Introduction

Fictionality as an interdisciplinary problem

The concept of *fictionality* participates in the discourses of more than one discipline and understanding fictionality therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach. Fictionality is a distinctive property of literary texts and as such it forms a natural topic for literary research. Fictional texts also posit a reality of their own that casts doubt on basic notions in logic and semantics and as such fictional worlds can be expected to interest philosophers. Yet the histories of the two disciplines show that fictionality has attracted only sporadic and limited attention from both literary and philosophical quarters. It is only in recent years that the two disciplines have come to share an interest in fictionality; furthermore, it is only in recent years that the two disciplines, when addressing the question of fiction, have started to refer to the same object of research. Until the mid seventies fictionality was an object of separate disciplinary pursuits: it was interpreted as a property of texts by literary theorists and either excluded as logical abnormality or entirely ignored by philosophers. That is, although traditional literary theory did not ignore the problem of fiction, it has regarded the fictionality of texts as an inner type of organization, largely disregarding the fact that being fictional, by definition, refers to the relations between a world and what lies beyond its boundaries. Recent years have witnessed a serious attempt on the part of literary theorists to go beyond the boundaries of the literary text and to address the concept of *fictionality* in a larger cultural context. Parallel to these developments, philosophy (and in particular philosophical logic) has developed analytical tools for dealing with problems raised by fictional worlds. It is at this stage that the philosophical and the literary discourses on fictionality started to interact (and sometimes overlap), and it is at this point that interdisciplinary dialogue

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on issues related to fictionality began to be marked in both disciplines.[1]

As noted above, fictionality, as a literary property, is obviously not a new topic in literary studies in either the Anglo-American (Wellek and Warren, 1963: 142 ff. and 212 ff.; Frye, 1957: esp. 248 ff., 303 ff.)[2] or in the German tradition (Auerbach, 1968). Yet, although literary theory has always regarded fictionality as the distinctive feature of literary texts (and hence equated fictionality with literarity), the canonized orientation toward fiction, largely influenced by the formalist–structuralist tradition and by the tenets of the New Criticism, attempted to locate the fictional property of texts in some textual component, making various proposals in this direction (Hamburger, 1973: the epic preterite; Banfield, 1982: free indirect discourse; Jakobson, 1960: equivalence patterns). From a theoretical point of view this direction of approach to fictionality reflects an attempt to isolate the literary object from all other objects of culture and to show that all properties and categories relevant to the understanding of literature, including its fictionality, can be clarified and defined by way of the literary text itself. Imposing a "centripetal" perspective, which confines research to the limits of the literary, to inner-systemic considerations, has left the fictionality of worlds and texts practically unexplicated within literary studies. Traditional branches of literary studies departing from such a centripetal position, would not and could not address the question of the relationship between fiction and reality, or the question of how the fictional mode is related to other non-actual states and events (such as myths, dreams, wishes and so on). Recent years are however marked by a growing interest shown

1 See Brinker, 1987, for an analytical survey of the recently noticeable interchange between philosophy and literary theory around questions of interpretation and meanings. Here, as elsewhere, Brinker is one philosopher who rejects the situation where philosophical meta-positions (realism, pragmatism) serve as literary "themes"; he rather advocates an interchange between the two disciplines so that a systematic paradigm is constructed for the literary discipline (a stand shared by the author of the present study).

2 Note however that whereas Wellek and Warren dedicate a chapter to the problem of the relations between fiction and reality, Frye subsumes the problem of fiction under a generic study of forms where he identifies fiction with specific novelistic forms. Other Anglo-American critics like Scholes and Kellogg, Forster and Booth do not refer to fictionality directly at all, but only indirectly through the issue of realism. In any case, for traditional theory of literature fictionality is not a theoretical issue in itself unless it involves specific forms and devices of literary composition.

