Fictions That Don't Tell the Truth

— Forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies* —

Neri Marsili
UNED (Madrid, Spain)

Abstract: *Can fictions lie? According to a classic conception, works of fiction cannot contain lies, since their content is neither presented as true nor meant to deceive us. But this classic view can be challenged. Sometimes fictions appear to make claims about the actual world, and these claims can be designed to convey falsehoods, historical misconceptions, and pernicious stereotypes. Should we conclude that some fictional statements are lies? This article presents two views that support a positive answer, and two that support a negative one. After examining various ways in which fictions can deceive, it concludes in favour of the view that fictional statements can mislead, but never lie.*

1. The poet: a liar by profession?

> *Poets themselves, tho' liars by profession,*
> *always endeavor to give an air of truth to their fictions*
>
> David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*

> *Now for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. [...] But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth [...]. And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not*
>
> Sir Phillip Sydney, *An Apology for Poetry*

Consider the oft-quoted passages above. They instantiate two rather radical, opposite views. The first one, defended by Hume, is that all fiction-writers are liars. Famously endorsed by Plato, who did not wish to include mendacious poets in his Republic, this view exerted influence on philosophers throughout history: Pascal defined poetic imagination as the "queen of lies and error", and about a century later Hume penned the harsh comment above.

Nowadays, tides have changed. The thesis that fiction writers are liars strikes most contemporary philosophers as risible – little more than a historical curiosity.

Surely fiction and lying have an important trait in common: typically, they both involve saying something that isn't (believed to be) true. But the current consensus is that it would be erroneous to conflate these two concepts, since they are importantly distinct. Many philosophers nowadays (like most folk) rather side with Sir Phillip Sidney's view that fictional statements aren't lies – however, as we shall see, exceptions abound.

There are excellent reasons to side with Sydney. It would be rather odd to claim that the falsities contained in a work of fiction are lies. Take, for instance, the incipit of Jorge Luis Borges's *The Lottery in Babylon*: "Like all the men in Babylon, I have been proconsul; like all, I have been a slave. I have known omnipotence, ignominy, imprisonment.". Nobody would argue that Borges's opening statement is a lie, even if Borges surely believed it to be false – he was never a proconsul, nor a slave; nor did he share this fate with "all the men in Babylon" (among other reasons, because he never lived there). But *why* do we judge that the Borges has not lied in writing this statement? Sydney's plausible suggestion is that lying requires making assertions ("telling things for true"), whereas authors of fiction ("poets") don't present their stories as true. Accusations of mendacity, then, aren't in order. The falsities we find in fictional works aren't lies, because they aren't affirmed.

This explanation is simple and appealing. But it's not the only explanation on the table. Some philosophers think that a deceptive intent is essential to lying, and an alternative explanation follows from this view. If Borges's incipit contains no lies (the story goes), it's because Borges has no intent to make its readers believe something false. He doesn't want to convince them that that he was a slave and a proconsul, or that he lived in Babylon. Lies differ from fiction because lies, unlike fictions, aim to deceive.

Which of these two views better tracks the distinction between fiction and lying? And can genuine lies be found within works of fiction? This paper aims to answer these two questions. Its goal is to determine what grounds the distinction between lying and fiction, and to establish whether these concepts really are mutually exclusive.

2. Fiction vs Lying

2.1 Defining lying, and distinguishing it from fiction

How does lying differ from fiction? Let's start by considering what lying is. There is consensus that stating what you believe to be false is a *necessary* condition for

lying: you cannot lie unless you explicitly say (as opposed to imply) something that you believe to be false[1]:

Lying-Nec: A speaker S lies *only if* S states that p and S believes that p is false

Lying-Nec identifies *necessary* conditions that aren't jointly *sufficient* to determine whether an utterance is a lie. Alone, it is unable to distinguish lying from fiction. Consider Borges's example once again. Writing *The Lottery in Babylon*'s incipit, Borges stated something that he believes to be false (that he was a proconsul, a slave, and so forth). The incipit satisfies Lying-Nec, but it's not a lie.

To distinguish lying from fiction, Lying-Nec needs to be narrowed down. We need a criterion that can tell lying apart from 'non-mendacious falsities'[2]: *fictions*, but also *ironic statements; jokes; teasing remarks; hyperboles; metaphors; euphemisms*, and the like. Historically, philosophers have offered two competing solutions: *Deceptionist* accounts of lying and *Assertionist* accounts.

Deceptionist accounts complement Lying-Nec with an 'intention to deceive condition' (IDC below):

Deceptionist definitions:
S lies to A iff:
(a) S states that p
(b) S believes $\neg p$
(IDC) S intends A to believe p[3]

For the Deceptionist, non-mendacious falsities aren't lies because they aren't meant to deceive. If Borges isn't lying, it's because he isn't attempting to deceive his readers (he isn't trying to convince them that it is actually true that he was a proconsul, a slave, etc.). But there is an alternative approach to explain why this sort of fictional statements aren't lies. One can complement Lying-Nec with the requirement that the speaker must *genuinely assert* that p (AC below):

---

[1] For an overview, Mahon (2015). For discussion of some complications regarding the requirement that the speaker has to believe that what they say is false, see Marsili (2014; 2018); for some reservations about the idea that the speaker must make an explicit statement, see Viebahn (2017; 2021), but cf. Marsili and Löhr (2022) for a reply.

[2] I am using 'falsities' for ease of exposition here, but technically we are dealing with 'believed-falsities': it isn't the literal of a joke or a metaphor that creates a problem for Lying-Nec, but rather the fact that they are *believed* to be false by the speaker.

[3] Different authors phrase this condition in slightly different ways. For an overview of alternative formulations, and the difficulties they all face, see Fallis (2018) and Krstić (forthcoming).

Assertionist definitions:
S lies to A iff:
(a) S says p
(b) S believes ¬p
(AC) In saying that p, S asserts that p[4]

On this view, the reason why *non-mendacious falsehoods* (fictional, ironic, metaphorical utterances) aren't lies is that they aren't genuinely asserted. Assertionists side with Sydney's explanation of the distinction between lying and fiction: if Borges's statements are not lies, it's because Borges "nothing affirms" (condition AC isn't met). Whether Borges had an intent to deceive is irrelevant to determine whether he was lying.

2.2 Different grounds for the fiction/lying distinction

Deceptionism and Assertionism yield different explanations for the intuitive difference between lying and fiction. What grounds the distinction is either the deceptive intent of the speaker (for Deceptionism), or the force of the utterance (for Assertionism)[5]. There's more than one way, however, to interpret the theoretical implications of each view for the lying/fiction distinction: both Assertionism and Deceptionism admit a Weak and a Strong interpretation.

Before I move on to discuss Weak and Strong varieties, let me introduce a terminological stipulation. In what follows, I will use the expression "utterance in fiction" to refer to *any utterance contained in a work of fiction*. If I prefer "utterance in fiction" to the more elegant "fictional utterance", it's because philosophers don't agree that all the utterances contained in a work of fiction (i.e. all "utterances in fiction") are fictional utterances. While "unitarians" (Friend 2008; García-Carpintero 2013; 2020, 240; cf. Stock 2017) are happy with the equivalence, "patchwork theorists" (Currie 1990, 48; Searle 1975, 332; Konrad 2017) claim that fictional works are a mixture of fictional utterances and genuine speech acts performed by the author *in propria persona*. Given this controversy, it's preferable to frame the disagreement between Deceptionists and Assertionists as a disagreement about the status of *utterances in fiction* (whether or not they can be lies, and under which conditions). This way of articulating each position

[4]Also this condition is phrased differently by different authors (e.g. Fallis 2009; 2013; Stokke 2013; 2018; Marsili 2021).

