

## Real Authors and Fictional Agents (Fictional Narrators, Fictional Authors)

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*Abstract:* A suitable account of fiction must involve a conceptual distinction between (at least) the following figures, or roles: real authors, fictional narrators, fictional authors. Real authors are the real original utterers of fiction-involving sentences in their fictional use, the one mobilizing pretense. They may coincide (although this would be rare) either with fictional narrators or with fictional authors. A fictional narrator is the protagonist of a tale that is narrated in the first person: the internal point of view on the tale. A fictional author constitutes the tale's external point of view that vividly manifests itself when the tale is narrated by no protagonist. Fictional narrators, however, never coincide with fictional authors. For either one or the other is the fictional agent, the one-place factor of a narrow fictional context of interpretation whose contribution is to provide a fictional truth-conditional content to the fiction-involving sentences of the relevant tale.

*Keywords:* Fictional agent; fictional author; fictional narrator; real author.

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## 1. Introduction

A suitable account of fiction must involve a conceptual distinction between (at least) the following figures, or roles: *real authors*, *fictional narrators*, *fictional authors*. Real authors are the real original utterers of fiction-involving sentences in their *fictional* use, the one mobilizing pretense. They may coincide (although this would be rare) either with fictional narrators or with fictional authors. A fictional narrator is the protagonist of a tale that is narrated in the first person: the *internal* point of view on the tale. A fictional author constitutes the tale's *external* point of view that vividly manifests itself when the tale is narrated by no protagonist.<sup>1</sup> Fictional narrators, however, never coincide with fictional authors. For either one or the other is the *fictional agent*, the one-place factor of a narrow fictional context of interpretation whose contribution is to provide a fictional truth-conditional content to the fiction-involving sentences of the relevant tale.

Now, the reasons why we need all such figures just partly overlap with those Currie (1990) provides. We do need a fictional author for the very *semantic* reasons that make a fictional narrator necessary; namely, in order to account for the fictional truth-conditions, and truth-values, of fiction-involving sentences in their fictional use. For we need either a fictional narrator or a fictional author, but not both, in order to have an agent, and just one, of the relevant narrow fictional context that enables a fiction-involving sentence in the above use to have a fictional truth-conditional content: to repeat, the fictional agent. Yet we do not need such an author for *epistemic* reasons, having to do with reliability in narration; namely, the idea (ungrounded, as I go on to argue) that unlike the fictional narrator, the fictional agent is reliable since she is omniscient as regards the world of a fiction. As a result, the semantic reasons for why we need a fictional author do not coincide with those Currie (1990), among others, defends, which appeal to an unmotivated ascription of omniscience (as regards the events in a fictional world) to the fictional author.

The architecture of the paper is the following. In Section 1, I provide the aforementioned semantic reasons that enable us to draw a distinction

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<sup>1</sup> In Levinson's (1996, 148) terms, she is a *perceptual enabler*.

between fictional narrators and fictional authors (whether or not they are identical with the real authors). In Section 2, I point out why we do not need epistemic reasons in order to draw the same distinction. Section 3 concludes.

## 2. In favor of the semantical reasons to distinguish between fictional narrators and fictional authors

A fiction-involving sentence is a sentence that, directly or indirectly, has to do with the tale that constitutes a literary fiction. As such, it may be used in different ways. Its first use is the *fictional* use,<sup>2</sup> i.e., the use of that sentence that occurs in the pretense from which the corresponding tale originates; namely, when one makes believe that such and such is the case—typically, in pretense plays viz. make-believe games.

By my lights, the best way of semantically accounting for the fictional use of a fiction-involving sentence appeals to a *minimally contextualist* framework (Recanati 2000, Voltolini 2006, 2016). According to that framework, in that use a sentence behaves like an indexical sentence. This is to say, in order for it to get determinate truth-conditions, in particular fictional ones, a fiction-involving sentence in its fictional use must be paired with a certain narrow context of interpretation *à la* Kaplan (1989); namely, a narrow fictional context, i.e., a set-theoretical entity constituted by the saturation of certain parameters (typically, an agent, a space, a time, and a world) and whose ‘world’ parameter is saturated by a world of fiction.<sup>3</sup> This world not only provides that sentence with fictional truth-conditions, by working as one of the parameters of the relevant narrow context of

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<sup>2</sup> For this terminology, see Kroon and Voltolini (2018). Currie (1990) labels it the *fictional* use.