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within the literary discipline in questions of ontology, in the distinction between fictional and nonfictional literary texts, in problems of representation, mimesis and the like. Fictionality is no longer defined as a property of texts: it is either viewed as a type of speech situation, as a position within a culture, or as a particular type of logic or semantics. In any of these definitions, the approach to fictionality legitimates a new set of problems not addressed before by literary theory.

The need to understand fictionality and to legitimize this new set of referential considerations has taken theorists beyond literary models in a search for explanatory tools and methods in other fields. From speech-acts theory to possible worlds semantics, interdisciplinary models that were not originally meant to explicate literary phenomena have emerged in the literary research domain to serve the acute need to explain a notion of fictionality, which has changed both in status and meaning. The primary sources of models suggesting a broader view on the literary phenomenon, and a more general conception of fictionality, naturally lie in the philosophical domain: in philosophical logic, in the philosophy of language and in aesthetics. Concepts that originated from these various philosophical branches have indeed been adopted by literary theorists, and this borrowing did not stop on the level of terminology. The currency of concepts such as *world projection*, *make-believe*, *mimesis*, *representation* and others drawn from aesthetics, alongside modal notions – like *possible states of affairs*, *cross-world identity*, *accessibility* – developed in philosophical logic, attests not only to the search on the part of literary theorists for explanatory models for fictionality beyond the confines of traditional literary theory; it reveals that this search has created an area of cross-disciplinary research. By now both clusters of concepts have been fully incorporated into the literary lexicon and are widely used in literary discourse.

In order to analyze the influence of philosophical logic and aesthetics on the literary discourse on fictionality, it is yet not enough to focus on the literary discourse itself. It is necessary to explore more deeply this area of interdisciplinary conceptualization. For this purpose the specific source of the philosophical influence on literary theory of fictionality and the particular area of interchange between the two disciplines have to be precisely located to account for the change in the literary and philosophical disciplines and for the concept of *fictionality* produced by these changes. Since the new interest in the

problem of fictionality in literary studies is marked by the influence of specific areas in philosophy, it is the first aim of this study to trace the sources, route and functions of this influence. That is, in order to understand the place of fictionality in current literary theory and explore this concept further, the interchange between the two disciplines has to be fully traced and grasped. The fact that the nature of fiction touches on some basic questions in philosophical logic and the philosophy of language does not imply that fictionality is a purely philosophical concept that necessarily exceeds the explanatory tools of literary models. Nor does it imply that the relations between the philosophical and literary discourses about fictionality are straight-forward; there is a whole complex of issues related to the interdisciplinary exchange around the problem of fiction.

Note that in tracing the various philosophical traditions that tackle the problem of fiction I will not deal with their separate influences on the literary discipline. Although, at least in the Anglo-American tradition of thought, logic and aesthetics are distinct modes of philosophical discourse (crudely speaking, the former representing the "left-overs" of analytical–formal philosophy, and the latter manifesting a more speculative, humanistic philosophical tendency), independent developments in the philosophical domain are not in themselves a direct object of the present study. Fictionality and related notions can be described indiscriminately as objects of logic and of aesthetics, particularly because it is the philosophical, even the metaphysical insights behind formal logic and semantics (and not the formalizations themselves) that pertain to the present study. The work of aestheticians (like Goodman, Walton, Wolterstorff, Brinker and others) will therefore be referred to alongside works of logicians (from Hintikka and Kripke to Lewis and Adams), but only insofar as their work pertains to the links between philosophical notions and the problem of fiction. I will also refrain from surveying the philosophical discourse on the logic of fiction for its own sake. To some extent the state-of-the-art in this regard, is well summarized in specific collections of essays to which formal semanticians and logicians contributed their work.[3] Although the solutions for fiction proposed by philosophers have been varied and even contradictory, these solutions will not be surveyed for their own sake. Specific aspects of the philosophical discussion on fiction and related topics will be brought up at various

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3 The primary source in this respect is the issue of the journal *Poetics* (vol. 8, 1979).

stages of the present study to illuminate the sources and the implications of the influence of philosophical logic on literary theory. These will also show what can ultimately be learnt from the process in which literary theory has become receptive to the discourse on non-actual states of affairs in general and on fictionality in particular developed in another discipline.