[5] There's a third family of definitions that I have left aside: hybrid definitions, which require *both* intended deception and assertion (both IDC and AC). However, what I say about Assertionism and Deceptionism can be extended to hybrid views quite straightforwardly. For more on hybrid views, see Mahon (2015) and Marsili (2021).

remains neutral on the broader question of which of utterances occurring in a work of fiction are genuine fictional utterances.

With this clarification out of the way, we are ready to explore Strong and Weak varieties of Deceptionism and Assertionism. I'll start from the former family of views. On a Strong reading, Deceptionism may be interpreted as claiming that utterances in fiction are *never* lies, because utterances in fiction are never meant to deceive:

> **SD:** Necessarily, utterances in fiction are not intended to deceive, so they cannot be lies

SD, in turn, entails that "Fictions Never Lie[6]" (FNL):

> **FNL:** Utterances in fiction cannot be lies

In the next section (§3) we shall see that there are several ways in which fictions can be designed to intentionally deceive their audiences: SD is false, and blatantly so. Luckily, Deceptionism need not be interpreted in this strong way. A more cautious Deceptionist take is the following: *whenever an utterance in fiction is intended to deceive*, it's best classified as a lie. This yields a more plausible account of the lying/fiction distinction (call it Weak Deceptionism):

> **WD:** If a believed-false utterance in fiction is intended to deceive, it's a lie. Otherwise, it's not a lie.

Applied to fiction, Assertionism also comes in two varieties. On a strong reading (call it Strong Assertionism), it holds that utterances in fiction cannot be lies, because utterances in fiction cannot be asserted:

> **SA:** Necessarily, utterances in fiction are not asserted, so they cannot be lies

Strong Assertionism (SA) sides with Sydney's views about fiction. Like Strong Deceptionism, Strong Assertionism entails FNL, *i.e.* that fictions never lie (although this conclusion is, of course, determined by altogether different motivations). Arguably, SA is the most influential view in the philosophical and

[6] The slogan "fictions never lie" (which echoes Mahon's "novels never lie", title of his 2019 article on this subject) is a helpful shorthand for the position under examination, but should not be taken literally, as a referee urges me to clarify. Clearly, if lying is possible in fiction, it's the author who lies, not the fiction itself, since fictional works cannot, strictly speaking, perform speech acts.

narratological scholarship on fiction; its most recent and systematic articulation is due to Mahon (2019)[7].

Assertionism admits a weak interpretation as well. Weak Assertionism (WA) grants that *some* utterances in fiction are genuinely asserted. When an assertion in fiction is believed to be false, it qualifies as a lie[8]:

WA: If a believed-false utterance in fiction is asserted, it's a lie. Otherwise, it's not a lie.

Weak Assertionism admits a "patchwork-theoretic" and a "unitarian" interpretation. It's easy to see that endorsing a patchwork theory (jointly with an Assertionist definition of lying) naturally leads to Weak Assertionism: if some utterances in fiction are genuinely asserted, some utterances in fiction can be lies. Crucially, Weak Assertionism is open to unitarian positions as well. Unitarian views do not rule out the possibility that an utterance in fiction could be *both* asserted *and* fictional[9]. The takeaway is that Weak Assertionism admits different assumptions about the mereology of fiction. While being aware of these complications is important, I shall leave them aside in what follows, since they are not of primary concern.

At this point, keeping track of the different positions may be difficult. The table below offers a helpful summary:

---

[7] See also Beardsley (1958,421–23, 1981), Scholes (1980,211); Ohmann (1971,197); Gale (1971,324–29); Van Inwagen (1977,301–7); Frye (2006); Kripke (2011); Maier (2017).

[8] An explicit defence of Weak Assertionism is in Dixon (2020, sec. 4; 2022). WA is also implicitly supported by those who think that fictions can contain genuine assertions (Walton 1983; Currie 1985; 1990; Friend 2014, 231; Konrad 2017; Green 2017; Abell 2020, 42–43).

[9] A unitarian view that allows for assertions in fiction is defended by García-Carpintero (2019) – but it should be noted that García-Carpintero considers assertions in fiction to be *indirect* speech acts, not direct ones.

Definition of Lying	**Account of the Lying/Fiction Distinction**		**Can fictions lie?**
Deceptionist	*Strong Deceptionism*	**SD**: Utterances in fiction cannot intentionally deceive, so they cannot be lies	No
	Weak Deceptionism	**WD**: A believed-false utterance in fiction is a lie if it's intended to deceive	Yes
Assertionist	*Strong Assertionism*	**SA**: Utterances in fiction are not asserted, so they cannot be lies	No
	Weak Assertionism	**WA**: A believed-false utterance in fiction is a lie if it's asserted	Yes

Table 1: *Four views about the distinction between lying and fiction, summarised.*

In all their differences, the four views under consideration converge on two answers to the initial question raised by the comments of Pascal, Plato, Hume, and Sidney – namely, whether fictions can lie. The Strong version of each view denies (for different reasons) that fictions can lie. Both Weak versions concede that sometimes fictions can lie (although, again, for different reasons). To establish whether fictions can lie (whether FNL is true), we'll have to assess the plausibility of each of the four views summarised in Table 1. This is what I set out to do in the rest of the paper, starting from evidence that bears on the validity of Strong Deceptionism.

3. Deceptive Fiction: an overview

I anticipated that Strong Deceptionism is false, because it incorrectly assumes that fictions are never meant to deceive. It's now time to justify this claim. There are two main ways in which fictions can be designed to deceive their audiences. First, authors can aim to deceive their audiences about what occurs in the story (deception about the *fictional world*). Second, they can aim to deceive their audiences about what is actually the case (deception about the *actual world*). Let's consider these two species of deception in turn.

Intended deception about the fictional world is, in a way, a puzzling phenomenon. Suppose that we endorse the naïve view that fictional utterances simply *stipulate* fictional truths[10]. As Culler (2004) puts it, when the novelist writes something in the fiction, "she cannot be wrong [...]"; such is "the power of

[10] For an insightful discussion of this view, its supporters, its merits and weaknesses, see Voltolini (2010).

invention, of incontrovertible stipulation". If Conan Doyle writes that 'Sherlock Holmes lives at *221B* Baker Street', he stipulates that it's true in this fiction that Sherlock Holmes lives at *221B* Baker Street. This proposition is true in the fiction in virtue of the fact that there is a sentence in the book that says so. We may naively conclude that deception about the fictional world is simply impossible, for whatever is recounted in the fiction is true by stipulation – there can be no mistakes.

Yet authors can clearly deceive their audiences about what happens in the fictional world. They may deploy an 'unreliable narrator', who can be *insincere* or *mistaken* about the events occurring in the story (Booth 1961,158–59). They may also adopt multiple narratorial 'voices', whose accounts of the fictional events are inconsistent. Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and Palahniuk's *Fight Club* are prominent examples of deceptive stories recounted by an 'unreliable narrator'; Kurosawa's *Rashomon*[11] adopts multiple, inconsistent voices. These fictions involve intended deception: until the correct version of the narrated events is revealed, we are bound to be deceived about what really happened in the fictional world.