<sup>3</sup> Whatever this world is from a metaphysical point of view: a possible, or even an impossible, world. (Im)possibilists *à la* Lewis (1983) or *à la* Priest (2016) would further say that such a world actually amounts to a set of (im)possible worlds, the worlds in which the sentence comes out as true. For my purpose, I am neutral on this option.

interpretation, but also allows the sentence to have a fictional truth-value, once it further works as a circumstance of evaluation for the sentence.

It is easy to show all this by means of an example. First of all, taken in its fictional use, the fiction-involving sentence:

- (1) Anna Karenina commits suicide

has fictional truth-conditions once it is interpreted in a narrow fictional context of interpretation whose ‘world’ parameter is saturated by a world of fiction, the world of *Anna Karenina*. Moreover, (1) is fictionally true when, so interpreted, it is true in that world, and fictionally false otherwise. As things do unfold this way in *Anna Karenina*’s world, (1) is fictionally true. On the other hand,

- (2) Anna is a rockstar

once interpreted with respect to the same narrow fictional context of interpretation, is fictionally false, i.e., is false when evaluated in the same world, for in *Anna Karenina*’s world things do not unfold this way.

Now, a specification is immediately required as far as the ‘agent’ parameter of a narrow fictional context is concerned. Normally, the agent of this context of interpretation does not coincide with the real producer of the relevant fictionally used sentence, i.e., the *real author*—for simplicity, just the real original utterer of the sentence, the real story-teller.<sup>4</sup> The only exceptions to the above noncoincidence claim are fictionalized autobiographical tales. In such cases, the agent of the fictional narrow context of interpretation and the real author coincide—the real author pretends that *she herself* is such that certain things happen to her.

Let me again provide examples of both cases. In its fictional use,

- (3) For a long while I used to go to bed early

has fictional truth-conditions once it is interpreted in a narrow fictional context of interpretation whose ‘world’ parameter is saturated by the world of Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Time Past* and whose agent is not the

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<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, who is the real author of a fictionally used sentence may be a complicated matter. In the literature, there are many subdistinctions here.

same as Marcel Proust himself, the real original utterer of that sentence, the real author. Yet still in its fictional use,

(4) I wanted, I always wanted, I very strongly wanted

has fictional truth-conditions once it is interpreted in a narrow fictional context of interpretation whose ‘world’ parameter is saturated by the world of Vittorio Alfieri’s *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Vittorio Alfieri, written by himself*, yet whose agent is the same as Alfieri himself, the real original utterer of that sentence, the real author.

Interestingly enough, the distinction between the contextual agent (of a narrow fictional context of interpretation) and the real utterer (of a certain fictionally used sentence; hence, the real author) is not *ad hoc*. For not only is the above one of the many cases showing, following Predelli (1998, 2005), that one must draw a distinction between the narrow context of interpretation (the one relevant for providing a truth-conditional interpretation for a sentence) and the context of utterance (the situation of discourse in which the sentence is originally mobilized), but it is also one of the many cases showing that this distinction may well affect the ‘agent’ parameter of a narrow context (see Voltolini 2006). For example, if a translator translates in her own language the indexical sentence tokened by Donald Trump in addressing Kim Jong-un,

(5) I would NEVER call him ‘short and fat’

in the relevant token of the translating sentence, the corresponding first person pronoun refers to Trump, the agent of the relevant narrow context of interpretation, not to the translator, the real utterer of that token. Likewise, if a clairvoyant utters:

(6) I am Manitou

the agent of the relevant narrow context of interpretation for that sentence to which the token of “I” refers is Manitou, not the clairvoyant herself, who is the mere real utterer of the above token of (6).

But if the fictional agent of a narrow fictional context of interpretation is normally not the real utterer of the relevant fictionally used sentence, who is she? It seems that here we must face a choice. One option is that the agent of a narrow fictional context of interpretation is the *fictional*

