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Fictional Reference as Simulation

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1. Fictional names and their uses

In a text of fiction a variety of *prima facie* referential devices (e.g. proper names, pronouns, demonstratives, etc.) are used to talk about the protagonists of the story. In some cases a fictional text features a protagonist who exists in the actual world (e.g. Napoleon in *War and Peace*). It is plausible that genuine reference occurs in such cases: the name 'Napoleon' in *War and Peace* arguably refers to the real Napoleon, but what is said of him is said in the fictional mode, that is, nonseriously. The speaker makes a fictitious assertion, based on pretence, even though the ancillary act of reference is genuine.¹ In other cases, however, the protagonists are themselves 'fictional characters' who do not exist in reality but only 'in the world of the fiction'.

With respect to fictional characters, there are two options. Either we maintain that genuine reference occurs, the target of the referential act being not a flesh and blood individual (as in the case of Napoleon) but the 'fictional character' construed as some kind of abstract object: a merely possible individual, or an intentional entity (an object of thought), or a cultural artefact created by the author of the fiction. This is the *realist* option, which enriches the ontology with a special kind of object, namely fictional characters, alongside ordinary individuals. Or — second option, that which I favour — we deny that the referential

¹ Some authors think that even the act of reference is non genuine in such cases. Thus Frege writes: 'If Schiller's *Don Carlos* were to be regarded as a piece of history, then to a large extent the drama would be false. But a work of fiction is not meant to be taken seriously in this way at all: it's all play. *Even the proper names in the drama, though they correspond to names of historical personages, are mock proper names; they are not meant to be taken seriously in the work*' ('Logic', in Frege 1979: 130; emphasis mine).

act is genuine in such cases: the fictitiousness affects not only the overall assertion, as in the Napoleon case, but also the ancillary act of reference.

Both views have been developed in the literature. I myself have argued for an oecumenical view according to which both types of reference may occur (genuine reference to fictitious objects, and fictitious reference to ordinary objects), corresponding to different *uses* of fictional names such as ‘Sherlock Holmes’ (Recanati 2018).² Fictional uses, i.e. the uses of such names in the fictional text itself, are instances of fictitious (non-genuine) reference to an ordinary flesh and blood individual. The individual in question (Sherlock Holmes) does not exist, and there cannot be genuine reference to something that does not exist; but it is possible to *pretend* that the object exists, and to ‘refer’ to it under that pretence. This is what happens in fiction when the protagonist talked about is a fictional rather than a real individual. But there are also instances of genuine reference to fictional characters (construed as abstract entities rather than an ordinary flesh and blood individuals). Such instances occur in talk *about* the fiction.

Consider the following statement:

(1) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character created by Conan Doyle in 1887

We can establish that the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in (1) refers to a cultural artefact by means of the following argument:

- Statement (1) is true.
- If (1) is true, then the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in (1) refers to something (otherwise the statement would be neither true nor false).
- *What* the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ refers to in (1) is something which Conan Doyle created in 1887, hence some kind of artefact (otherwise the statement would be false rather than true).
- The artefact in question is not a concrete thing; it belongs to the domain of ideas.

² I am not the first one to have put forward such an oecumenical view. See e.g. Kripke (1973), Zalta (2000).

This argument can be blocked at various steps by denying one of the premisses. But all of the premisses sound plausible enough, and the argument provides at least *prima facie* justification for the claim that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in (1) refers to a cultural artefact, which I take to be a kind of abstract entity (Thomasson 1999). This type of argument, however, *only* applies to so-called ‘metafictional’ uses of fictional names, such as (1). It evidently does not apply to uses of fictional names in fiction — fictional uses, such as (2) below — nor does it apply to so-called ‘parafictional’ uses, like (3):

(2) Sherlock Holmes shook his head and lit his pipe.

(3) In Conan Doyle’s novels, Sherlock Holmes is a detective who solves mysteries and whose adventures are narrated by his friend Dr Watson.