Intended deception about the actual world occurs when fictions are designed to cause their audiences to form incorrect beliefs about the actual world. It is thought that Walter Scott's historical novels (together with many other Scottish works of his time, like the literary forgeries of James Macpherson[12] and the bogus essays of the 'Sobieski Stuarts'[13]), contributed to promote false beliefs about Scottish folklore and history (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012,48). If this was Scott's intention, some of his works would be an example of fiction that intentionally deceives *about the actual world*.

Fiction is often designed to convey misleading stereotypes and deceptive misconceptions, too. Examples abound in early American literature and cinema, especially in relation to its disturbing representations of African American (Chaleila 2020) and Native American (Barnett and Walker 1975; Rollins 2011; Berny 2020) characters. It is sadly known that in these works Natives and Afro-American are often represented as either vicious and violent, or submissive and unintelligent. Works of fiction have been used to explicitly disseminate white supremacist misconceptions and conspiracy theories, too. The fictional novels of William Luther Pierce (most famously *The Turner Diaries*) promote the idea

[11] Which is in turn based on the 1922 short novel *In a Grove*, by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa.

[12] Above all, *The Poems of Ossian* – a forgery that Macpherson presented as the translation of Gaelic poems dating back to the 3rd century. Here deception occurs at two different levels: there's deception *about* the fiction (its origin and its author are misrepresented) and *from* the fiction (it invites false beliefs about Scottish traditions and folklore).

[13] See Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012,37–41) for a brief introduction to the work of these prolific forgers.

that Zionists secretly control Western governments, and that various forces are conspiring to subdue, oppress, and eliminate white people. These novels have been taken to be faithfully depicting reality by many readers: the *Turner Diaries* are thought to have incited numerous acts of violence, with experts estimating that over 40 terrorist attacks and 200 killings were inspired by Pierce's novel (Berger 2016).

Insofar as some of these fictional works sincerely reflected the racists attitudes and xenophobic delusions of their authors, it may be countered that, while these works contain many false and vicious statements, their authors lacked an *intention* to deceive: their work simply reflects their racist ideals and historical misconceptions. If we accept this premise, these works are no less objectionable, but they don't represent a challenge to SD.

In some other cases, however, a deceptive intent is harder to deny. Take the example of Thomas Dixon Jr., an American author who wrote various works of fiction romanticising white supremacism in the Southern States – famously, bestselling novels like *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865–1900* and *The Clansman: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (the latter of which was turned into the infamous motion picture *Birth of a Nation*). Invariably displaying realistic ambitions, Dixon's works are plagued with historical and factual inaccuracies, which some commentators assumed to be deliberate[14]. If these commentators are right, Dixon's works of fiction were deceptive by design, not by accident.

Be it as it may, it is clear that fiction can be an effective form of propaganda, and can be intentionally designed to convey false narratives meant to manipulate public opinion and to distort the historical record. Utterances in fiction can be deceptive by design, both about the *fictional world* and about the *actual world*. This means that Strong Deceptionism is false, and that little can be done to redeem it. My discussion, from now on, will focus on the remaining three positions, starting from Weak Deceptionism.

4. Intended deception about the fictional world

We saw that fictions can be deceptive by design. What needs to be established, now, is whether some of these deceptions amount to genuine lying, as claimed by Weak Deceptionism. This section considers whether intended deception about the fictional world amounts to lying; the next one covers deception about the

[14] For some relevant comments, see NAACP (1915), D'ooge (1994), Franklin (1979), and Mahon (2019).

actual world. Let's start by considering an excerpt from Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*[15]*:*

> (1) Tyler and I met at a nudist beach. He asked me: "Do you know what time it is?"

Without doubt, (1) is a deceptive statement: the reader doesn't know it yet, but Tyler and the narrator are the same person. Therefore, Tyler and the narrator cannot have met at a nudist beach (or anywhere else), and Tyler cannot have asked the narrator the time. Palahniuk included (1) in the story to trick his readership into falsely believing that (1) is true. According to Deceptionist definitions of lying, (1) is a lie.

But here's a problem. Intuitively, by writing (1) Palahniuk hasn't lied to his readers[16]. He merely set them up for a plot twist. Readers may feel disappointed and fooled when they realise (later in the novel) that Tyler and the narrator are the same person. Yet, it would be intuitively inappropriate to accuse Palahniuk of being a liar for introducing a plot twist into the story.

To better appreciate this point, it can be useful to compare (1) to the deceptive utterances found in non-fiction. Consider, for example, Lance Armstrong's autobiography *It's Not About the Bike* (co-authored with Sally Jenkins). After the book's publication, it came to light that Armstrong had been using illegal substances throughout his career; "much of what was written [in the text] turned out to be mendacious" (Bury 2013). Readers complained that numerous statements contained in the books are outright lies. There is little question that they are, and the outrage caused by Armstrong's biography is surely justified (Mahon 2019). The same outrage would be intuitively out of place if addressed to Palahniuk. It's unsurprising, then, that Palahniuk's book did not generate the accusations of mendacity and the outrage that accompanied Armstrong's.

Generalising, there seems to be an intuitive difference between the deceptive statements found in non-fiction and those found in fiction. It is quite straightforward that (at least some of) the intentionally deceptive statements that we find in works of non-fiction are lies. By contrast, utterances in fictions

---

[15] I am quoting almost *verbatim* from pp. 56-57, but I've slightly redacted the citation to facilitate discussion.

[16] Remember that the issue here is whether *authors* can lie by penning fiction, not whether fictional characters can lie. Hence, while we may agree that the *narrator* (a fictional character) has lied, this falls short of proving that Palahniuk lied. That characters can *fictionally* lie is something that anybody is ready to acknowledge, but intradiegetic lies are no more lies (to borrow Dretske's motto) than decoy ducks are ducks.

that are meant to deceive about the fictional world, like (1), are intuitively not lies. This is a problem for Weak Deceptionism, which fails to appreciate the distinction, and classifies both kinds of statements as straightforward lies.

But Weak Deceptionism might only need a minor tweak. Perhaps genuinely intending to deceive requires an intention to make someone believe that a given proposition is *actually* true (true in the actual world). Clearly, Palahniuk has no intention to trick his audience into believing that (1) is true *in the actual world*. Reinterpreting the 'intention to deceive condition' in this way has the welcome consequence that (1) isn't classified as a lie.

The problem with this solution, however, is that it rules out the possibility of lying about possible worlds in general, and fictional worlds in particular. Suppose that a friend asks me how *Moby Dick* ends, and I reply:

(2) Ahab finally kills the whale

It seems pretty clear that I would be lying. Yet, I only intend my friend to believe that (2) is true *in the fictional world* of the story, not in the actual world. The revised criterion is therefore incorrect, because it rules out the possibility of lying *about* fiction. This is undesirable, because it's possible to lie about propositions under the scope of modal operators, including fictional operators[17].

Perhaps some further epicycle can be added to Deceptionism, to deliver a criterion that includes (2) without excluding (1)[18]. I am doubtful that this would help much, however. As we are about to see, Weak Deceptionism also has trouble accommodating fictions designed to deceive about the actual world.

5. Intended deception about the actual world

5.1 A case study

[17] Put more precisely, accepting this requirement means that any statement that is implicitly indexed to a possible world cannot be a lie. To illustrate the breadth of the problem, here's an example that doesn't involve fictional works. Imagine a conversation between two mail inspectors. Bob wants to know whether Tod, the new employee, will really stick to the rules if he finds an illegal package. So, he asks:

- Bob: You find a package containing illegal drugs. What do you do?
- Tod: I call Officer Johnson immediately

Tod could be lying to Bob here (if he aims to deceive Bob about what he would do). But the revised criterion wouldn't accommodate this intuition: Tod isn't aiming to deceive him about the actual world, in which he found no illicit package, but about the possible worlds in which he did.