*narrator*, i.e., the protagonist of the tale who, it is pretended, tells the story from an *internal* point of view. Since she narrates the tale in the first person, this is often labeled the homodiegetical narrator.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes (there are a number of such cases, actually), the fictional narrator is also the same as the real author of the tale; namely, when the internal protagonist of the tale mobilizes a fictionalized autobiography, as in the Alfieri example involving (4). Yet mostly, the fictional narrator is an imaginary individual who exists only in the world of the tale.<sup>6</sup> The other option is that the agent of a narrow fictional context of interpretation is not the fictional narrator, but the fictional author, i.e., the external point of view from which the tale is told in that context.<sup>7</sup> This is often labeled the heterodiegetical narrator, the one that narrates the tale in the third person.<sup>8</sup> Yet this label is somehow inappropriate. For sometimes (again, there are a number of such cases), the fictional author may even coincide with the real author herself, so that the first person is again mobilized.<sup>9</sup> This happens if that author pretends that she herself, rather than simply some individual or other, tells the relevant tale, but without being one of its protagonists, and either keeping her persona or not.<sup>10</sup> Here is an example of this situation; when Alessandro Manzoni, the real author of *The Betrothed*, enters the tale not as a protagonist of the tale itself, but as its external point of view:

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g. Predelli (2020). Clearly enough, sometimes a tale is told by different characters. Yet for any single sentence of that tale, taken in its fictional use, there is just one fictional narrator, if any.

<sup>6</sup> Lamarque-Olsen (1994, 62) simply call it a *narrator*, taking her as a figure in the world of the fiction.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Currie (1990). See also Levinson (1992). In Lamarque-Olsen's (1994, 62) terms, this is the *fictional narrator*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. again Predelli (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Granted, there may be cases in which what seems to be a fictional author coinciding with the real author is just the fictional narrator (consider a 'metafictional' version of *The Betrothed* in which (7) below is uttered again.) But once the fictional author is severed from the fictional narrator, as I am claiming, she does not have to coincide with the real author (*pace* Kania 2005, Boyd 2017).

<sup>10</sup> In Currie's (2010) terms, the real author is then a mere *implied* author.

- (7) My five-and-twenty readers may imagine what impression such an encounter as has been related above would make on the mind of this pitiable being.

Yet mostly, in being just the external point of view from which the tale is told, the fictional author is neither the real author, nor even, *pace* Currie (1990, 76,214), an imaginary individual, as the fictional narrator instead is. For she is not a protagonist of the tale that exists only in the fictional world of the tale. Rather, she is imaginatively located at the periphery of that world (Predelli 2017, 2020). For, as Predelli stresses (2020, 50,53), it is fictionally the case that, unlike the fictional narrator, she is causally immune from what happens in that world.<sup>11</sup>

Now, this distinction between the fictional narrator and the fictional author arises because sometimes at least, there is no tale's protagonist who is pretended to tell the story, hence there is no fictional narrator. As a result, someone else must enter the fore as playing a descriptive role towards the fiction itself: the fictional author. This typically, but not exclusively (e.g., if paintings may display narratives, they also display fictional authors), happens with *mindless fictions* (Currie 1990), i.e., fictions in which one pretends that there is neither language nor intelligent life. In such a case, a real author indeed pretends that a fictional author tells a story that there is a both languageless and mindless situation (that a fortiori involves no fictional narrator). Thus, the fact that the tale is a third-person narration does not rule out that there is no contextual agent for it; no narrator, yet an agent, the fictional agent. See Currie's own example:

- (8) [It's a humanless world.] A lizard basked in the sun. A breeze stirred the leaves of a flower nearby. A bird flew past. Too bad there was no one around to record the event.

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<sup>11</sup> When the fictional author does not coincide with the real author, she plays the same role as Currie's (2010) *implied* author *qua second* author. Granted, there is sometimes a narratorial self-effacement with which the real author disguises either the fact that she herself is the fictional author or the fact that she herself is the fictional narrator. Yet *pace* Kania (2005:50), this self-effacement does not prevent the need for distinguishing her, *qua* fictional author, from the fictional narrator. For *qua* fictional author but not *qua* fictional narrator, she is (fictionally) causally inert.

This form of pretense is not particularly problematic. First of all, it is just an extension of the case in which an author may pretend, not only about a previous time, but also about a time in which nobody existed, that *someone* describes how the world unfolded at that time. Cf.:

- (9) [Now it's 1940.] Hitler is attacking France  
 (10) [Now it's the Big Bang.] Matters spreads everywhere.

