Against an Identity Criterion for Fictional Ersatz Realism

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Abstract

Fictional ersatz realism is the metaphysical stance that abstract fictional entities exist and are dependent on fiction and literary practices. Everett [4] tackled the position of ersatz realism by claiming that the ersatz realist cannot provide an identity criterion for fictional entities that does not imply a contradiction. Although Woodward [20] proposed a defense to Everett's argument, I will argue that ersatz realism is no tenable position, as it still cannot provide an adequate identity criterion. To establish this result, I will provide a base frame for identity criteria available to the ersatz realist. Afterwards, I will show that to any identity criterion the ersatz realist may propose there is a story such that a fictional entity corresponding to this story is not self-identical, imposing a contradiction to the metaphysical account of ersatz realism.

Keywords: *Fictional Ersatz Realism, Identity, Identity Criteria, Everett, Woodward*

1 Everett's Agument against Ersatz Realism

(1) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character.
(2) Benedict Cumberbatch never thought about Sherlock Holmes.

To most people, and even the philosophers among them, the first sentence seems to be a true statement whereas the second does not. But this observation, albeit ostensibly harmless, has led to a variety of problems within the philosophy of language and metaphysics. Following Frege, a sentence in which a name occurs can denote *The True* or *The False* only if the occurring name denotes [7, p. 29]. However, Sherlock Holmes, depicted as the detective living in Baker Street 221b, does not exist[1] in this world. Moreover, some philosophers consider specifically this lack of

existence to be an essential feature of him [9, pp. 157-8]. This results in the problem that "Sherlock Holmes" appears to not denote any object which, taken together with Fregean semantics, contravenes the intuition that the statements (1) and (2) are true or false.

Over the course of time, a variety of strategies with the objective of solving this problem has been proposed and *fictional realism* is one of them. The fictional realist takes on the semantic problem sketched above by refining the ontology that must be taken into consideration when one claims that a name denotes. According to Schnieder and von Solodkoff [14] two of the main theses of fictional realism can be stated as follows:

(FR_1) There are fictional entities, in the same sense as that in which, setting aside philosophical disputes, there are people, Mondays, numbers and planets.

(FR_2) Fictional entities are abstract objects.

Thus, a statement like (1) gets its truth value by the fact that "Sherlock Holmes" does indeed denote an abstract fictional entity. And of this fictional entity, it is true that it is a fictional character. More so, the fictional entity can be the object of intentional acts such as thinking and thereby it is false that Benedict Cumberbatch never thought about Sherlock Holmes, or at least I hope that it is.

Of course, the two theses stated above do not sufficiently describe a full-fletched theory and it is not the aim of this paper to do so or to describe the varieties of fictional realism. Instead we will investigate one specific form of fictional realism and will therefore add another thesis to further characterize the theory.

(FR_3) Fictional entities are dependent entities.

Thesis (FR_3) expresses the idea that a fictional entity exists only dependent on the fact that someone wrote a fiction involving this very entity while avoiding to say that a fictional entity is created by an author, as this may yield further complications.[2] Nevertheless, by expressing dependency (FR_3) implies that facts about fictional entities supervene on facts about literary works and literary practices [20, p. 648;p. 658]. Taken together, these three theses describe a position which, in accordance with Woodward, will be called *ersatz realism*.[3]

Although the debate about fictional realism and antirealism revolved primarily around the plausibility of certain semantics that can make sense

of sentences akin to (1) and (2), Everett [4] took a more direct route to show the implausibility of the realist's metaphysical account by claiming that the identity criterion for fictional entities offered by fictional realism yields inconsistent results.

In order to understand the argument he put forward, we first need to look more thoroughly into realism. The position claims that there are fictional entities but, as they are abstract entities, it stands to reason that they possess the properties one would ascribe to characters like Sherlock Holmes. An abstract entity is not a detective and it cannot be. So, what is it about the abstract entity Sherlock Holmes that we can predicate things we usually can not predicate of abstract entities? Realism takes the situation to be twofold. For one, Sherlock Holmes is an abstract entity and it is rightly predicated that he is a fictional entity as well. To make sense of intra-fictional sentences such as "Sherlock Holmes lives at Baker Street 221b", the realist uses an intensional *according-to-the-story*-operator such that the original sentence is paraphrased as "According to the Doyle-Stories, Sherlock Holmes lives at Baker Street 221b". Thereby its truth value is determined in dependence of the story, just as intended by (FR_3).[4] Therefore, one must be cautious how names are to be interpreted when considering realism. On the one side, there is the fictional *entity* Sherlock Holmes the abstract element of this world, while on the other side, one talks about the fictional *character* Sherlock Holmes, which lives in Baker Street according to the stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.[5]

With regard to (FR_3), Everett asks how we can decide, whether two fictional entities are identical and looks for an identity criterion within realism. His proposal of a "platitudinous" identity criterion[6] reads as follows:

$(Everett - Identity_1)$ If a story concerns x and y, and if x and y are not real things, then x and y are identical in the world of the story iff the fictional entity x is identical to the fictional entity y.