[18] A referee suggests one: to argue, à la Lewis (1978), that the content of statements like (2) is best rendered with a periphrasis like (2*) "In Moby Dick, Ahab finally kills the whale". Let's concede that (2*) tells us something about the actual world (for instance, *that in the actual world it is true that "in Moby Dick, Ahab finally kills the whale"*). This still wouldn't help: if we allow for this reading, nothing would then prevent us from counting (1) as a lie once again, since also (1) falsely conveys (by the same token) *that in the actual world, "in Fight Club, Tyler and the protagonist met at a nudist beach"*.

Commenting on the historical inaccuracies found in recent movies (*Oppenheimer*) and series *(Napoleon, The Crown),* British columnist Simon Jenkins expressed concerns over the practice of "deliberately telling lies about the living or the deceased", which (he argues) is becoming increasingly common in cinematic works of fiction (Jenkins 2023). Similarly, Masha Gessen criticised the HBO series *Chernobyl* for "crossing the line from conjuring a fiction to creating a lie" (Gessen 2019). As these examples illustrate, we sometimes speak of deceptive fiction as containing *lies*. Is the term used loosely in these cases (as when we refer to honest mistakes as lies), or can deceptive fiction contain genuine lies, just like non-fiction?

To address this question, let's focus on explicit statements contained in literary works of fiction that purport to narrate actual events, which best illustrate the possibility of lying in fiction. Consider the following passage from Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables:*

> *(3) The artillery had to wait until [the soil] became a little firmer before they could manoeuvre. Napoleon was an artillery officer, and felt the effects of this.*

The chapter from which this excerpt is taken, *Waterloo,* is a long digression on what happened on the 18th of June in Waterloo, when France faced a coalition of European forces. Here Hugo displays an unmistakable intention to convey a reliable account of what happened during the battle. Knowing this, many readers take (3) to communicate something that is true not only in the world of the story, but also in *the actual world* (cf. García-Carpintero 2019; 2020; Marsili 2023).

Can utterances of this sort be lies? Suppose that, instead of (3), Hugo had included the following incorrect statement:

> *(3-F) Napoleon had never been trained to be an artillery officer*

Imagine that Hugo added (3-F) ('F' as a reminder for 'False') to the story because he wanted to trick his readers into believing, incorrectly, that Napoleon's lack of artillery expertise was the cause of his defeat in Waterloo. Would (3-F) be a lie?

Weak Deceptionism gives a positive answer. Hugo included a statement he believed to be false in the book, with the intention to deceive his readers. By WD's light, he is clearly lying. Weak Assertionism concurs, but offers a different explanation. For the Weak Assertionist, (3-F) is a lie because it's a genuine assertion about the actual world. Since Hugo *asserted* what he believes to be false, WA classifies (3-F) as a lie. But whether (3-F) really is asserted is up for

dispute: the Strong Assertionist disagrees. While it's true Hugo intended to convey that (3-F) is actually the case, *Les Miserables* is a work of fiction, so Hugo doesn't explicitly take responsibility for the truth of its content. This disqualifies (3-F) from being a genuine assertion: (3-F) cannot be a lie.

Which of these views is right? Typically, philosophers appeal to their own intuitions to settle this sort of questions. The problem, however, is that in these crucial cases intuitions tend to diverge. Strong Assertionists report the intuition that (although deceptive) statements like (3-F) are intuitively *not* genuine assertions nor lies. The Weak Assertionists and the Weak Deceptionists retort that intuitively (3-F) is a genuine lie (either because it's asserted, or because it's meant to deceive). Intuitions alone aren't likely to settle the disagreement here. We need to determine whether utterances like (3-F) are lies on independent grounds.

5.2 The lying-misleading distinction

To make progress, we may regard the current stalemate as involving a disagreement on whether these deceptive utterances in fictions are *merely misleading*[19] (as the Strong Assertionist would have it) or *genuine lies* (as argued by the other two views)[20]. The advantage of framing the disagreement in these terms is that we can now take advantage of linguistic tests that rely on pre-theoretical intuitions about which moves are available to the participants to a conversation, instead of theory-laden intuitions about what lying is.

There's relative consensus between linguists and philosophers[21] that the lying/misleading distinction parallels a distinction between asserting a proposition and indirectly communicating it. A misleading statement communicates something false without asserting it (Saul 2012; Stainton 2016; Michaelson 2016). Philosophers also tend to agree that the availability of

[19] As it is commonplace in the literature, I take a statement to be *misleading* iff it is deceptive in virtue of intentionally communicating content that is false. A *merely misleading* statement, in turn, is a misleading statement that is not a lie.

[20] To be sure, there is a third possibility – that these utterances are neither lies nor misleading. Indeed, most utterances in fiction fall into this third category (an obvious example being *The Lottery in Babylon*'s incipit, discussed in §1). I'm implicitly restricting discussion to believed-false statements that the author aims to present as true in the actual world.

[21] As argued in recent work, this distinction is not quite the same as the distinction between what is said and what is implicated (Viebahn 2017; Timmermann and Viebahn 2020; Viebahn 2021; cf. Marsili and Löhr 2022; Pepp 2022).

felicitous[22] *denials* is evidence[23] that an utterance is not explicitly stated (and therefore not a lie), but at most implied (i.e. at most *misleading*). A felicitous denial is a statement by means of which the speaker successfully *cancels* a potential interpretation of their utterance (in the Gricean sense of 'cancellation', cf. Grice 1989). In other words, a misleader (but not a liar) should be able to felicitously use expressions like (M) and (C) to take back a misleading interpretation of their statements (cf. Marsili 2023):

(M) Sorry, but you misunderstood me: I didn't mean to suggest that p is actually true
(C) In fact, p is false

To illustrate how this works, let's compare a mendacious assertion with a misleading implicature. Imagine that I know that (3-F) is false, and I utter (3-F) in a serious conversation about French history. Accusing me of lying would be perfectly appropriate. In reply to the accusation, I would be unable to felicitously back off with (M) or (C)[24]. If I added (C), I would contradict myself; if I replied with (M), my comeback would have the paradoxical flavour of a Moorean assertion. In both cases, my denial would "misfire": it would be conversationally inadmissible. From the unavailability of (M) and (C), we can infer that I've lied rather than misled.

Now suppose that in the same context I uttered the true but misleading sentence (3-M) (below) instead, knowing that (3-F) is false, and intending to trick my audience into believing that (3-F) is true:

(3-M) My history professor told me that (3-F) *Napoleon had never been trained to be an artillery officer*

If someone objects that Napoleon was actually a trained artillery officer, I could easily back off with constructions like (M) or (C). I may explain that my purpose was to expose my history professor's utter incompetence, since (3-F) is blatantly

[22] By "felicitous" denial I mean one that does not misfire. The term "misfire" is here understood in its traditional Austinian sense (Austin 1975). Denials can misfire, for instance, when they bring about a logical ("p; but, of course, not p") or pragmatic contradiction ("p, but I don't mean to suggest that p"). I discuss more concrete examples of felicitous and infelicitous denials (and explain what makes them infelicitous) in what follows.