Moreover, imposing a contextual agent in this way in order for a narrow context of interpretation to provide a sentence with determinate truth-conditions is not restricted to cases involving fiction, but it has an independent justification. In fact, as Predelli (2001) stresses, indexical sentences can be interpreted also in narrow *possible* contexts whose worlds contain no language and possibly no intelligent life either. Consider e.g.:

- (11) I am hungry now

and interpret it in a narrow possible context in which nobody utters sentences containing more than three words. So interpreted, the sentence in question is true in the possible world of that context iff the agent of the context, who obviously is not its utterer in that context, is hungry at the contextual moment in that world. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds of:

- (12) It is sunny now

when interpreted in such a context (there must be a contextual agent even if there is no contextual utterer).

As I said before, in a few cases, the fictional author who is the fictional agent of the relevant narrow fictional context of interpretation is also the real author. Consider e.g. how the previous mindless fiction narrated by (8) might be suitably modified:

- (8\*) A lizard basked in the sun. A breeze stirred the leaves of a flower nearby. A bird flew past. Too bad, my dear readers, there was no one around to record the event.

What is important, however, is that the fictional author never coincides with the fictional narrator.<sup>12</sup> For, as I just stressed above, we need a fictional

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<sup>12</sup> Pace Currie (2010), it is then improper to call the fictional author a *narrator*.



author for semantic reasons; namely, in order for the relevant narrow fictional context of interpretation to always have an agent, the fictional agent, and just one agent in order to saturate the ‘agent’ parameter of the context. Thus, when the context seems to lack an agent, because there is no fictional narrator, we must presuppose that there is a fictional author that plays that agential role.<sup>13</sup> If instead there already is a fictional narrator in the context, she may legitimately work as the fictional agent, thereby ruling out a fictional author to play that role.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, by appealing to the semantic necessity of a contextual fictional agent—who, as we just saw, may be either the fictional narrator or the fictional author (but not both)—I may adhere to the so-called Necessity Narrator Thesis, which always requires a narrator (an agent, in my terms) for a narrative.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Against the epistemic reasons to distinguish between fictional narrators and fictional authors

As we have seen in the previous Section, a semantic reason is available as to why we must draw a distinction between fictional narrators and fictional authors. To recap, whenever there is a fictional narrator, there is no fictional author. For the ‘agent’ parameter of the relevant narrow fictional context of interpretation, which we need in order to supply the relevant fiction-involving sentence with fictional truth-conditions in its fictional use, is already saturated by that narrator.

As a result, we do not need fictional authors over and above fictional narrators for *epistemic* reasons; namely, because fictional narrators are

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<sup>13</sup> The fictional author is thereby a *minimal narrating agency*, in Matravers’ (2014) terms.

<sup>14</sup> So not only we do not need to postulate a second narrator (i.e., the fictional author), as Matravers (2014, 127) says, but we must not do so.

<sup>15</sup> Even though, as we have seen above, I do not require that the fictional agent be always distinct from the real author. For this thesis, cf. originally Chatman (1990). It is also presented but negatively discussed in Boyd (2007, 285). For a further discussion, see Livingston (2001). Furthermore, Currie’s (1995) *controlling narrator*, the narrator whose mode of presenting the story imaginatively coincides with the work’s text as a whole, should be the same as the fictional agent.

sometimes unreliable (Currie 1990, 1995), hence what it is pretended that they tell is fictionally false, i.e., false in the world of the relevant tale. For there is no guarantee that the fictional author is an omniscient descriptor of the tale's world. As the external point of view from which the tale is told, she may be unreliable as well. Granted, we have famous examples of unreliable fictional narrators: for example, the personage of Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*. In their fictional use,

(13) I am named "Humbert Humbert"

(14) I have been seduced by Lolita

are fictionally true and fictionally false respectively. For when interpreted in the relevant narrow fictional context of interpretation that has *Lolita's* world as its world, (13) is true in that world iff the fictional narrator who is the agent of that context, i.e., Humbert Humbert, is so named in that world, while (14) is true in that world iff the fictional narrator who is the agent of that context, i.e., Humbert Humbert again, has been so seduced in that world. But (13) is indeed fictionally true, for in that world Humbert Humbert does have such a name, while (14) is fictionally false, for in that world *he* has seduced Lolita. Yet we may well have examples of unreliable fictional authors as well. Suppose that the previous mindless fiction told by (8) continued as follows:

(8+) Darkness was spread everywhere.