Using the previously introduced distinction between "character" and "entity", this criterion claims that two fictional entities x and y are identical if and only if according to the story in question the fictional character x is identical with the fictional character y. The reason for Everett to presume that the realist accepts this identity criterion, is that the realist could not make sense of sentences such as "Benedict Cumberbatch thinks about Holmes but not about Watson" and to make sense of

such sentences was among the main motivations for realism in the first place [4, p. 627].

But if the realist accepts this identity criterion, Everett concludes, she runs into serious trouble. To illustrate some problems, Everett presents two stories. The first of which concerns indeterminate identity, wherefore the argument resulting from the story is called the *indeterminacy argument*.

Frackworld: No one was absolutely sure whether Frick and Frack were really the same person or not. Some said that they were definitely two different people. True, they looked very much alike, but they had been seen in different places at the same time. Others claimed that such cases were merely an elaborate hoax and that Frick had been seen changing his clothes and wig to, as it were, become Frack. All that I can say for certain is that there were some very odd similarities between Frick and Frack but also some striking differences.

Regarding the goings-on in *Frackworld*, one can state that the identity of Frick and Frack is indeterminate and this indeterminate identity, Everett argues, will carry over to the indeterminate identity of the fictional entities Frick and Frack, granted that the biconditional expressed in ($Everett-Identity_1$) preserves indeterminacy. Moreover, the indeterminacy must not be understood as a result of a vague identity criterion, as there could be no refinement of the identity criterion that is faithful to the story while delivering a definite identity relation, may it be true or false, because the story does not give a definite answer. And given the fact that the identity of the fictional entities Frick and Frack is indeterminate, Everett infers that the realist runs into contradictions on an ontological level, as Evans [3], so Everett states, has shown that "it cannot be an indeterminate matter as to whether a is b" [4, p. 629]. As it will be shown later, however, the cited proof by Evans is not problematic to the realist in the way Everett assumes it to be, wherefore the indeterminacy argument loses its force.

The second story Everett presents concerns an inconsistent story resulting in an *incoherence argument*.

Dialethialand: When she arrived in Dialethialand, Jane met Jules and Jim. This confused Jane since Jules and Jim both were, and were not, distinct people. And this made it hard to know how to interact with them. For example, since Jules both was and was not Jim, if Jim came to tea Jules both would and wouldn't come too. This made it hard for Jane to determine how many biscuits to serve. Then Jane realized what to do. She needed both to buy and not to buy extra biscuits whenever Jim came. After that everything was better.

The metaphysical moral of the story, combined with ($Everett - Identity_1$), Everett argues, is that as it is true according to the story that the fictional characters Jules and Jim are distinct, the fictional entities Jules and Jim are distinct as well. Moreover, in addition to their distinctness, it follows that, since the fictional characters Jules and Jim are not distinct according to *Dialethialand*, the fictional entities are not distinct either. We arrived at a contradiction.

There is, however, an important aspect of the argument that Everett did not make explicit. ($Everett - Identity_1$) stated that something is the case if and only if something is the case in the world a certain story. In writing a story in which the sentence "This confused Jane since Jules and Jim both were, and were not, distinct people" appears he presumed that it is true in the story, that Jules and Jim both are and are not distinct people. This is by no means trivial. We must, therefore, specify the realism in question even further.

(*Say-So*) The author's say-so is a criterion of truth in world of the story.

There are two things to notice here. First off, the author's say-so is just one criterion of truth in a story among many. We take Sherlock Holmes to be human, even though this is never explicitly mentioned. These matters, however, will be left aside here, as it will suffice to rely on the say-so. Second, and more importantly, (*Say-So*) entails the so-called *Principle of Poetic License*, which states that "for any class K of propositions, there is a story (abstractly conceived) in which every proposition in K is true" [2, p. 202], given that the author's language is such that it can express any class of propositions, which will be granted for the moment. We will see later on that (*Say-So*) plays a crucial role in the debate. For now, we observe that the realist's position Everett attacks must be at least characterized by (FR_1) − (FR_3) and (*Say-So*).