[23] The claim here isn't that the test provides *conclusive* evidence. But all we need to draw our inference to the best explanation is *defeasible* evidence. For more on the limitations of this test, see Fricker (2012), Peet (2015), García-Carpintero (2018), and Marsili (2023).

[24] The resulting replies would be: (M) "Sorry, but you misunderstood me: I didn't mean to suggest that it's actually true that Napoleon had never been trained to be an artillery officer", and (C) "In fact, he had been so trained".

false. The test correctly classifies (3-M) as a misleading statement, rather than a mendacious assertion.

Attending to the availability of (M) and (C) can help us determine whether deceptive utterances in fiction like (3-F) are best classified as misleading or lying. Imagine that a critic interviews Hugo and presses him about the presence of the false statement (3-F). Hugo could easily reply with something like (M) or (C): "You misunderstood me, I added that detail merely for colour – I didn't mean to suggest that Napoleon was an incompetent artillery officer. In fact, he was a very competent one!". On top of being felicitous, this clarification would be plausible (in the right context). Oftentimes, considerations about plot design and enjoyability outweigh the importance of historical accuracy, from the author's perspective. And when critics point out inaccuracies in a work of fiction with realistic ambitions, it isn't uncommon for authors to resort to replies along these lines[25]. This suggests that (3-F) is best classified as a misleading statement, as opposed to a genuine lie. The same verdict is reached for any fictional utterance designed to deceive about the actual world: authors of fiction can felicitously back off with expression like (M) and (C).

This doesn't mean that authors of deceptive fictions are off the hook for the deceptions that they concoct. Quite the contrary: they can be criticised for purposefully attempting to deceive their audiences[26]. Going back to our example, we may suspect that Hugo is just making excuses during his interview. Perhaps adding (3-F) was not needed for the economy of the story, and we may know that Hugo's true goal was precisely to deceive his readership. In this context, it would be appropriate criticise Hugo for his ruse. But the contention here is simply that misleaders can *felicitously* make excuses – not that these excuses are necessarily plausible or convincing[27], nor that are necessarily sincere.

If (as argued) statements like (3-F) aren't genuine lies, Deceptionism is in trouble. This view turned out to clash with our intuitions about fiction that deceives about the fictional world (as noted in §4), and with linguistic data about fictions designed to deceived about the actual world (i.e. the test for the lying/misleading distinction just discussed)[28]. The results of the test put pressure on Weak Assertionism too, for also this view classifies statements like (3-F) as genuinely mendacious, rather than misleading. Still, the test does not provide

[25] Friend (2006) discusses one such case: criticised by the historian Richard Current about a minor inaccuracy contained in his historical fiction *Lincoln,* Gore Vidal responded with expressions functionally equivalent to (M) and (C) (cf. Marsili 2023).

[26] In fact, many contemporary philosophers believe that misleading is just as bad as lying. For an overview, see Saul (2012); for a discussion in relation to fiction, Marsili (2023, sec. 5).

[27] For more on implausible deniability, Mazzarella (2023, sec. 4) and Dinges and Zakkou (2023, sec. 8).

[28] For a converging argument on this point, see Fallis (2009,55–56).

conclusive evidence; in the next section, I will review some further arguments for classifying some utterances in fiction as lies.

5.3. Assertions in fiction?

Despite the results of the test, it's undeniable that many fictions talk, in some important sense, about the actual world. In many realistic works (including *Les Miserables*), this connection is so obvious that denying utterances in fiction the status of assertions might seem to go against common sense. Let's consider the case for and against classifying them as assertions.

Dixon (2022, cf. also 2020, §4) offers an excellent reconstruction of the disagreement between Weak and Strong Assertionists on these matters[29]. Dixon (2022, 117) begins by presenting three conditions for asserting which, according to Mahon's (2019) influential defence of Strong Assertionism, cannot be satisfied in a work of fiction[30]. On this view, a statement isn't asserted unless:

(i) (AFFIRM) It affirms that the depicted persons and events occurred or existed prior to the existence of the text;
(ii) (LIABILITY) It's subject to a norm of accuracy (it may be faulted for being false);
(iii) (EXPLICIT) It's explicit, i.e., forms 'what is said', not implied, by the uttered/written sentence.

This characterisation of assertoric statements could certainly be refined. For instance, AFFIRM does not cover assertions about *a priori* truths, like mathematical assertions (e.g. "three is a prime number"). But we can easily loosen AFFIRM to fix this problem, by interpreting AFFIRM as requiring that assertions must present their content as *true* (as opposed to something that "occurred or existed")[31]. Read in this way, the proposed characterisation of assertion is more plausible: it holds that assertions (i) present their content as true, (ii) can appropriately be criticised for being false, and (iii) are explicit, rather than implied[32].

[29] For work that defends of the broader thesis *that fictions can assert*, see references in footnote 7.

[30] Here I am sticking to Dixon's (2022) reconstruction of Mahon's (2019) views, even if I think that a more charitable reading (which I go on to suggest in the main text) is available and should be preferred. The labels (TRUE, LIABILITY, EXPLICIT) are my own.

[31] Wright calls this a 'platitude' about assertion (Wright 1992, 23–24). For discussion of what 'presenting as true' might require, see Pagin and Marsili (2021, §3.1) and Marsili and Green (2021, 23–25).

[32] All three conditions frequently appear in the literature on assertion. For an overview, see Pagin and Marsili (2021).

This characterisation correctly rules out "implicit thematic statements": statements that aren't included *verbatim* in the text, but that a sufficiently attentive reader can easily extrapolate (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 324; Mikkonen 2009). To illustrate, a thematic statement in *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* is that lying is bad (or that lies don't get you far in life, or some periphrasis of the sort). This message is presented as true by Carlo Collodi (ii), but is not asserted, because it doesn't satisfy condition (iii): it's not *explicitly* stated in the story.

What shall we make of claims that are instead explicitly included in the fiction, like (3-F)? Dixon (2022) notes that, even by the Strong Assertionist's strict standards (i-iii), these statements should be classified as genuine assertions. (3-F) is explicit in the sense required by (iii): it states, word by word, that *Napoleon had never been trained to be an artillery officer*. This statement is also (i) presented as true by their authors, and (ii) it can be faulted for its falsity (cf. §5.2). The idea that assertions must satisfy (i)-(iii), which appeared to support Strong Assertionism, now lends support to the opposite view (Weak Assertionism).

In reply, the Strong Assertionist might insist that (i-iii) cannot be jointly satisfied in fiction. Or they might counter that satisfying (i-iii) is not sufficient for an utterance to count as an assertion. In what follows, I consider a combination of both strategies.

I'll start with AFFIRM, the idea that assertions must present their content as something that occurred *in the actual world*. Dixon rightly points out that authors can successfully communicate that salient passages of their work are true in the actual world (and not only in the fiction) – we already considered examples of this, like the excerpt (3) from *Les Miserables*.

However, recognising that authors can covey information about the actual world falls short of proving that utterances in fiction can present their content as true in the same way as assertions do. To see this, it can be helpful to compare works of fiction with works that are paradigmatically assertoric, like works of non-fiction. Non-fiction straightforwardly presents its content as true in the actual world. Lacking reasons to think the opposite, we are entitled to assume that any declarative statement occurring in a work of non-fiction is presented as true. Works of fiction, even when realistic, are more ambiguous. The content of the story is not presented as content that is actually true. Readers can surely recover information about the actual world – but they can only do it by guessing, on the basis of context and genre-conventions, that the author meant to communicate that a particular utterance (or passage, chapter, etc.) is true in the actual world, and not only in the fiction.