In the case of (2), the argument does not apply because the first premiss (to the effect that the statement is true) wouldn’t be plausible all. A fictional statement involving a fictional name, like (2), does not count as true or false. So one cannot argue from the fact that (2) is *true* to the conclusion that the name ‘Holmes’ in (2) must refer to something. In the case of (3), the argument does not apply either, despite the fact that the first premiss, in that case, would be plausible. (Statement (3) seems to be true, just like statement (1).) That is because the third premiss (to the effect that what the name ‘Holmes’ refers to must be an artefact, in view of what is truly predicated of it) would be false: what is truly predicated of Holmes in (3) is that he is a detective who solves mysteries etc. It is not true that anything of which these things are truly predicated must be an abstract artefact rather than a flesh and blood individual.³

I conclude that a *prima facie* case can be made for the view that the name ‘Holmes’ in (1) refers to an abstract artefact, while no such case can be made for either (2) or (3). In the case of (2), it is very tempting to go for the nonrealist alternative: the name ‘Holmes’ there does not genuinely refer to anything, it only pretends to refer to a flesh and blood individual. This is fictitious reference to an ordinary object, rather than genuine reference to a fictitious

³ As Merel Semeijn pointed out to me, one might argue that what is truly predicated of Holmes in (3) is that *in Conan Doyle’s stories* he is a detective etc. Even so, the problem of the ‘wrong kind of object’ (as Klauk 2014 calls it) remains: in the Holmes stories, it is a flesh and blood individual, not an abstract object, who solves mysteries.

object.⁴ The oecumenical view accepts that there are these two types of use of fictional names, and considers the fictional use as basic. The practice of fiction, based on pretence, is what gives birth to the abstract artefacts which supervene on it and can in turn be referred to in metafictional sentences such as (1). As Schiffer writes, fictional entities are ‘abstract entities whose existence supervenes on the pretending use of words’ (Schiffer 2003: 52). Or Searle: ‘It is the pretended reference which creates the fictional character’ (Searle 1975: 330). Or Kripke: ‘A fictional character (...) is an abstract entity. It exists in virtue of more concrete activities of telling stories, writing plays, writing novels, and so on [all of which involve pretence]’ (Kripke 2013: 73).

The real difficulty for the oecumenical view comes from parafictional uses like (3), which share features with both fictional and metafictional uses. I’ll return to that issue in sections 4 and 5. Meanwhile, I want to discuss another, related debate in the philosophy of fiction, concerning what differentiates fictional talk from serious talk.

2. Matravers against the simulation view

Following a venerable tradition, I have claimed that fictional uses of referring expressions rest on pretence. The author of the fiction pretends to make assertions, i.e. to report facts of which s/he has knowledge (Lewis 1978). When the protagonists of the fiction are themselves fictional characters, the pretend assertion rests on an ancillary act of *pretend reference*. One of the merits of the pretence approach is that it is compatible with a demanding notion of reference, such as the view that genuine reference requires some form of acquaintance with the referent (Recanati 2012). On this view one cannot refer to something that does not exist, or of which one has only descriptive knowledge; but one can pretend to refer to such things, and that is what happens in fiction.

On the oecumenical view I have described, the fictional use of referring expressions is more basic than the metafictional use, through which we refer to the abstract entities which supervene on the fictional uses; but the regular use of referring expressions in acts of genuine reference (to things with which we are acquainted) is itself more basic than the

⁴ If there is such a difference between the use of the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in (1) and (3), why do we have the sense that it refers to the same fictional character in both? For a tentative answer, based on the idea of a two-sided mental file, see Recanati (2018).

fictional use. The fictional uses *mimic* the regular uses, in such a way that fictional reference is parasitic on genuine reference. This is exactly parallel to what happens in the case of assertions. Pretend assertions (such as those made by the author of a fiction) mimic genuine assertions. Whichever norms regulate genuine assertions are tacitly invoked in pretend assertions: whoever pretends to assert pretends that the normative conditions of genuine assertion are satisfied. Likewise, whoever pretends to refer pretends that the normative conditions of genuine reference are satisfied. Let us call the idea that fictional reference and fictional assertion are parasitic on genuine reference and genuine assertion, which they simulate, the *asymmetric dependency thesis* about fiction (ADT). The reason I need to give it a name is that this idea has been called into question recently. That is the second debate I want to say something about.

