Phil. 145 b: Topics in the Philosophy of Language: Reference and Fiction

Prof. Yourgrau

Fall 2017

Office Hours: Rabb 332, M/W 2:30 – 3:30, and by appt.

Course Description:

Fiction provides an exceptionally rich field for philosophical investigation. Besides being interesting in its own right, its analysis requires reflection on some of the deepest questions in philosophy, including the nature of nonexistence, the puzzle of creation, and the relationship of language and thought to reality, including the fundamental relationship of proper names to their referents (if any). "Sherlock Holmes smoked a pipe", for example, seems to be a true statement, but if so, whom is this truth supposed to be about? Sherlock Holmes? But surely he is merely a fictional detective. Does that mean that reality includes, besides real detectives, also fictional ones? But if "Sherlock Holmes" fails to refer, how do we account for the fact that "Sherlock Holmes smoked a pipe" seems to be true?

In coming to grips with such questions, we will have to examine how the classic and "new-classic" accounts of proper names – by Frege, Russell, Strawson, Kripke, et al. -- apply to fiction. We will also have to swim out into the dark waters of metaphysics and investigate whether reality includes such things as fictional objects. We will have to examine, therefore, the metaphysics of so-called possible world semantics, pioneered by Saul Kripke, et al. At the same time, we will have to provide a satisfactory account of the very activity of fiction, of art, and thus of the fundamental human enterprise of creation. Is writing books, we will ask, creative in a way that is fundamentally different from constructing buildings, or having children.

For years, it has been known that Saul Kripke, a (or perhaps the) seminal figure in philosophy of language and modal logic and metaphysics, had offered a striking and provocative approach to fiction in his John Locke Lectures at Oxford. These have recently been published as Reference and Existence. This book will be the focus of the class, as well another newly published essay of his, "Vacuous Names and Fictional Entities", in his Philosophical Troubles. We will also read parts of R.M. Sainsbury, Fiction and Fictionalism, as well as classics in the theory of reference by Frege, Russell, Strawson and others. Fiction is becoming an increasingly central field in contemporary analytic philosophy, and it is hoped that this class will make clear why this is so.
Texts:

1) S. Kripke, *Reference and Existence*

2) R. M. Sainsbury, *Fiction and Fictionalism*

Also essays by Kripke, G. Frege, B. Russell, P. Strawson, K. Donnellan, et al.

Writing Assignments:

Several short papers (3 - 5 ppg), and a final paper (4 - 5 ppg).

**Learning Goals:** Students will learn how to approach fiction with a philosophical eye, asking questions about fiction with which they may be unfamiliar, such as whether names in fiction refer, and whether the proper analysis of fiction requires the recognition of a fictional reality, in addition to the everyday reality with which we’re all familiar. More generally, students will become conversant with traditional questions in the philosophy of language, in particular, how language relates to and reflects reality.

**Note:**

a) No ipads, iphones, or any such computer related device to be used in class. The only "i" I want to see in class is you.

b) Attendance in class is mandatory. Attendance will be taken. After two unexcused absences, there will be a grade penalty for each additional unexcused absence.

**Disabilities:** If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis and need to have special accommodations for this class, please see me immediately. Also please note that any case of dishonesty (cheating on a test, using materials, including from the internet, and failing to cite its origin) is a serious academic infraction and is subject to disciplinary action.

Academic Integrity: You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult the university webpage for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Allegations of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university.