It is from content that is presented as *true in the fiction*, then, that readers of fiction draw inferences about what they are meant to recognise as being *true in the actual world*. This speaks against the idea that fictions can present their content as true in the same way as assertions do: when readers of fiction learn something about the actual world, they always have to infer it from content that is presented as *true in the fiction* in the first place. If asserting rather requires presenting content as true *simpliciter,* it follows that utterances in fiction cannot be asserted.

The Strong Assertionist can therefore suggest that (a) a genuine assertion must be presented as true *simpliciter*, and (b) utterances in fiction cannot satisfy (a). If both (a) and (b) hold, utterances in fiction cannot be assertions, and Strong Assertionism is vindicated.

The second criterion, LIABILITY, admits a similar criticism. As we saw in section 5.3, it's undeniable that authors can appropriately be faulted for the falsities contained in their fictions. But the Strong Assertionist can counter that, so understood, LIABILITY is too cheap a requirement. Non-assertoric speech also renders the speaker "liable" to criticism in this broad sense. For instance, I can appropriately be faulted for deceptively implying something false without asserting it, as illustrated by example (4M). If our goal is to capture a property that is distinctive of assertions, LIABILITY is too broad to be a plausible candidate.

Luckily, plausible conceptions of assertoric liability are available in the literature. Various authors have suggested that assertions generate distinctive commitments [33] – commitments that go beyond what LIABILITY covers. Assertions, some note, *guarantee* or *warrant* the truth of the asserted proposition (Moran 2005, 11; Carson 2006; 2010). As Peirce puts it, asserting is a bit like signing a contract stating that the asserted proposition is true (MS[R] 454:5). Once you assert a proposition, you are expected to back it up with adequate evidence if challenged, or else retract it (Brandom 1994; MacFarlane 2005). While authors disagree about the details, there is wide enough consensus that asserting a proposition generates a distinctive set of responsibilities that goes beyond LIABILITY (being liable to criticism if the proposition turns out to be false).

If we interpret LIABILITY as requiring this set of stronger commitments, it's easy to argue utterances in fiction cannot be asserted. Authors of fiction, by definition, do not *guarantee* that any specific utterance contained in their work is true. This is, one might argue, the key difference between a work of fiction and a work of non-fiction. The Strong Assertionist can hence offer another two-

[33] See, for instance, Peirce (CP, MS); Brandom (1994); Rescorla (2009a); Marsili (2015; 2021; forthcoming); Tanesini (2016; 2019), Peet (2021).

pronged argument: (a) asserting requires overtly committing yourself to the truth of a proposition, and (b) this sort of commitment is unachievable in fiction. If both (a) and (b) hold, Dixon argument fails.

What about the third condition, EXPLICIT? EXPLICIT establishes that assertions have to be explicitly articulated, word-by-word, in the text. There is no denying that utterances in fiction can be explicit in this sense. But the Strong Assertionist might once again reply that explicitness is not enough. Arguably, what is distinctive about assertions is that they make *direct* claims about the actual world, as opposed to indirect claims (like claims that are advanced by means of implicatures, indirect speech acts, or presuppositions). If this is right, utterances in fiction should not only be explicit to count as asserted, but also advance *direct* claims about the actual world.

Various authors (Ohmann 1971, 15; García-Carpintero 2016; Alcaraz León 2016; Marsili 2023) have suggested that utterances in fiction cannot be assertions because they cannot be direct in this sense. This point is often established with linguistic tests similar to the one introduced in section 5.2. The underlying idea is that direct claims aren't typically cancellable. By contrast, we saw that utterances in fiction invariably are: authors can cancel any putative claim about the actual world contained in their fictions with constructions like (M) and (C).

This suggests that utterances in fiction, unlike assertions, cannot advance direct claims about the actual world[34]. The Strong Assertionist has a third argument available, then. If (a) assertions must be direct, in the sense of not being cancellable with expressions like (M) and (C), and (b) utterances in fiction cannot satisfy (a), then utterances in fiction cannot be asserted.

Recapitulating, Dixon's argument for Weak Assertionism admits three objections. Each one is motivated by a fairly orthodox understanding of what assertion requires. Crucially, to establish the desired conclusion, it's enough that one of the three arguments succeeds. This is because all three arguments independently establish that utterances in fiction cannot ever qualify as assertions. If just one of the three counterarguments flies, Strong Assertionism is vindicated.

6. Strong Assertionism

> *The pleasure that [novels] occasionally offer is far too heavily paid for: they undermine the finest characters. They teach us to think ourselves*

[34] This point stands regardless of whether we think of these communicative acts as implicatures, indirect speech acts or derivable inferences of some other sort. For discussion of the options available, see Marsili (2023, §IV.4).

> *into other men's places. [...] The reader learns to understand every point of view. Willingly he yields himself to the pursuit of other people's goals and loses sight of his own. Novels are so many wedges which the novelist [...] inserts into the closed personality of the reader. The better he calculates the size of the wedge and the strength of the resistance, so much the more completely does he crack open the personality of the victim. Novels should be prohibited by the State.*
>
> Peter Kien, in Elias Canetti*'s Auto da Fé*

Sydney argued that the fiction-maker "nothing affirms", so that he "never lieth". On a similar note, John L. Austin (1975) suggested that we should distinguish between 'serious', assertive discourse (for the truth of which a speaker takes full responsibility) and fictional, 'etiolated' discourse (for the truth of which the speaker cannot be held fully responsible). The version of Strong Assertionism I defended incorporates both insights and goes one step further. Although authors of fictions cannot make genuine assertions, they can still indirectly *suggest,* or otherwise *convey,* that salient propositions that are presented as "true-in-fiction" are *also* true in the actual world. Thus, utterances in fiction can mislead, but they can't be genuine lies.

One potential worry about Strong Assertionism is that it seems to presuppose a sharp distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Clearly, not every work lends itself to a straightforward classification within this dichotomy. Borderline cases abound, ranging from essayistic fictions (non-fiction essays tainted by fictional elements, like Enrique Vila-Matas's *A brief history of portable literature*) to fictions that are entirely true (like Natalia Ginzburg's *Family Lexicon*[35]). Borderline works of this sort have prompted many authors to challenge the idea that fiction and non-fiction are separated by sharp boundaries. Friend (2008; 2011; 2014), for instance, argues that the opposition between fiction and non-fiction is more like a distinction between genres: loose, rather than sharp; dependent on ever-evolving conventions, rather than modally strict; and allowing for some overlap between the two categories.

I am sympathetic to Friend's view. But Strong Assertionism needs not presuppose that every work clearly sits on one side or another of the fiction/nonfiction distinction. Strong Assertionism is a thesis about *utterances in fiction*: it says that *if* a work is classified as a work of fiction, then it cannot contain assertions or lies. When a work is classified as neither fictional nor non-fictional (or unclassifiable as either), Strong Assertionism simply makes no

[35] In the preface, Ginzburg states: "I haven't invented a thing, and each time I found myself slipping into my long-held habits as a novelist and made something up, I was quickly compelled to destroy the invention".

predictions about its status. Borderline cases, then, don't challenge this view, which is about works that *are* classified as fictions, and takes no stance about *how* works should be classified[36].