Hence the sentence inaugurating (8), namely:

(8-) A lizard basked in the sun

would be fictionally false. For when interpreted in the relevant narrow fictional context of interpretation that has the world of that fiction as its world, that sentence is true in that world iff in that world a lizard basked in the sun. Yet in that world darkness was spread everywhere, as (8+) fictionally truly says; so, there is no sun in it. So, the agent of that context, who is the fictional author since there is no fictional narrator, would be as unreliable as the fictional narrator Humbert Humbert in *Lolita's* tale.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For this way of accounting for inconsistent fictions, see also Predelli (2020, 113,115). Strangely enough, after having said that, Predelli converges with Currie's

This shouldn't be surprising. For in general, even when they are external, points of view are *partial* ways of grasping situations. Consider the case in which one *misdescribes* a past situation by pretending it is contemporary, as in the following variation of (10):

(17) [Now it's the Big Bang.] Dinosaurs are around.

This unreliability even of some fictional authors allows us to dispense with a well-known and widespread criticism of the idea of a fictional author that has precisely to do with her supposed omniscience (Byrne 1993, Matravers 1995, Kania 2005, Boyd 2017); namely, how can she know what happens in the tale, especially when the tale concerns what is in the protagonists' minds?<sup>17</sup>

This point has an interesting consequence. Since fictional authors have been introduced here just in order to account for the fictional truth-conditions of fiction-involving sentences in their fictional use, the semantic reasons for this introduction do not coincide with those Currie (1990) provides. For, in having to do with the real truth-conditions of fiction-involving sentences in their different internal metafictional use<sup>18</sup>—that is, the use in which such sentences say the same as the corresponding parafictional

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idea that the fictional author—the *peripheral teller*, as he labels her) is omniscient (ib., 53). Yet he immediately admits that the peripheral teller is qualifiable in terms of factors that would make her immediately biased, such as belonging to a gender, having a certain psychology, or being a member of a certain cultural community (ib., 54,61,117). Currie (1990) might further reply that this case does not force one to consider the fictional author unreliable, for one might instead both take (8+) and (8-) to be fictionally true and ascribe the fictional author inconsistent beliefs in the truth-conditions of the corresponding parafictional sentences (see immediately below). Yet independently of whether this reply works (for some doubts, see Kroon and Voltolini 2019), it would make the fictional author hardly idealizable, as Currie wishes (again, see below).

<sup>17</sup> On behalf of Currie, Kroon and Voltolini (2019) note that since “the postulation of a teller for every tale is simply a staple of literary and aesthetic theory (Currie 1990, 75–6), [...] not worrying about how the teller got her information [...] might be another such staple”. Yet, as they go on to say (ib.), “one worry about such a response is that it seems little different from saying we should treat the story as if it were told from a God's eye point of view.”

<sup>18</sup> This is the use that (Currie 1990) labels *metafictional*.

sentences, i.e., sentences of the form “in story  $S$ ,  $p$ ” (Bonomi 2008)—the semantic reasons for which Currie introduces a fictional author rely crucially on ascribing omniscience (as regards the facts of the tale) to the fictional author. According to Currie, what is (really) true in the story is a matter of what it is reasonable to infer as regards what the fictional author believes: “The belief set of the fictional author—the set of propositions he believes—is the set of propositions that go to make up the story” (1990, 76). More technically,

“ $\mathbf{F}_s(p)$ ” is true iff it is reasonable for the informed reader to infer that the fictional author of  $S$  believes that  $p$  (Currie 1990, 80).

Now, giving (real) truth-conditions of this sort for parafictional sentences is precisely to exploit the idea that the fictional author has a sort of omniscience as regards the relevant fictional world, insofar as she is pretended to tell the story as a *known fact* (“we make believe that the fictional author is presenting us with information he knows to be true”, Currie 1990, 94). It is indeed reasonable to make that inference insofar as the fictional author has cognitive authority about that fictional world: “the teller (the fictional author) is identified as the person uniquely responsible for this text” (Currie 1990, 153).

Yet at this point a problem may arise for my account. If one assumes Currie’s account of the real truth-conditions of parafictional sentences, one may wonder whether the previous example of the prolonged mindless fiction (fictionally) told by (8) plus (8+) supplies us with a genuine case of a fictional author’s unreliability. For in that case, one may indeed say that the really false parafictional sentence:

(16) In the prolonged mindless fiction, a lizard basked in the sun

is also false according to Currie’s account. For, given how the mindless fiction continues, it is *not* reasonable to infer that the fictional author believes that a lizard basked in the sun. Instead, reasonably enough, given how the prolonged mindless fiction ends, the fictional author believes that darkness was spread everywhere, hence she does not believe that a lizard basked in the sun. This explains why in its fictional use, (8-) turns out to be fictionally false, i.e., is false *in the world of the prolonged mindless fiction*, without postulating any unreliability on the fictional author’s part.