2   A Response by Woodward

Both the indeterminacy and the incoherence argument undermine the realists position, such that the results are not just merely peculiar but impose a contradiction on reality – a fact that the realist hopefully cannot tolerate.[7] It appears, however, that there are a few issues with the argument made by Everett which we will now investigate. Afterwards I will provide an answer to the argument on behalf of the realist, proposed by Woodward [20].

The first thing to notice concerns the content of $(Everett - Identity_1)$ and has been pointed out by Schnieder and von Solodkoff [14]. Suppose the according-to-the-story-operator is formally expressed by ACC_F, where the index determines the specific story that is talked about. Then, $(Everett - Identity_1)$ can be formally expressed with the use of a classical biconditional.

$$(Everett - Identity_1) \qquad\qquad x = y \leftrightarrow ACC_F(x = y)$$

Given this formalization, it is obvious that the inferences from the goings-on in the respective story to the goings-on on a level of reality, i.e. the left-hand side of the biconditional, are not sound. In the case of *Frackworld* where the indeterminacy within the story allegedly carries over to the real world, the goings-on in the story would be expressed as $ACC_{Frack}(\triangledown(Frick = Frack))$, where $\triangledown$ is used as the indeterminacy operator "it is indeterminate, that. . . ". Stated in this way, the indeterminacy does not carry over such that $\triangledown(Frick = Frack)$ appears on the left side of the biconditional. As the indeterminacy operator appears within the scope of ACC_{Frack}, the line of argumentation regarding problems resulting of indeterminate identity statements is blocked. Analogously, one can prevent the inconsistent fiction to yield the results needed for the incoherence argument, as the story only states that $ACC_{Dia}(Jules = Jim)$ and $ACC_{Dia}(\neg(Jules = Jim))$, wherefore the inference of $\neg(Jules = Jim)$ is not possible by $ACC_{Dia}(\neg(x = y))$. And without this inference there is nothing to contradict $Jules = Jim$ which still can be inferred by $ACC_{Dia}(Jules = Jim)$. So, there is no contradiction at all.

Everett [5, p. 205] admits that under the given formalization of his identity criterion his argumentation is not sound, yet adds that this is not the interpretation of the criterion he had in mind. Instead he reformulates the identity criterion involving two clauses.

($Everett - Identity_2$) If a fiction F is such that (1) in that fiction x exists and y exists, and (2) no real thing is identical to x or y, then:
(i) It is true that fictional entity x is identical to fictional entity $y \leftrightarrow$ in fiction F: it is true that $x = y$
(ii) It is false that fictional entity x is identical to fictional entity $y \leftrightarrow$ in fiction F: it is false that $x = y$

Which may be reformulated as

If x and y are fictional entities, then
(i) $x = y \leftrightarrow ACC_F(x = y)$
(ii) $\neg(x = y) \leftrightarrow ACC_F(\neg(x = y))$.

This adjustment fixes the problems of inference in the case of *Dialethialand* portrayed above, since by (ii) we can derive the second part of the contradiction, making the incoherence argument a threat for realism again. Nonetheless, the case of *Frackworld* is not covered directly by the amended identity criterion and therefore Everett rectifies another aspect of his argument. He supposes that if according to a story F it is indeterminate whether x and y are identical, then it is indeterminate whether according to the story F x and y are identical, formally stated that $ACC_F(\triangledown(x = y))$ implies $\triangledown ACC_F(x = y)$.[8] Given this last clarification, the incoherence and the indeterminacy argument are back in place to be disputed by the ersatz realist.

The incoherence and indeterminacy argument are resting on shaky foundations, as they gain their power only if the identity criterion is twofold and the indeterminacy-operator $\triangledown$ is invariant with respect to the story-operator ACC_F. Woodward [20] nevertheless contends that the realist is not forced to accept the contradiction Everett claimed to be inevitable, even if she accepts Everett's adjustments.

The argument Woodward puts forward requires us to take a closer look at inconsistent fictions and ($Everett-Identity_2$). As we have seen in the process of adjusting the identity criterion by Everett, it seems that the fundamental motivation for the criterion is best characterized in faithfulness to the story: whatever identity relation holds true between fictional characters must be adequately modeled by the fictional entities. An inconsistent fiction with respect to identity therefore implies that there ought to be contradictions regarding the identity of the corresponding fictional entities. It is not the soundness of the argument that Woodward challenges. To the contrary he agrees that there could be no identity criterion for the realist that is fully faithful to the story [20, p. 658]. It

is rather the idea that the realist ought to provide an identity criterion that is fully faithful to the story that stands trial. The reason for this can be found in (FR_3), the thesis that fictional entities are dependent entities and facts about fictional entities particularly supervene on facts about literary practices. Woodward follows Thomasson's observation that literary practices are variously vague, which taken together with (FR_3), implies that our concepts of a fictional characters are vague, it may hence be indeterminate whether two fictional entities are identical, as facts about fictional entities are not *discovered* but rather products of *decisions* about how to fill in gaps when engaging with fiction [17, pp. 154-5].