Possible worlds and fictionality

This study concentrates on one central metaphor, that of *possible worlds*, whose origins lie with Leibnitz. Within philosophy possible worlds serve diverse purposes: they are used as a metaphysical term, as a concept of modal logic, as a way for describing epistemic accessibility and even as a metaphor in the philosophy of science denoting relationships between mutually exclusive paradigms. Possible worlds are also widely employed in aesthetic discussions of representation, mimesis and artistic reference. Possible worlds have not only been used across philosophical domains but also across disciplines and have, above all, permeated the field of literary theory (but also linguistics, art theory and the natural sciences). Possible worlds stand in this study first as a general label for a set of modal and referential concepts developed in logic and borrowed by other disciplines to describe diverse issues: from universes of discourse in linguistics, through fictional worlds and narrative multi-perspectives in literary theory, to physical reality in natural sciences. This set includes the concepts of necessity and possibility, that of world, world-set and transworld relations, concepts referring to world constituents, and to modes of existence (nonexistence, incomplete being, and so on). These concepts have permeated the literary theoretical discourse as evidenced in the re-introduction of referential issues into the literary domain and in the terminology prevailing in areas of literary theorizing that address the problem of fictionality. Possible worlds hence provide a general framework and context for describing the most notable influence of philosophical discourse on the literary theory of fictionality and they supply the grounds for reorienting literary theory toward questions of reference, ontology and representation. "Possible worlds" is also a specific term that has re-emerged in modal logic in the seventies to provide the abstract notions of modal logic with concrete content: possibility and necessity are described in this context as *worlds* or as *states of affairs. Possible*

worlds, in itself, has gained a marked currency in the literary area of discourse. In this specific sense the idea of possible worlds is symptomatic of modifications and revisions in the philosophical discipline itself in the last two decades. Both in its specific and its more general sense the concept of *possible worlds* represents a larger context behind it and it does not appear as an isolated concept in philosophy. Discussions about possible worlds and related issues in philosophy, represent more general changes in this domain. These changes proceed in the direction of relaxing philosophical notions of *truth, existence* and *world-language relations,* notions that traditionally received rigid delimitations. Understanding the influence of the philosophical discourse on literary theory hence cannot proceed without due attention being paid to these changes. In applying possible worlds to the literary discipline there is no reason to assume that the concept can be detached from its broader philosophical context. The impact of philosophical conceptualization and theorizing on literary theory of fictionality indeed transcends the notion of possible worlds in its restricted sense, and to explain this impact one must hence draw from wider philosophical resources. In this regard possible worlds can again serve as a handy metaphor, as a lens through which changes in the philosophical domain can be surveyed and the extent of their influence gauged. The way possible worlds and related concepts (like accessibility, necessity, contingency) are interpreted in literary theory reflects a specific phase in the history of cross-disciplinary fertilization around the problem of fiction, as this study aims to demonstrate. The nature of this phase is particularly conspicuous not only because it is encapsulated in the very notion of possible worlds and in the ontological connotations this concept carries, but also because it marks the first stage of interdisciplinary exchange in a history that has for the most part been a history of separate disciplinary undertakings. It is for this reason that possible worlds can reflect deeper-rooted changes of direction and orientation in both disciplines.

The essentials of the interdisciplinary exchange around possible worlds can be summarized in the following way (and they will be fully elaborated in chapter 1 of this study):

(1) Possible worlds (and related concepts) borrowed from philosophical logic, indicate the legitimization of referential problems and of issues that have to do with the relations fiction–reality in literary theory.

(2) Possible worlds provide for the first time a philosophical

explanatory framework that pertains to the problem of fiction. This is an exception in view of the long philosophical tradition, from Plato to Russell, that has excluded fiction from the philosophical discussion (fiction has been viewed, for instance, as a sequence of propositions devoid of a truth value).