Some philosophers of fiction seem to repudiate ADT. Thus Matravers (2014) rejects the Waltonian idea that it is characteristic of fiction to mandate a special kind of attitude on the part of the consumer, viz. make-believe, pretence or imagination, that attitude itself being characterized as the simulation of ordinary credal attitudes such as belief. According to Gregory Currie, whom Matravers takes to be a representative of the view he rejects, reading a nonfictional text, say a newspaper article, normally yields belief (or possibly disbelief), but reading a fictional texts has a different effect:

We do not acquire from them beliefs in the straightforward way that we acquire beliefs from nonfiction. With fictions, our mental processes are engaged off-line, and what we acquire instead of beliefs is *imaginings* which simulate belief (Currie 1995: 148)

Imaginings themselves are not on a par with beliefs. They are *simulated* beliefs, where simulation is an operation (the operation of 'running off-line') which 'sever[s] the connections between our mental states and their perceptual causes and behavioural effects' (Currie 1995: 149):

Simulation transmutes beliefs into imaginings. Just as a belief and a desire may have the same content but differ functionally, so may a belief and an imagining. Believing that it will rain has certain connections to perception and behaviour which, if they

are severed, transmutes the belief into a case of imagining that it will rain. (Currie 1995: 149)

Matravers rejects the whole picture. The alleged disconnection from perception and behaviour is not characteristic of fiction, he points out, but of representation more generally. 'it is true that horror movie viewers do not typically flee the cinema screaming, but neither do documentary viewers, television news viewers, or any other kind of viewer' (Matravers 2014: 38). Matravers contrasts *representation* with *confrontation*.⁵ There is confrontation whenever we directly experience a state of affairs, to which we can react online. Often, however, what we encounter is not directly a state of affairs given in experience but the representation of a state of affairs. When we read a newspaper article, the situation it describes is not directly experienced, but represented. Understanding a representation is a matter of building a mental model of the situation it describes, and that is something we do whether the representation is fictional or not. If this building of a mental model is called imagination, then imagination is involved both in processing fiction and nonfiction:

The distinction between confrontations and representations is more fundamental than the distinction between non-fictions and fictions. Confrontations do not require the imagination; I do not need to imagine being confronted by a wolf if there is one in front of me. Something is needed to explain my engagement with representations, [however]. If philosophy does need some notion of (...) 'make-believe', it applies to this category rather than only to fictions. (Matravers 2014: 53)

Matravers argues for 'a "two-stage" model of engaging with representations', where 'the first stage is neutral between non-fictional and fictional representations: we build a mental model of the representation that is compartmentalized but not isolated from our

⁵ 'The difference between a confrontation relation and a representation relation aligns with the difference between situations in which our mental states are online and situations in which our mental states are offline. That is, in confrontation relations our mental states are caused by perceptual inputs from the objects of those states, and cause actions towards objects in our egocentric space. In representation relations our mental states are not caused by perceptions of the objects of those states, and do not result in actions towards objects in our egocentric space (although, of course, they can still cause actions).' (Matravers 2014: 50)

pre-existing structure of belief' (Matravers 2014: 90). Fiction and non-fiction are only differentiated in the second stage, when we relate the representation to our pre-existing structure of belief:

My objection to Currie is that his functional description (...) — non standard inputs and an absence of motivation as an output — does not apply only to fiction but to our engaging with representations generally. There is a further question of the relation between this activity and our pre-existing structure of belief. That is not to do with engaging in simulation, but with the *result* of engaging in simulation. Put very roughly, simulating fiction scenarios does not result in our forming beliefs and simulating non-fictional scenarios does result in our forming beliefs. (Matravers 2014: 27)

The two-stage model advocated by Matravers is reminiscent of the traditional Fregean picture, according to which an utterance, whether serious or fictional, expresses a thought (first stage), which may or may not be asserted, that is, put forward as true (second stage). Only in the case of a serious utterance is the thought asserted and the hearer intended to believe it. On a Fregean interpretation of Matravers' two-stage model, the first stage corresponds to the process of grasping the thought, entertaining it. It is common to serious and fictional statements, and if it involves the imagination, then imagination is involved in both cases. The second stage is what Frege calls 'the step from sense to reference'. (For Frege, the thought it expresses is the sense of an utterance, while its truth-value — true or false, as the case may be — is its reference.) The step from sense to reference is not taken in the case of fiction: the thought which is expressed is not asserted, it is not taken to be true (or false), but is merely entertained. The same thing happens at the level of the referring expression which is a constituent of the fictional sentence. The referring expression has a sense (an individual concept) but through that sense no reference is made to an actual individual falling under that concept in the fictional case. Only when the reference is genuine rather than fictional is the step from sense to reference taken.

