential sensations and emotions. The idea of the plurality of possible worlds makes the idea plausible from the ontological point of view. The literary theory conditions immersion by excluding metanarrative, or generally, anti-illusionist strategies from the text. The number one candidate for the immersive reading experience (also referred to as *aesthetic illusion* within literary theory) is realist writing based on a lively representation of the variety of aspects of reality. But we were told at school that literature is supposed to "develop our imagination", and Ingarden tells us that we are supposed to fill in the narrative gaps. Thus, it seems that it may be both the *narrative density* (or saturation), and the *uncertainty* of literary representation (or the tendency of a text to provide the reader with "blank space") that stimulate our imagination. As a result, the most exciting question from the point of view of a literary critic is what is the relation between mental imagery resulting from filling in the gaps, and mental immersion resulting from a "saturated" narrative. And whether these are two different processes, since they basically depend on the same structure, that is on verbal representation, what is (or is not) told. For example, there may be particular textual devices that act as ignitors of the whole process under generally different textual conditions (saturation vs. gaps). Let us observe some examples of fictional representations of space, particularly landscapes, in order to test the opposition, taking into account the fact that a literary critic may find it difficult to avoid the interaction of historically located cultural schemes.

Petr Koťátko (Prague): Who Is Who in the Fictional World

The paper defends a conservative account of worlds of narrative literary works. According to the author's view, they admit of being identical with the actual world - and if they are not, it is still possible for them to share entities with the actual world (as coexisting with fictional entities). The causal links in these worlds have a counterfactual dimension precisely like in the actual world. Typically, the fictional entities are just as complete as the inhabitants of the actual world. Things going on in the world of a narrative work cannot be reduced to those described in the text, implied by it or implicated by it.

Paolo Leonardi (Bologna): Vacuous Sentences

Vacuous sentences – sentences in which occurs a designative phrase without designation – are deemed to be false or neither true nor false. Or, if one admits of (non-)existent objects *à la* Terry Parsons, true or false. I am slightly uneasy with either solution. Vacuous sentence, I will advocate, are a special case of *ungrounded* sentences (for the notion of groundedness, see Kripke 1975). They are sentences for which there are no grounds neither for telling them true nor for telling them false. Hence, at a first level, they are properly neither true nor false, and, at a higher level, reflecting on the case, they can be told either true or false, depending on whether one expands the domain or not.

S. Kripke 1975 "An Outline of a Theory of Truth" (*The Journal of Philosophy* 72: 690-716).

Jerry Levinson (Maryland): Design versus Commentary

What are the different possibilities for assigning a source or responsibility to the sounds that form part of a film, according to the nature of the sounds, the nature of the film, and the nature of the narrative, if any, that is unfolding? That question is not one to which one can respond by citing the film's sound editor. The question is rather one of determining, in the course of adequately comprehending a film, what position the sounds heard in the film occupy in relation to the fictional world that is constituted, in the main, by the film's image track. In the second part of the paper I explore this and related questions with special reference to Godard's 1965 *Masculin-Feminin*.

Paisley Livingston (Honk Kong): Representing Risk in Cinematic Fiction

With an eye to isolating some of the artistic tradeoffs linked to the representation of various sorts of risk in cinematic fictions, I compare several kinds of strategies, beginning with familiar rhetorical patterns involving verisimilitude. I move on to discuss problems related to attempts to employ film's depictive and other representational devices to induce spectators to draw inferences about highly unfamiliar risks, especially those arising in 'counterlegal' or 'nomically impossible' fictions, where reasoning about implicit content cannot rely on ready-to-head premises. Art-cinema strategies maximizing uncertainty and ambiguity regarding risks and consequences are also discussed. Examples used to illustrate my points include *Pleasantville* (dir. Ross, 1998) and *La visione del sabba* (dir. Bellocchio, 1988).

Anders Pettersson (Umea): The Role of Fictionality in Literature

Fictionality is often regarded as a fundamentally important element in literature. In my paper, however, I will describe the introduction of fictions as a device which makes it easier for authors to achieve their literary objectives but which is not, in itself, at the heart of literary art. Principally, the license to depart from literal truth facilitates the composition of stories or situations that are satisfying from a literary point of view.