At first, this approach does not appear to solve the problems laid out by *Dialethialand*, since it resulted in a contradiction and not indeterminacy. However, Woodward puts $(Everett - Identity_2)$ in the spotlight again as well as the fact that the identity criterion is twofold, wherefore he infers that it actually states two different concepts of identity, i.e. $character_1$ corresponding to clause (i) and $character_2$ corresponding to clause (ii), given that double negation elimination is valid. With all this in mind and especially the fact that $character_1$ and $character_2$ are two competing concepts of identity, Woodward relies on an argument made by Sider, according to which there are cases of conceptual analysis where there simply is no fact of the matter which concept T_c out of a variety of competing concepts $T_1,T_2, \ldots ,T_n$ is the "right" one [15, pp. 189-90]. Woodward takes the present situation to be of this kind, lining up with the Thomasson's idea that there may be multiple concepts regarding fiction that are "equally justified, equally acceptable" [17, p. 156]. Therefore, the two clauses of $(Everett - Identity_2)$ need to be separated again, resulting in a situation where $character_1$ and $character_2$ are just two competing concepts that may provide "precise but mutually inconsistent answers" to the question of identity [20, p. 156]. Applied to the case of *Dialethialand*, this means that, assuming concept $character_1$, the fictional entities Jules and Jim are identical and it is not the case that they are distinct, whereas on $character_2$, they are distinct and not identical, wherefore there is no contradiction within a single concept.

Thus, the incoherence argument reduces to the indeterminacy argument as it is indeterminate which concept is right. The competing concepts imply different truth values for the identity statement, wherefore one could state that it is indeterminate whether or not the fictional entities are identical.[9] However, as it already has been mentioned, Everett claims that this indeterminacy is just as problematic as the consequences of the

incoherence argument, since, if one follows Evans' [3] proof, an identity statement of indeterminate truth value allegedly results in a contradiction and accordingly there cannot be indeterminate identity statements. At this point, Woodward draws closer attention to the proof conducted by Evans that is crucial to the argument of Everett. In a short essay, Lewis proposed an interpretation of the controversial proof to the extent that the proof does not show that there cannot be indeterminate identity statements, as this would be "plainly false" given that there are identity statements like "*Princeton = Princeton Borough*" that are indeterminate and accepted to be indeterminately true [10, p. 128]. Rather, in accordance with the title of Evans' article "Can There be Vague Objects?", the conclusion is that there cannot be objects that are inherently vague – not that there cannot be vague identity statements that result from a semantic vagueness of the relata.[10]

To apply this conclusion to the case of the indeterminacy argument, we need to recall that the concepts of identity were such that they gave precise, i.e. determinate, answers to questions of identity albeit we cannot decide which concept is the right one as they are equally justified. Thus, we may interpret the indeterminacy of identity concepts analogously to semantic vagueness because, just as there are multiple precisifications for a semantically vague term such that the resulting statement it is involved in is determinate, there are multiple concepts for identity such that the resulting identity statement is determinate or, using the expression of Woodward, precise. The indeterminacy Everett assumed to be problematic for the realist is therefore, as Woodward concludes, no more a problem than the indeterminacy of any other concept.

3   Another Argument against Ersatz Realism

Up to this point it appears that Woodward effectively defended realism. One could go on to criticize (FR_3) and its implications in the previous argument, as it seems debatable to say the least, that facts about abstract entities depend on decisions made by a social group. However, using Lewis' idiom again, this is no contradiction but merely a peculiarity – something the realist is certainly willing to tolerate. It nonetheless seems to me that this is not the end of the line regarding problems the realist must handle. Woodward stated that there are multiple equally acceptable and justified precise concepts of identity that may be mutually inconsistent. Nevertheless, one needs to question how appropriate the different concepts of identity are. The least we should expect of a

concept of identity is that it verifies self-identity, meaning that it ought to be true of every object, that it stands in the identity relation to itself, a fundamental law of logic that is usually incorporated into formal systems as an axiom.[11] So, we may check the proposed identity concepts $character_1$ and $character_2$ for the demand of self-identity by looking into the wonderous world of Noidentitatia.