Yet in other cases, not only is there a mismatch between the truth-value that the relevant parafictional sentence really has and the truth-value that it should have according to Currie's account, but this mismatch is also due to the fictional author's unreliability. For in these cases the parafictional sentence is really false and yet it is reasonable to infer that the fictional author believes its embedded content; thus, implausibly, the relevant parafictional sentence turns out to be really true according to Currie's account. This situation typically occurs in a case where epistemic indistinguishability is not matched by metaphysical indistinguishability. Consider a version of Robert Stevenson's most famous tale where no protagonist tells the tale in the first person and the following sentence is fictionally used:

(17) It is unclear whether Dr. Jekyll is the same as Mr. Hyde.

Yet the version of the tale is such that what transpires in it is also the case in the standard version of the tale, namely, that the two guys, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, are identical. For example, in the modified version, it is (fictionally) told that whatever the first guy does, so does the second. In such a version, there is a fictional author that tells the story, yet she is unreliable. (17) is indeed fictionally false: in the world of this version's tale, it is still determinately the case that the two guys are the same. So, the corresponding parafictional sentence:

(18) According to the tale's version, it is unclear whether Dr. Jekyll is the same as Mr. Hyde

is really false as well. Yet it should, implausibly, come out as really true according to Currie's account. For it is reasonable to infer that the fictional author believes that it is unclear whether Dr. Jekyll is the same as Mr. Hyde.

Granted, Currie might reply as follows. Since, given her omniscience as regards the relevant fictional world, the fictional author is a *postulate* (Currie 1990, 126), hence an idealization, the above parafictional sentence must count as really false, not as really true. For it is unreasonable to infer that an *idealized* fictional author believes that it is unclear that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are the same.

But there is no reason to idealize the fictional author in this way. For her being located in the (fictionally) causally inert periphery does not

prevent her from being essentially *biased*, by her belonging to a gender or anyway having a certain psychology as well as being a member of a certain cultural community, as Predelli (2000) repeatedly stresses (see fn.13 above). Indeed, remember that even the fictional author is essentially *perspectival*: she represents a *point of view*, albeit external, to the fiction's world. Hence, *qua* such a point, she may imperfectly grasp the facts of such a world.<sup>19</sup> In the end, therefore, the fictional author may be as unreliable as the fictional narrator is, when there is any.

#### 4. Conclusions

In this paper, I provided a semantic reason to draw a distinction between fictional narrators and fictional authors, independently of whether they are respectively the same as the real authors of fiction-involving sentences in their fictional use, as is sometimes (actually, rarely) the case. This reason hinges on the fact that in order for such sentences to have determinate fictional truth-conditions in their fictional use, there must always be *just one* fictional agent for the narrow fictional context that enables the relevant fiction-involving sentence to have those truth-conditions. Hence, there must be a fictional agent, yet she can be either the fictional narrator or the fictional author, but not both. This reason allows us to dispense with appealing

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<sup>19</sup> This would immediately transpire if we admitted *pictorial* narrators, as hypothesized above in the text. If there are any, pictorial narrators are peripheral. Indeed, a pictorial narrator represents the only proper and causally inert *pictorial* point of view from which, unlike the picture's *vehicle* - the physical basis of a picture - the picture's *subject* - the scene presented by the picture - is seen in the picture (cf. e.g. Hopkins 1998). Now, the phenomenon of anamorphosis shows that only from a certain physical vantage point, one activates the *proper* pictorial point of view from which the picture's scene is seen in the picture. From other vantage points, different *improper* pictorial points of view on that scene are activated. Consider Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors*. If one wants to see in that painting the scene containing a skull located at the ambassadors' feet, one must endorse the proper pictorial point of view that is achieved from locating oneself on the painting's very side. If one faces the painting frontally, one can only endorse an improper point of view from which the scene's skull is not seen in the painting.

to an epistemic reason to draw the very same distinction, a reason that mobilizes the alleged omniscience of the fictional author. For there is no need that such an author be always reliable.<sup>20</sup>

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