Understanding the role of fictionality in literature is closely bound up with understanding the art of literature as such and its specificity. Nicholas Wolterstorff's analysis (1980) of what he calls "the fictive stance" will function as a point of reference in this regard. According to Wolterstorff, authors of fiction introduce states of affairs, just like ordinary users of language, but they merely present these states without affirming them, thus inviting reflection, not belief, from their readers. Wolterstorff's remarks are less a fitting analysis of fiction or fictionality than an innovative description of a mode of discourse that could be called "presentational". I will argue that the presentational mode is fundamental to poetry, drama, and fictional prose.

Implicitly, Wolterstorff describes literary response as having a layered structure: as being the uptake of the content introduced but also the reflection on this content. Understanding this duality is key to grasping the complexity of literary meaning and to the analysis of a specific kind of reader operation mediating between uptake and reflection, an operation which I call "application". Through application, the text acquires its personal significance for the reader. Having recourse to fictions can help the author introduce states of affairs that are interesting for the reader to ponder and apply. Two very short texts -- a poem and a piece of prose fiction -- will be used to illustrate these points.

Martin Pokorný (Prague): Fictionality between Quality and Quantity

The paper will test the following hypothesis: A text is exactly as fictional as it is long.

Stefano Predelli (Nottingham): Fictional Names and Generics

According to what I call the Character Referring Thesis, fictional names such as 'Holmes' refer to abstract fictional characters. 'Internal' utterances, such as my utterance of 'Holmes smokes a pipe' during a discussion of Doyle's stories, are then analyzed as saying that, in Doyle's fiction, a certain abstract character is a pipe smoker. This has the undesirable consequence that fictional narratives end up describing metaphysically impossible scenarios, for instance a scenario in which abstract objects engage in pipe smoking. In this presentation, I propose an alternative analysis of internal utterances, consistent with the Character Referring Thesis but not committed to this unpalatable outcome.

Greg Ray (Florida): Toward a Unified Theory of That

Formal semantics had its genesis in concerns that discounted fictional discourse and intensional idioms, and finding ways to re-incorporate these elements in an extensionalist framework proves enormously difficult, the resources of Kripkean possibility semantics notwithstanding.
In this talk, we consider how extensionalist semantics might have developed if intensional idioms and fictional discourse had been a key issue for foundational thinkers like Tarski, or if Kripke had focused at the outset on 'that'-clauses more generally, and not just the rather special case of 'it is possible that'. Taking its queue from insights of Tarski and Kripke, the result is a semantic picture that remains strikingly classical, but easily accommodates fictional discourse as well as yielding a natural account of attitude contexts. If something like the account that emerges is correct, several famous puzzles would find resolution.

Göran Rossholm (Stockholm): Factual information vs „fictional information"

I will present a concept of fiction rooted in the concept of factual information and try to spell out the major differences between these concepts information and information (or information taken figuratively and literally). I will confine myself to narrative fiction, and I will comment about fictionality from a readers perspective only.

Marcelo Sabates (Kansas): Characters at Work

The paper defends a version of a fairly traditional type/ token account of literary works by addressing some objections regarding the variability and creatability of texts, by comparing the view with recent alternatives and by arguing that it offers the best
framework for a plausible view about fictional characters.

Barry C. Smith (London): Fiction as a Visual Cliff'

Our emotional responses to fictional characters have puzzled many philosophers who struggle to understand how what is fictionally the case can arouse emotions like pity, admiration or anger as readily as the recognition of what is actually the case. Some have argued that because we lack beliefs about real people or events we do not have real emotions towards fictional characters. Others have argued that because we do have beliefs about fictional characters and events these support our emotional responses. In contrast to both, I shall argue that basis of our emotional reactions are belief-independent mechanisms that successful fiction triggers. These are the same mechanisms that serve us in social interactions and which play an initial role in how beliefs are established. It is therefore naturalness not truth that allows fiction to work on our emotions. Lack of truth does not detract from our response, but failure to exploit natural cues will diminish the credibility and engagement with a fiction. Where it is effective, fiction does not require 'the willing suspension of disbelief', it exploits aspects of our cognitive and emotional systems that are prior to, and independent of, our beliefs.