Noidentitatia: "I just don't feel like myself anymore", Miriam sighs in front of the mirror. And this was not a psychological crisis. Ever since King Logifantasy V wielded his Hegelian sword to cut the strings to reality the whole kingdom of Noidentitatia was floating in logical space. Miriam does not know what to think about this situation as it is hard for her to be herself since she is literally not herself anymore. The sword of the King sliced through everything such that nothing is identical to itself any longer. Therefore, Miriam could not be too mad as the King and his sword, the purposed targets of her anger, were no longer themselves either.

Following the goings-on in Noidentitatia we can contend two things. First, the story does not state that Miriam is identical to herself, wherefore by (Say-So), since $\neg(Miriam = Miriam) \leftrightarrow ACC_{Noid}(Miriam = Miriam)$ holds according to $character_1$, $\neg(Miriam = Miriam)$ pertains on the account of $character_1$. Second, as $\neg(Miriam = Miriam) \leftrightarrow ACC_{Noid}(\neg(Miriam = Miriam))$ holds according to $character_2$, we can derive $\neg(Miriam = Miriam)$ with $character_2$ by the fact that due to (Say-So) according to Noidentitatia Miriam is not identical to herself. Thus, we have derived contradictions with the law of self-identity for both concepts of identity which were allegedly precise, begging the question what is meant by "precise".

One might want to contest $\neg ACC_{Noid}(Miriam = Miriam)$ as the required part to derive the contradiction for $character_1$, as we can not and do not expect every story to explicitly state the self-identity of every fictional character to presume that she is indeed self-identical. We just take it to be default. Even further, this approach appears to orient itself towards everyday normal conversation and it is tempting to line up our interpretation of fiction with, for example, the maxims of discourse proposed by Grice [8]. In this light it would be a violation of the maxim of quantity to state of everything that it is self-identical, as it appears meticulous. However, one cannot make this arrangement as easily and equate conversations and their maxims with written text,

especially fiction. Caplan and Muller clarified that in the case of fiction, the reader has no reason to assume that the author followed the maxims. To the contrary, fiction is distinguished by the fact that it can legitimately break with such things as conversational maxims, which can be seen, e.g., by extensive descriptions of minor events within a story [1, pp. 220-1]. Surely, we can observe that authors follow those maxims most of the time but certainly not always and more importantly they are not obliged to do so. Therefore, we may not conclude that $ACC_{Noid}(Miriam = Miriam)$ if it is not explicitly stated or implied by the author or whatsoever that we can assume literary maxims analogous to conversational maxims.[12] Just as it has been implied by the statement that literary practices are vague, we cannot generally fix how fiction ought to be read and regarding stories like Noidentitatia, we should be careful with presumptions.

From here on, we are able to outline a more severe problem to the realist. We need to remember that (FR_3) implied that facts about fictional entities supervene on literary works and literary practices. As an immediate consequence, any concept of identity concerning fictional entities must be based on the proceedings of a story and their interpretation. Thus, any concept of identity k should be expressible in the shape of

$$x = y \leftrightarrow \Psi_k^2 xy$$

where $\Psi_k^2 xy$ is to be understood as a potentially molecular, syntactically well-formed- first-order formula that has as its atomic constituents nothing but formulas of the form $ACC_F(\Phi_i^2 xy)$ for arbitrary well-formed formulas Φ_i^2 and no free variables except for x and y. Thus, for example, we get $character_1$ if $\Psi_{c_1}^2 xy \equiv ACC_F(x = y)$. If one wants to imagine a more complex criterion k_j involving another formula $\neg F^2 xy$, the corresponding $\Psi_{k_j}^2$ may be $\Psi_{k_j}^2 \equiv ACC_F(x = y) \wedge ACC_F(\neg F^2 xy)$ and so forth. The relevant point to this is that, due to the adopted supervenience relation, there may be variations of how different aspects of the story, or whatever does not appear in the story, are put together for a possible identity concept but on the right-hand side of the biconditional the relevant terms x and y appear only in the scope of a ACC_F operator and as relata of formulas Φ_i^2 that are true of x and y according to the story. Moreover, nothing except logical vocabulary appears outside of such an operator on the right-hand side of the biconditional. Consequently, the identity of x and y is fully determined by the fiction and its interpretation.[13]