We are now ready to offer a conclusive answer to our initial questions. First, contrary to what is claimed by Weak Deceptionism and Weak Assertionism, fictions cannot lie – FNL is vindicated. Second, if fictions never lie it's because lying requires asserting, and fictions never assert, just like the Strong Assertionist claims. Sydney was right. However, this doesn't yet mean that authors like Plato were wrong in highlighting the deceptive potential of fictional works.

Far from redeeming deceptive fictions, Strong Assertionism highlights their potential to deceive in ways that are sneakier than non-fiction. Works of non-fiction are bound by the expectations of accuracy of assertoric discourse. The same isn't true of works of fiction. Authors of fiction easily deflect accusations of mendacity: if pressed, they can always deny that any particular statement included in their work was meant to be read as a claim about the actual world (even if they indeed included it purposefully, in order to deceive). The net result is that although we can learn a lot from fiction, this path to knowledge is often a perilous one to tread (cf. Friend 2014; Ichino and Currie 2016; O'Brien 2017), because fiction authors don't overtly take responsibility for the truth of what they communicate.

This doesn't mean that we should endorse the absurd ramblings of Peter Kien, the protagonist of Canetti's *Auto da Fé* cited in the opening of this section, who thinks (like a modern Plato) that "novels should be banished by the state". But Kien is right in pointing out that fiction can deceive in pernicious and subtle ways. Fictional works can sustain racist stereotypes and narratives, and incorrect accounts of historical events (as in the examples reviewed in section 3). Crucially, while authors of non-fiction assume full responsibility for the inaccuracies contained in their text, the same isn't true of authors of fiction, who can take advantage of some degree of deniability to pass on a false message without being held fully responsible for its falsity. This means that fiction can deliver the same epistemic damage of non-fiction, while freeing authors from full accountability for the falsehoods that they convey. Although authors of fiction may protest that

[36] Shouldn't Strong Assertionism say something about borderline cases too? Here's a criterion to deal with them: the clearer it is that an utterance is part of a fictional work, the clearer it is that that utterance isn't asserted, and isn't a lie. This is a promising view, compatible with Friend's account of the fiction/nonfiction distinction, and with recent work on assertion (Labinaz and Sbisà 2014; Labinaz 2016) and lying (Marsili 2014; 2018; 2021; Krauss 2017; Marsili & Lohr 2023) that argues that these concepts have loose (rather than sharp) boundaries. I have no space to explore these suggestions further here, but I am sympathetic to the idea that Strong Assertionism could be refined along these lines.

they only ever talk about fictional affairs, their works can be an effective and insidious tool for deceiving about the actual world. *Caveat lector!*

References

Abell, Catharine. 2020. *Fiction: A Philosophical Analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Alcaraz León, María José. 2016. 'Is There a Specific Sort of Knowledge from Fictional Works?' *Teorema* 35 (3): 21–46.

Austin, John Langshaw. 1975. *How To Do Things With Words*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Barnett, Louise K., and Robert H. Walker. 1975. *The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890*. Greenwood Press.

Beardsley, Monroe C. 1958. *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*. Harcourt, Brace & World.

———. 1981. 'Fiction as Representation'. *Synthese* 46 (3): 291–313. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01130042.

Berger, J.M. 2016. 'The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism's Deadly Bible'. *ICCT Research Paper*. https://doi.org/10.19165/2016.1.11.

Berny, Martin. 2020. 'The Hollywood Indian Stereotype: The Cinematic Othering and Assimilation of Native Americans at the Turn of the 20th Century'. *Angles. New Perspectives on the Anglophone World*, no. 10 (April). https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.331.

Booth, Wayne C. 1961. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Brandom, Robert. 1994. *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bury, Liz. 2013. 'Lance Armstrong Faces Lawsuit over Lies in Memoirs'. *The Guardian*, 9 August 2013.

Carson, Thomas L. 2006. 'The Definition of Lying'. *Noûs* 40 (2): 284–306.

———. 2010. *Lying and Deception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chaleila, Wisam Abughosh. 2020. *Racism and Xenophobia in Early Twentieth-Century American Fiction: When a House Is Not a Home*. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367508685.

Culler, Jonathan. 2004. 'Omniscience'. *Narrative* 12 (1): 22–34.

Currie, Gregory. 1985. 'What Is Fiction?' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (4): 385–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/429900.

———. 1990. *The Nature of Fiction*. Cambridge University Press.

Dinges, Alexander, and Julia Zakkou. 2023. 'On Deniability'. *Mind* 132 (526): 372–401. https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzac056.

Dixon, Daisy. 2020. 'Lies in Art'. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2020.1844772.

———. 2022. 'Novel Assertions: A Reply to Mahon'. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 62 (1): 115–24. https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayab017.

D'ooge, Craig. 1994. 'The Birth of a Nation: Symposium on Classic Film Discusses Inaccuracies and Virtues'. In , 53:263–66.

Fallis, Don. 2009. 'What Is Lying?' *Journal of Philosophy* 106 (1): 29–56.

———. 2013. 'Davidson Was Almost Right about Lying'. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 91 (2): 337–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2012.688980.

———. 2018. ‘What Is Deceptive Lying?’ In *Lying: Language, Knowledge, Ethics, Politics*. Oxford University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1702023.

Franklin, John Hope. 1979. ‘“Birth of a Nation”: Propaganda as History’. *The Massachusetts Review* 20 (3): 417–34.

Fricker, Elizabeth. 2012. ‘Stating and Insinuating’. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 86 (1): 199–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8349.2012.00214.x.

Friend, Stacie. 2006. ‘Narrating the Truth (More or Less)’. In *Knowing Art*, edited by Matthew Kieran and Dominic Lopes. Springer.

———. 2008. ‘Imagining Fact and Fiction’. In *New Waves in Aesthetics*, edited by Kathleen Jones and Katherine Thomson-Jones.

———. 2011. ‘Fictive Utterance and Imagining’. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 85 (1): 163–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8349.2011.00201.x.

———. 2014. ‘Believing in Stories’. In *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*, edited by Gregory Currie, Matthew Kieran, Aaron Meskin, and Jon Robson, 227–48. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199669639.003.0012.

Frye, Northorp. 2006. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Edited by Robert D. Denham. University of Toronto Press.

Gale, Richard M. 1971. ‘The Fictive Use of Language’. *Philosophy* 46 (178): 324–40. https://doi.org/10.2307/3750012.

García-Carpintero, Manuel. 2013. ‘Norms of Fiction-Making’. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 53 (3): 339–57. https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayt021.

———. 2016. ‘To Tell What Happened as Invention: Literature and Philosophy on Learning from Fiction’. In *Literary Studies and the Philosophy of Literature: New Interdisciplinary Directions*, edited by A. Selleri and P. Gaydon, 123–47. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-33147-8_7.

———. 2018. ‘Sneaky Assertions’. *Philosophical Perspectives* 32 (1): 188–218. https://doi.org/10.1111/phpe.12116.

———. 2019. ‘Assertions in Fictions’. *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 96 (3): 445–62. https://doi.org/10.1163/18756735-09603013.

———. 2020. ‘Assertion and Fiction’. In *The Oxford Handbook of Assertion*, edited by Sandy Goldberg, 435–57. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190675233.013.18.

Gessen, Masha. 2019. ‘What HBO’s “Chernobyl” Got Right, and What It Got Terribly Wrong’. *The New Yorker*, 2019.

Green, Mitchell. 2017. ‘Narrative Fiction as a Source of Knowledge’. In *Narration as Argument*, edited by P. Olmos, 47–61. Cham: Springer.