(3) Possible worlds indicate that fiction is logically and semantically not an exceptional phenomenon. Although fiction is constituted by propositions that seem like regular assertions yet do not refer to actual states of affairs or to anything at all, there are other cultural products with similar features, products that present non-actual states of affairs through the power of language (conditionals, propositions relating the wishes, anticipations or memories of a speaker, myth-constructing propositions, etc.). Fiction is hence not seen as an isolated exceptional phenomenon but is part of a larger context of discourses that do not refer to the way things actually are in the world.

(4) Possible worlds breach the hermetics of literariness and the inner-systemic orientation that had been a prevalent characteristic of literary theory for some decades. This is achieved however without hindering the possibility of formalism in literary theory. In this respect the logico-semantic source of possible worlds matches the needs of literary researchers anxious to retain formal methods of description in literary studies.

These four points that supply the grounds and the motivation for the literary use of possible worlds portray only one side of the picture of interdisciplinary exchange. The other side of this exchange reveals symptomatic difficulties that cross-disciplinary conceptual borrowing involves. In this context a twofold problem with the literary use of possible worlds requires explanation. First, literary theory gives insufficient account of the philosophical sources of thinking about possible worlds, and, second, in the process of transferring possible worlds to the literary domain, the concept loses its original meaning and becomes a diffuse metaphor. In short, possible worlds is a concept that seems to have been fully incorporated into the literary discipline without a sufficient clarification of its original meaning. The result is a naive adaptation or an inadvertent metaphorization of a concept whose original (philosophical and literary) nonfigurative significance is far from self-evident. A similar situation occurs in relation to other concepts such as accessibility, actuality and nonexistents. Often then, the literary use of these concepts deviates from their original

philosophical meaning: it ignores the purposes these concepts were
destined to serve and the problems they aimed to solve in the
philosophical domain. In addition to this partial account of the original
significance of possible worlds, it sometimes seems that in the literary
arena possible worlds function as "modern" substitutes for more
traditional concepts and thereby the explanatory potential possible
worlds carry with them for literary phenomena is not fully exhausted.
Thus, although the interdisciplinary interaction around the concept of
possible worlds did give rise to some insights concerning literary fiction
and enabled new directions of thought, this interaction has still not
been fully explored in some respects, while in other respects it has
been misleading. The problems involved in using possible worlds
across disciplines will be described in the second chapter of this study
where it will be shown that fictional worlds can be seen as possible
worlds only when part of the logico-semantic features of the latter
concept are ignored. Although possible worlds talk marks the birth of
a new type of discourse on fictionality within the literary discipline,
fictional worlds, unlike possible worlds, manifest a world-model based
on the notion of *parallelism* rather than *ramification*. Possible worlds are
based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities
that emerge from an actual state of affairs; fictional worlds are based
on a logic of parallelism that guarantees their autonomy in relation to
the actual world.

A world of any ontological status contains a set of entities (objects,
persons) organized and interrelated in specific ways (through
situations, events and space-time). A world as a system of entities and
relations, is an autonomous domain in the sense that it can be
distinguished from other domains identified with other sets of entities
and relations. A fictional world is likewise composed of sets of
entities (characters, objects, places) and of networks of relations that
can be described as *organizing principles*: spatio-temporal relations,
event and action sequences. Worlds, whether fictional, possible or
actual, are hence distinguishable from one another. Yet the fictional
world is constructed as a world having its own distinct ontological
position, and as a world presenting a self-sufficient system of structures
and relations. Possible worlds however, despite being distinguishable
worlds, do not share this ontological autonomy. One central symptom
of the kind of autonomy attributed to fictional worlds is manifested in
the way fiction constitutes an independent *modal structure*. Constructed
as a parallel world, every fictional world includes a core of facts around

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which orbit sets of states of affairs of diminishing fictional actuality. The fictional modal structure manifests the parallelism of fictional ontologies indicating that fictional facts do not relate *what could have or could not have occurred in actuality, but rather, what did occur and what could have occurred in fiction.*