Fredrik Stjernberg (Linköping): Conceivability and Imagination

In my talk I will be examining some of the connections proposed between the conceivable and the possible. It seems that all possible (sic) combinations and views have been tried out. But I will be focussing on a special issue concerning the relations between the two, namely the way in which our understanding of fiction can be made to aid us in understanding the world. We seem to have some very clear examples of this — people coming to understand how other persons work after reading a piece of fiction, as when Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin made imaginative identification with the plight of the slaves possible. But on the other hand, we can work ourselves into a way of Viking fiction that makes it impossible for fiction to provide knowledge and understanding: after all, how could we arrive at knowledge through a detour of accepting a bunch of falsehoods? In discussions of Gettier cases in epistemology, people usually find the no false lemma proviso pretty

convincing. So how could it work better in the case of fiction? Or is the product of understanding fiction some other kind of mental state, or some other kind of achievement?

The focus of my talk will be what has been called the fictionality puzzle. Walton (2006) formulates it as follows:

We easily accept that princes become frogs, or that people travel in time, in the world of a story, even, sometimes, that blatant contradictions are fictional. But we balk ... at interpretations of stories or other fictions according to which it is fictional that (absent extraordinary circumstances) female infanticide is right and proper, or that nutmeg is the summum bonum ... Why the difference? This is the fictionality puzzle. (Walton (2006), p. 140)

Some detours from truth work in fictin, some don't. But it is unsatisfying to leave it at that.

References:
Nichols, S. (ed.), The Architecture of the Imagination, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2006
Walton, K., "On the (so-called) puzzle of imaginative resistance", in Nichols (2006)

Karel Thein (Prague): Fictionality and Modality. An Ancient Story About the Mind and Its Excesses

The paper conceives of several possible definitions of fictionality with a particular focus on the relations between fiction, modal reasoning and imagination. Choosing some examples from the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophy alike, it submits that these relations are the basic element of both our propositional self-awareness and our access to other minds.

Alberto Voltolini (Turin): How Do I Know That I Am Not a Fictional Character?

Theoretically speaking, it seems very easy to answer *à la* Descartes the Descartes-like question of how do I know that I am not a fictional character: (according to the best theory of *ficta*,) fictional characters are abstract entities, abstract entities do not think, yet I think, so I am not a fictional character. To be sure, the easy answer needs to be refined. For there indeed is a sense according to which at least some fictional characters think, the very same sense in which they are humans. Yet one rather has to apply that refinement to the really important question, namely, how do I know that I am not an inhabitant of a fictional world. This is a version of the more general question, among all (im)possible worlds, how do I know which world I live in, how do I know that I live in the (absolutely) actual world and not in a world that at most might have been actual. For that refinement will show that the idea that I may discover that I live in a world of fiction is simply meaningless.

Marián Zouhar (Bratislava): Frege on Fiction

Frege scarcely suggested any positive theory of fictional discourse; his notes about it are primarily designed to highlight certain features of factual discourse rather than to contribute to a theory of fictional discourse *per se*. I gather the fragmentary pieces scattered here and there in some of Frege's papers and try to outline a possible Fregean picture of the fictional discourse semantics.

The fundamental feature of the sentences occurring in fictional discourse is, according to Frege, that the thoughts (*Gedanken*) expressed by such sentences are neither true nor false. Sometimes Frege speaks about such thoughts as fictitious. I show (i) that being fictitious cannot be interpreted as having a third truth-value and (ii) that this holds for all thoughts expressed by the sentences occurring in fictional discourse, contrary to what Frege seems to imply in certain unclear passages. Given these conclusions, it is shown that sentences in fictional discourse are about nothing; i.e., the Principle of Subject-Matter (*cf*. Carnap) breaks down in such contexts. For all sentences in fictional discourse it holds that neither proper names nor concept-words appearing in them have meanings (*Bedeutungen*). Thus, the Sherlock Holmes stories, for example, are not about Sherlock Holmes or anyone else. Analogously, fairy-tales cannot be about fairies or witches or unicorns because there is no concept (*Begriff*) of a fairy (etc.).

Finally, I shall qualify certain Frege's remarks which appear to point to a somewhat odd theory of language used in fictional discourse. Frege seems to imply that the language as used in factual discourse differs from the language as used in fictional discourse. This *double* language hypothesis explains, rather neatly, a great majority of Frege's remarks on fiction. However, I do not wish to claim that this is something Frege was after in his paper. On the basis of one Frege's note, I outline a competing *single* language hypothesis. Anyway, both hypotheses are consistent with prevailing number of Frege's remarks on fiction. I try to explain why Frege sometimes speaks as if preferring one hypothesis and sometimes as if preferring the other one.