What has been said until this point appears to be in accordance with the realists' account. But we now can make an important argument against

identity concepts in general if we grant a certain creative freedom to authors. Suppose c_i to be an identity concept expressed by $x = y \leftrightarrow \Psi^2_{c_i} xy$. We can then take the result of $\neg\Psi^2_{c_i} xy$ to be a manual to write a fiction F_{c_i} involving a character a such that $\neg\Psi^2_{c_i} aa$, which is made possible by $(Say\text{-}So)$ and the Principle of Poetic License, wherefore we can infer $\neg(a = a)$ resulting in a contradiction with the law of self-identity. We therefore should dismiss c_i as a precise concept of identity.[14] Furthermore, as there were no specifications on c_i we can dismiss all concepts of identity as imprecise, since for every concept we can construct a fiction that implies a contradiction. For the realist, concepts of identity seem to lead precisely into a contradiction. Of course, an identity criterion specified by the realist may hold for all but one story and within a practical context she simply ignores this one special case, but this one case must be taken seriously in the context of metaphysics as contradictions are intolerable.

Now there are at least five possibilities on two different grounds for the realist to react to this argument. The first, is to challenge $(Say\text{-}So)$ and the Principle of Poetic License. For the previous argument to be sound, we require that a fiction can have as content whatever we would like it to have, wherefore we may engage in what Fine called "logico-philosophical fantasy" [6, p. 134]. Certainly, there are philosophers arguing that we can interpret fiction only to a certain degree of coherence (see e.g. [16, pp. 139-140]), resulting in cases where it may be indeterminate whether $ACC_F(\Phi^2_k aa)$ and therefore prohibiting to make a determinate statement of truth or falsehood. At this point the realist is at a bifurcation. The first route she could take is to contend that some formulas are such that if they appear within a fiction, the story always allows for the inference onto $\triangledown ACC_F(\Phi^2_k aa)$.[15] I think the (non-)identity predicate is a good candidate to evaluate this thought as one may insist that, although a story, such as Noidentitatia, states that a character is not self-identical, the referential function of "Miriam" can be seen as an argument that she is nonetheless self-identical and thus conclude that it is indeterminate whether or not she is self-identical. Suppose there is such a formula that whenever we read it to be true of a fictional character, we rather infer $\triangledown ACC_F(\Phi^2_k aa)$. Then, either the rest of the formula Ψ^2 involves determinate atomic formulas or other indeterminate formulas. If we assume the rest to be of determinate truth value regarding identical input, it is possible to write a story such that the truth value of Ψ^2 is either false or indeterminate, wherefore we could infer $\neg(a = a)$ or $\triangledown(a = a)$ where the former is the required part of said contradiction and the latter may

express just as much a contradiction with the law of self-identity, given a suitable account of indeterminacy. The only possibility to avoid the contradiction, then, is to demand Ψ^2 to involve another occurrence of a formula of indeterminate truth value and a material conditional in a suitable position, such that it is impossible to avoid truth of the formula of the right-hand side.[16] It is highly dubious that the realist should subordinate her identity criterion to a logical form but maybe this is just another hint where she may find an adequate criterion.

The other route the realist could go along, involves claiming that some alleged fictions are just too much of a logico-philosophical fantasy and therefore should not be regarded as fictions whatsoever, whereby the texts such as Noidentitatia lack their metaphysical implications. This approach, however, runs into another problem if we recall some of the initial motivation for realism. Some of the plausibility of the metaphysical account of realism is that the names that appear in fiction and therefore are used in extra-fictional statements like "Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character" do refer ordinarily and they refer to fictional entities. If fictions like Noidentitatia get excluded from the map of fictions the realist needs to offer an additional account of what happens to names used in texts that are excluded from the realm of fiction, as one would still state things like "Miriam is a character in Noidentitatia". Even more so, it is not only that the realist has to offer an additional account of reference, but she must explain why there need to be two accounts of reference and what this difference in reference of names consists in. This is a known problem and has been put together in a question by Fine: "Is it really conceivable that the whole linguistic role of the names and of the sentences in which they occur should change upon introducing the slightest discrepancy in the story [. . .]?" [6, p. 133].

The third major option is to attack the interpretation of (FR_3) that Everett presupposes and ever since seems to persist in the debate. In proposing $(Everett-Identity_1)$, Everett claims that realism is such that whether two fictional entities are identical can be read off a story. However, this need not be the case. Even though Woodward maintains that facts about fictional entities supervene on facts about literary works and literary practices, this need to be understood in the light of a straightforward form of supervenience. For example, Williamson stated that meaning may supervene on use in an "unsurveyably chaotic way" [19, p. 209]. Why couldn't the supervenience relation expressed by Woodward be just as chaotic? Likewise the realist could adopt a different position of ersatzism e.g. some sort of "magical" ersatzism.[17] If fictional

entities are taken to be structureless, mereological atoms or supervene
chaotically on literary works and literary practices, it is hard to see how
an argument akin the presented can be laid out. Indeed, no argument
that is founded on the readable content of a story necessarily affects any
such kind of ersatzism. Nonetheless, in opting for this path, the realist
loses some control over his theory wherefore it requires some ingenuity
to defend realism from there on. But this is far from hopeless.