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. 2012. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295636.

Ichino, Anna, and Gregory Currie. 2016. ‘Truth and Trust in Fiction’. In *Art and Belief*. 63-82.

Jenkins, Simon. 2023. ‘Napoleon and The Crown Are Travesties: There Is No “Artistic Licence” to Distort History’. *The Guardian*, 20 November 2023, sec. Opinion. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/20/the-crown-napoleon-artistic-licence-distort-history.

Konrad, Eva-Maria. 2017. ‘Signposts of Factuality: On Genuine Assertions in Fictional Literature’. In *Art and Belief*, 42–62. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198805403.003.0003.

Krauss, Sam Fox. 2017. ‘Lying, Risk and Accuracy’. *Analysis* 73: 651–59. https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/anx105.

Kripke, Saul A. 2011. ‘Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities’. In *Philosophical Troubles*, 52–74. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Krstic, Vladimir. forthcoming. ‘Lying, Tell-Tale Signs, and Intending to Deceive’. *Dialectica*.

Labinaz, Paolo. 2016. 'Asserzione e Gradi Di Forza Illocutoria'. *RIFL*, 63–77. https://doi.org/10.4396/2015SFL06.

Labinaz, Paolo, and Marina Sbisà. 2014. 'Certainty and Uncertainty in Assertive Speech Acts'. In *Communicating Certainty and Uncertainty in Medical, Supportive and Scientific Contexts*, edited by Andrzej Zuczkowski, Carla Canestrari, Ramona Bongelli, and Ilaria Riccioni. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Lamarque, Peter, and Stein Haugom Olsen. 1994. *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Lewis, David. 1978. 'Truth in Fiction'. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1): 37–46.

MacFarlane, John. 2005. 'Making Sense of Relative Truth'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105 (1): 305–23. https://doi.org/10.1038/161665b0.

Mahon, James Edwin. 2015. 'The Definition of Lying and Deception'. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

———. 2019. 'Novels Never Lie'. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 59 (3): 323–38. https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayz034.

Maier, Emar. 2017. 'Fictional Names in Psychologistic Semantics'. *Theoretical Linguistics* 43 (1–2): 1–45. https://doi.org/10.1515/tl-2017-0001.

Marsili, Neri. 2014. 'Lying as a Scalar Phenomenon'. In *Certainty-Uncertainty – and the Attitudinal Space in Between*, edited by Sibilla Cantarini, Werner Abraham, and Elisabeth Leiss, 153–73. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/slcs.165.09mar.

———. 2015. 'Normative Accounts of Assertion: From Peirce to Williamson, and Back Again'. *Rivista Italiana Di Filosofia Del Linguaggio*, 112–30. https://doi.org/10.4396/26SFL2014.

———. 2018. 'Lying and Certainty'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Lying*, edited by Jörg Meibauer, 169–82. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198736578.013.12.

———. 2021. 'Lying, Speech Acts, and Commitment'. *Synthese* 199: 3245–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02933-4.

———. 2023. 'Fictions That Purport to Tell the Truth'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 73 (2): 509–31.

———. forthcoming. 'The Definition of Assertion: Commitment and Truth'. *Mind and Language*.

Marsili, Neri, and Mitchell Green. 2021. 'Assertion: A (Partly) Social Speech Act'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 181 (August): 17–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.03.016.

Marsili, Neri, and Guido Löhr. 2022. 'Saying, Commitment, and the Lying-Misleading Distinction'. *The Journal of Philosophy* 119 (12): 687–98. https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil20221191243.

Mazzarella, Diana. 2023. '"I Didn't Mean to Suggest Anything like That!": Deniability and Context Reconstruction'. *Mind & Language* 38 (1): 218–36. https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12377.

Michaelson, Eliot. 2016. 'The Lying Test'. *Mind & Language* 31 (4): 470–99.

Mikkonen, Jukka. 2009. 'Assertions in Literary Fiction'. *Minerva - An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 13.

Moran, Richard. 2005. 'Getting Told and Being Believed'. *Philosophers' Imprint* 5 (5).

NAACP, ed. 1915. *Fighting a Vicious Film: Protest Against the Birth of a Nation*. Boston Branch of the NAACP.

O'Brien, Lucy. 2017. *The Novel as a Source for Self-Knowledge*. Edited by Ema Sullivan-Bissett, Helen Bradley, and Paul Noordhof. *Art and Belief*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198805403.003.0008.

Ohmann, Richard. 1971. 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature'. *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 4 (1).

Pagin, Peter, and Neri Marsili. 2021. 'Assertion'. In *Stanford Enciclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2021 edition. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/assertion/.

Peet, Andrew. 2015. 'Testimony, Pragmatics, and Plausible Deniability'. *Episteme* 12 (1): 29–51. https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2014.31.

———. 2021. 'Assertoric Content, Responsibility, and Metasemantics'. *Mind and Language*.

Peirce, Charles Sanders. n.d. *(CP) Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Edited by C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, and A.W. Burks. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

———. n.d. *(MS) The Charles S. Peirce Papers*. Harvard: Harvard University Library.

Pepp, Jessica. 2022. 'What Is the Commitment in Lying?' *The Journal of Philosophy* 119 (12): 673–86.

Rescorla, Michael. 2009. 'Assertion and Its Constitutive Norms'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LXXIX (1): 98–130.

Rollins, Peter. 2011. *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. University Press of Kentucky.

Saul, Jennifer M. 2012. *Lying, Misleading, and What Is Said: An Exploration in Philosophy of Language and Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

Scholes, Robert. 1980. 'Language, Narrative, and Anti-Narrative'. *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1): 204–12.

Searle, John R. 1975. 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse'. *New Literary History* 6 (2): 319–32.

Stainton, Robert J. 2016. 'Full-On Stating'. *Mind and Language* 31 (4): 395–413. https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12112.

Stock, Kathleen. 2017. *Only Imagine: Fiction, Interpretation, and Imagination*. Oxford University Press.

Stokke, Andreas. 2013. 'Lying and Asserting'. *Journal of Philosophy* 110 (1): 33–60. https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2013110144.

———. 2018. *Lying and Insincerity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tanesini, Alessandra. 2016. '"Calm down, Dear": Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 90 (1): 71–92. https://doi.org/10.1093/arisup/akw011.

———. 2020. 'Silencing and Assertion'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Assertion*, edited by Sanford Goldberg. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190675233.013.31.

Timmermann, Felix, and Emanuel Viebahn. 2020. 'To Lie or to Mislead?' *Philosophical Studies*, June. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-020-01492-1.

Van Inwagen, Peter. 1977. 'Creatures of Fiction'. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (4): 299–308.

Viebahn, Emanuel. 2017. 'Non-Literal Lies'. *Erkenntnis*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-017-9880-8.

———. 2021. 'The Lying/Misleading Distinction: A Commitment-Based Approach'. *Journal of Philosophy* CXVIII (6).

Voltolini, Alberto. 2010. 'How Creationism Supports Kripke's Vichianism on Fiction'. In *Truth in Fiction*, edited by Franck Lihoreau. Berlin, Boston: DE GRUYTER. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110326796.93.

Walton, Kendall L. 1983. 'Fiction, Fiction-Making, and Styles of Fictionality'. *Philosophy and Literature* 7 (1): 78–88. https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1983.0004.

Wright, Crispin. 1992. *Truth and Objectivity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.