We can all agree that Dickens’s Mrs Gamp is a fictional character. What we don’t all agree on is what this means, and what in particular makes it true that Mrs Gamp is a fictional character; or, in the formal mode, what the truth-maker is for the sentence “Mrs Gamp is a fictional character”. Meinongianism provides one well-known answer to this question, with the most familiar version identifying being a fictional character as an extra-nuclear property whose exemplification by Mrs Gamp – a non-existent but in other ways concrete object who also exemplifies such nuclear properties as being a woman, an inhabitant of London, etc. – makes for the truth of the sentence “Mrs Gamp is a fictional character”. Terence Parsons and Richard Routley (Sylvan) are perhaps the best known contemporary proponents of such a “concrete” Meinongianism. More recent attempts to answer this question have included Peter van Inwagen’s and Ed Zalta’s contrasting “abstract objectualist” view that ‘Mrs Gamp’ names an abstract object that exemplifies the property of being a fictional character but does not exemplify the property of being a woman (since women aren’t abstract objects), and Ken

* I am grateful to Ed Zalta for many conversations on the topic of this paper.
1. See Martin Chuzzlewit. The example is used in van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction”, American Philosophical Quarterly, 14 (1979), 299-308.
Walton's anti-objectualist view that to say "Mrs Gamp is a fictional character" is to speak truly in the context of a certain unofficial game of make-believe.\textsuperscript{4}

Call characterizations such as "Mrs Gamp is a fictional character" \textit{negative existential characterizations} – NE-characterizations, for short – in view of the fact that they entail, and in a sense explain, the corresponding negative existential statements (to someone's question: "What do you mean, Mrs Gamp doesn't exist?" we can sensibly answer: "She is a fictional character"). Hence Walton, concrete Meinongians like Parsons and Routley, and abstract objectualists like van Inwagen and Zalta, all provide theories of the truth-makers of NE-characterizations. My aim in this paper is to show why we should reject these different theories: all are guilty of a certain literalist fallacy. In the next three sections I present a number of problems for these theories. In the final two sections I describe and defend an alternative anti-objectualist theory.

2.

I begin with the abstract objectualists. In his seminal paper "Creatures of Fiction" ("Creatures", for short), Peter van Inwagen argued that we naturally make reference to abstract fictional objects when we engage in talk about fiction. His fundamental argument for this conclusion is that theoretical entities of this type are needed to make sense of quantificational sentences like the following:

(1) There are characters in some 19th-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18th-century novel ("Creatures", p. 302).