The fourth option to avoid the proposed argument, and the first on log-
ical grounds, is to simply restrict the input for the variables x and y
such that not a single name or logically speaking constant symbol can
take the place of x and y. Judging by the portrayed course of the debate
about realism, it seems that it is only intended to find a criterion of iden-
tity for objects with different names. One could therefore claim that the
criterion must hold only between objects designated by differing expres-
sions and assume self-identity of identical fictional entities by default.
To me, however, this is a weak response as it lacks motivation except
to avoid problems. The realist would need to explain why the identity
relation is not reflexive for fictional entities and thereby explaining their
special status within ontology even within the realm of abstract entities
in contrast to e.g. numbers.

Lastly, the realist could contend that it is only due to the logical in-
flexibility imposed by logical monism, that the proposed argument is
troubling.[18] If we accept that fiction is logically deviant, the entities
implied by such fiction may be just as deviant. In the case of Miriam,
one might, therefore, state that the corresponding fictional entity, and
anything involving this entity, must be understood in a logic that allows
for false self-identity statements, while e.g. the fictional entity corre-
sponding to Sherlock Holmes may still be understood classically. This
approach, however, adds serious theoretical costs to realism and it is
dubious whether the realist is willing to pay this price, especially if the
sole purpose of a logical pluralism is to avoid the posed contradiction. If
she can nonetheless come up with a good explanation of why pluralism
should be adopted for realism, this appears to be a viable route.

4   Conclusion

This paper depicts an aspect of the present debate about fictional re-
alism. To understand the current standing, Everett's first argument
against realism has been displayed and with it the initial reaction by
Schnieder and von Solodkoff. The underlying problem of realism that

Everett sees could very clearly be traced, as we followed his refinements of his identity criterion for fictional entities. But even if one gave away these adaptions to Everett, the presented arguments by Woodward denied the conclusion that the realist runs into contradictions. These arguments can be summarized as (1) problems including inconsistent fictions alleviate to problems about indeterminate fictions, as literary concepts give indeterminate answers when faced with inconsistent stories and (2) the indeterminacy of identity is due to indeterminacy of concepts and is therefore analogue to semantic indeterminacy which poses no issue.

I subsequently proposed an argument against the position Woodward laid out. It appears that if authors are granted a certain freedom with respect to writing fictions and if the identity of fictional entities is determined by the content of fictional texts and the interpretation thereof, then there can be no identity criterion for fictional entities that does not run into a contradiction with respect to self-identity. The three major possible reactions of the realist that have been illustrated seem to press the realist either (a) to insist on indeterminate interpretation of fiction and a particular logical form of the identity criterion, (b) to give an additional account of reference such that she can make sense of extra-fictional sentences involving characters that appear inside a kind of non-fictional text, (c) to claim that the dependency and supervenience of fictional entities on literary works and literary practice is chaotic and/or the ersatzism in question is magical, (d) to explain why fictional entities deserve a special treatment with regard to identity as the identity relation is not reflexive, or (e) to adopt a logical pluralism such that non-self-identical entities pose no metaphysical contradiction. To me it seems that all considered options to avoid the argument are peculiar in some way. It is, therefore, the ersatz realist's turn again.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 For the rest of the paper the terms "to exist" and "there is" are meant to express the same content if not stated otherwise and no (neo-)Meinongian distinction between them will be made.

2 Most notably is the problem of numerical distinctness, as it seems counterintuitive to claim that J.R.R. Tolkien created 6000 horsemen to fight on the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, although this number was clearly intended and ought to express 6000 different horsemen involved in the battle.

3 Hereafter, the position of ersatz realism will abbreviated with "realism" and the advocate of such a position will be called "realist". Yet, I still intend to discuss exclusively the position of ersatz realism as the represented arguments do not generally apply to other kinds of fictional realism.

4 To be more precise, the operator specifies the very story according to which something ought to be interpreted, wherefore there are a multitude of operators, one for each story, setting aside issues about whether or not two stories of serial-fiction depict the same story.