Fictionality and the pragmatics of fiction

The importance of delimiting the area of interchange between the two disciplines, of grasping the source of the philosophical influence on literary theory of fictionality and of distinguishing fictional from possible worlds, lies in the new approach to fictionality that this analysis generates. To some extent the mere use of concepts borrowed from philosophical logic, and particularly the use of concepts that belong to the framework of *possible worlds* goes hand in hand with a new conception of fictionality. It is the aim of chapter 3 of this study to elucidate the nature and significance of the notion of fictionality that emerges from the interdisciplinary domain of theorizing about referential issues. The work of a group of literary researchers working within a formalist tradition (Doležel, Pavel, Eco, Ryan, Vaina, Margolin) anticipates, implies and sometimes explicitly implements a reconsideration of fictionality. The terminology these theorists have borrowed from the logical framework is applied in order to tackle a variety of issues: to clarify the concept of *fictionality* (Pavel, 1986; Doležel, 1988), to clarify generic distinctions (Ryan, 1991; Doležel, 1985), to analyze the speech act distinctive of fiction-making (Martinez-Bonati, 1981; Ryan, 1984; Petrey, 1990) and even to solve the poetical problems raised by particular literary trends (McHale, 1987) or to describe the reading process and semiotic deciphering of the literary text (Eco, 1979). This range of issues to which logical concepts are applied ratifies the recent interest of literary theorists in general questions related to the logic and semantics that derive from the "fictional" position of a text in a culture. Yet beyond this variety of issues, and upon a closer look at these models, a common trait emerges: what characterizes this whole direction, directly influenced by the philosophical discussion of necessity, possibility and possible worlds, is that there is no longer an attempt to locate the fictionality of texts in a textual property. Although not often explicitly stated, the position presented in these studies implies that a logic of fiction does not base itself on textually immanent features. The state of being

fictional is identified with a complex of literary, cultural and institutional considerations. This direction of research shows that the fictional property of texts can be defined relative to a given cultural context, as a pragmatically decided feature of texts. Every culture adduces its own relative criteria for classification of texts: some texts are viewed as fictional but only relative to texts that are considered within this same context to be nonfictional – history, or scientific versions of the actual world. Fictionality is hence no longer viewed as immanent: only as a pragmatically determined property can fictionality distinguish *Anna Karenina* as a fiction from Michelet's nonfictional *History of France* despite the considerable number of fictional components that the latter contains. Fictionality can also contextually distinguish fiction from myth (texts that can be considered fictional or factual according to the historical moment chosen) and from scientific texts (texts that present authoritative versions of how the world is).

Chapter 3 would therefore aim to propose a systematic model of what a pragmatic definition of fictionality involves by integrating the results of the critique on the interdisciplinary use of possible worlds with a description of the logico-semantic properties of fiction. If a fictional world is not a possible world, the question remains as to what characterizes fictional ontologies and what is their position in relation to their producers and understanders. To explore the unique nature of fiction we should first ask how far the analogy between possible and fictional worlds has brought us in this respect. Possible worlds have evidently had a long-lasting and profound impact on the literary disci-pline in its dealings with fictionality. The situation looks like this: the impact of possible worlds and other logical concepts on literary theory is demonstrated in what can be described as the rendering of fictional-ity into a pragmatic concept; the pragmatics of fiction, in its turn, is the basis for defining the kind of context-dependent dividing line between fictional and nonfictional ontologies, and also the basis for describing the logic and semantic properties related to the fictional modality.

A pragmatically determined dividing line between fiction and nonfiction means that the way fictionality is approached in the present study contrasts with both "segregationist" and "integrationist" approaches to fiction.[4] Contrary to the type of dividing line between fiction and nonfiction proposed in this study, segregationists tend to

4 The distinction between segregationist and integrationist approaches to fiction was proposed in Pavel, 1986.