5 The distinction between "entity" and "character" is not universally made within the literature but will be used here. Admittedly, this distinction will make some plausibility arguments in favor of realism less plausible as no one ordinarily claims that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional *entity*, but rather that he is a fictional *character* as can be seen in example (1), section (1.1.). However, as the persuasive power of the semantic arguments is not disputed in this paper, I will nevertheless strictly use the proposed distinction in hope of metaphysical definiteness.

6 In the same vein as we are setting aside issues of whether two stories of series depict the same story ($fn.4$) we are only concerned with identity of fictional entities and characters within the same story. The criterion is not aimed to dispute settlements about whether Goethe's Faust is the same as the Faust depicted by Thomas Mann but rather whether the fictional entities corresponding to Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are identical.

7 At this point it should be mentioned that a possible answer to the problems stated above is to conclude that a paraconsistent logic is to be taken as baseline (see [13]). This approach will not be discussed in this paper as it is not widely considered within literature.

8 This inference, as Everett notices, may run into problems given that there is an F such that $ACC_F(x = y)$ and $ACC_F(\triangledown(x = y))$ since then one can derive $ACC_F(x = y)$ and $\triangledown ACC_F(x = y)$ which may expresses a contradiction depending on the account of indeterminacy [5, p. 211]. Although Everett ultimately attempts to prove a contradiction, one of this kind would be independent of the metaphysical position of the realist and therefore not desired.

9 Of course, there may be far more concepts of identity than $character_1$ and $character_2$ but those two are sufficient to track how the incoherence argument reduces to the indeterminacy argument. We will come back to the possibility of other viable concepts of identity in section (3).

10 Without getting in too much detail, the proof Evans presents is sound only if the objects themselves are vague, whereas if the vagueness is interpreted semantically the proof is fallacious. Evans himself does not explicitly elaborate this subtlety which, so Lewis contends, is the reason for its controversy and the misunderstanding "in about half of the published discussions of *Can There Be Vague Objects?*" [10, p. 128].
Moreover, the interpretation by Lewis should not be seen as one interpretation amongst many as Evans himself replied to Lewis "Exactly! Just so! Yes, Yes, Yes! I am covered with relief that you see so clearly what I was doing [. . .]" [10, p. 130].

11 There certainly are logics which refrain from the law of self-identity, such as negative free logics, but again this should not be the focus here as the realist appears to aspire its ontology without tweaking classical logic too much.

12 At this point, we should make mention of the problem of reference if there are non-self-identical characters within a story. I do not think we should get too much into the story of Noidentitatia and try to figure out how "Miriam" may refer and especially to what or whom this name may refer. Rather I suggest that we remain on a sort of surface level and assert that the use of the name "Miriam" in the case of non-self-identity is no more problematic than the use of constant symbols within, e.g., negative free logics where one can truly express negative self-identity statements. "Miriam" refers to the non-self-identical character that does not feel like herself.

13 The addressed "literary practices" make their appearance in the logical form of the right-hand side of the biconditional as through that logical form certain aspects of the story are highlighted or neglected.

14 To be exact, we should mention that there are cases where it is impossible to write such a fiction, namely if the right-hand side of the biconditional expresses a tautology, e.g. $x = y \leftrightarrow ACC_F(x = y) \vee \neg ACC_F(x = y)$. These cases, however, can be discarded as they would imply that all fictional entities are identical, which in turn implies that there is only one fictional entity a thesis that the realist does not endorse.

15 As we have seen, Woodward does not follow this route. He rather argues that, whenever something concerning identity appears to be indeterminate according to a story, we should refine our interpretation to make it determinately true or false, even if it is not fully faithful to the story.

16 For the present purpose, we assume a three-valued logic like the one developed by Łukasiewicz [11, pp. 153-178] to be suitable, where the classical equivalence of $A \to B$ and $\neg A \vee B$ does not hold. The formula $x = y \leftrightarrow (ACC_F(\Phi_1^2 xy) \to ACC_F(\Phi_2^2 xy))$ may pose an example for a criterion that avoids contradiction with regard to self-identity, for if $\triangledown ACC_F(\Phi_1^2 aa)$ and $\triangledown ACC_F(\Phi_2^2 aa)$ hold, $a = a$ holds as well. The mentioned impossibility of falsehood on the right-hand side of the biconditional must not be understood as a tautology, as this result may only emerge if x and y take the same constant as input.

17 [18] and [12] show how it may be possible to overcome the obstacles Lewis set out for magical ersatzism. Thanks to an anonymous referee for making me aware of this option.

18 Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

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