On the Fregean interpretation, the two-stage model is indeed incompatible with ADT. ADT rests on the following two theses, as we have seen:

- (i) it is characteristic of fiction to mandate a special kind of attitude on the part of the consumer, viz. imagination rather than belief (Walton 1990)
- (ii) that attitude itself is the simulation of belief (Currie 1995)

Proponents of the two-stage model reject (i) because, as Matravers puts it, fiction and nonfiction alike are representations, and to understand a representation one has to imagine what it represents – one has to build a ‘mental model’ of its content. This is *not* characteristic of fiction as opposed to nonfictional texts. As for (ii), it is incompatible with the Fregean claim that grasping a thought, entertaining it (or, as I have just put it, ‘imagining what it represents’), is a simpler act of the mind than judging the thought to be true. To judge a thought to be true one must grasp it. Grasping/entertaining the thought is a simple act of the mind, while judging/asserting is more complex: it involves grasping/entertaining *plus* ‘endorsing’. This point has been made quite explicitly by Scott Soames, a staunch advocate of the Fregean picture:

Some [cognitive acts] — judging and asserting that *o* is red — involve further cognitive acts in addition to predicating redness of *o*, whereas others — seeing and imagining — do not. To judge or assert that *o* is red is to think of *o* as red and to do something else. In the case of judging, this something else is endorsing, in the sense of adopting that way of thinking — of *o* as red — as potential basis for further thought or action (Soames 2014: 228-29).

Acts of judgment or denial are, for Soames, more complex than simple acts of entertaining, since they involve an additional act of endorsement or (in the case of denial) rejection. In contrast, imagining consists of a single act of entertainment, and so do, according to Soames, mental acts such as *seeing* and *visualizing* (Soames 2014 : 229). Fiction works the same way, according to the two-stage model (on its ‘Fregean’ interpretation). Propositions are entertained, and the subject imagines what it would be like for them to be true, but no endorsement takes place: the content of the representation is not adopted as belief.

The contrast between the two views is reasonably clear. According to ADT, belief (or judgment, or assertion) is primary, while fiction involves ‘make-believe’ (or imagination), which is the simulation of belief, hence a more complex cognitive act. According to the

Fregean picture, what is primary is grasping/entertaining, which works in the same way for fictional and nonfictional discourse and possibly involves the imagination (understood as the construction of a mental model). Serious assertions involve an additional act of endorsement of the propositions entertained. No such act takes place when the discourse is fictional.

3. Force cancellation

Recently there has been a sustained attack on the Fregean picture and the force/content distinction on which it is based. An act of assertion has a certain content (what is asserted) but it also has 'assertive force'. According to the Fregean picture, these components can be separated: besides being asserted, the content can be expressed or entertained in a forceless manner, i.e. without judging the proposition to be true or asserting it. There is a sense in which this is fairly uncontroversial, but there is also a sense in which it isn't. According to Peter Hanks (2007, 2015), propositions themselves, e.g. the proposition that *o* is red (Soames' example), are *inherently assertive*, because what holds together the object talked about (*o*) and the property ascribed to it (redness) is the fact that the property is predicated of the object. *Pace* Soames (2010, 2015), this notion of predication is not neutral and forceless. If you predicate redness of *o*, you ascribe that property to the object. To be sure, the proposition that *o* is *F* can be expressed without being actually asserted, e.g. when it occurs in the antecedent of a conditional. But this (the so-called 'Frege point') does not object to there being an assertive component inherent in the proposition, contrary to what Peter Geach repeatedly claimed (Geach 1960, 1965). When a proposition occurs unasserted, Hanks argues, the assertive ingredient is *cancelled*:

Frege's main reason for adopting the content–force distinction—the fact that we do not assert the antecedent or the consequent in an utterance of a conditional—is consistent with thinking that an assertoric element is included in the contents of declarative sentences. Frege's reaction to this fact about conditionals was to hold that the contents of declarative sentences are devoid of any assertive element, but this is not the only reaction one might have. An alternative is to hold that in certain contexts, for example, when a sentence is used inside a conditional, the assertive

element is cancelled by the presence of the conditional. (Hanks 2011: 15)

In fictional texts, clearly, propositions occur without assertive force. For example, the actor who says that p on stage does not seriously assert that p : she merely pretends to assert that p . But this can be analysed by saying that the assertive force inherent in the proposition that p is cancelled because the utterance takes place in a theatrical context. Theatrical contexts are, by convention, contexts in which force is cancelled (Hanks 2015 : 96n). As Dummett puts it, ‘The reason [the actor] is not making assertions is not that he is doing *less* than that — merely expressing thoughts, say — but that he is doing *more* than that — he is acting the making of assertions’ (Dummett 1973: 311). Cancellation results from the fact that the speaker is staging or simulating the performance of an assertion, rather than genuinely going through the performance.

On the Fregean picture defended by Soames, forceful cases such as assertion or judgment result from an ‘endorsement’ operation that comes in addition to the basic act of entertaining the proposition. On the alternative picture defended by Hanks, it is forceless occurrences which involve a supplementary operation : cancelling. The following table, adapted from Recanati 2019, summarizes the difference between the two views.⁹

	<i>Basic case</i>	<i>Supplementary operation</i>
<i>The Fregean picture</i>	Entertaining (forceless)	Endorsement (distinguishes serious talk from fiction)
<i>The alternative picture</i>	Assertion/judgment (forceful)	Force cancellation (distinguishes fiction from serious talk)

Table 1 : The two pictures

⁹ A similar contrast is drawn by Gilbert (1991) between two models of belief-forming mechanisms such as perception — the ‘Cartesian’ model and the ‘Spinozan’ model. According to both models, belief fixation proceeds in two stages, a ‘representation’ stage and an ‘assessment’ stage (Gilbert 1991: 109). On the Cartesian model acceptance only occurs at the assessment stage. On the Spinozan model, the representation stage involves automatic acceptance of the represented content, which acceptance may be cancelled or certified at the assessment stage. Gilbert defends the Spinozan model, and so do Egan (2008) and Mandelbaum (2014) after him.

If we give up the Fregean picture and adopt the alternative picture instead, as I recommend, do we have to reject Mattravers' two-stage model? No — but we need to reinterpret it in a non-Fregean way. We can maintain that there are two levels: the 'basic' level, which is the common core shared by serious talk and fictional talk, and the second level where serious talk and fictional talk come to be differentiated. According to the Fregean picture, the basic level corresponds to the (forceless) act of entertaining a proposition, while the second level features the additional act of endorsement which distinguishes serious talk from fictional talk. According to the alternative view, the basic level corresponds to the (forceful) act of asserting or judging, or the forceful state of believing, a proposition, while the second level features an operation of 'decoupling', or 'running off-line', which cancels the force of the state or act (Recanati forthcoming a, b). (Due to that operation, the state or act in question is merely simulated.) So the two-stage model does not have to be repudiated. The alternative view only forces us to acknowledge the presence of an assertive component at the basic level.

I accept, indeed welcome, Mattravers' idea that understanding a discourse, whether fictional or not, involves imagining the situation it represents, i.e., constructing a mental model for it.¹⁰ But, like Gilbert (1991), I take that process to be a form of temporary acceptance: it consists in (provisionally) accepting the existence of certain elements corresponding to the referring expressions in the discourse, and ascribing to them certain properties and certain relations to other elements, corresponding to what is predicated of them in the discourse. This amounts to viewing things as being thus and so. Thus, if I hear or read 'it is raining' (or 'winter is coming'), I put myself in the sort of mental state I am in when I judge or believe that it is raining (or that winter is coming). That state is inherently assertive/judicative, even though the assertive/judicative force inherent in it may be cancelled if it turns out that the speaker is not serious. The intrinsically assertoric character of what goes on at the first level (common to fictional talk and serious talk) explains why entertaining fictional scenarios carries a certain emotional load and generates certain action tendencies. What mitigates the fictional emotions (and distinguishes them from real

¹⁰ See the quotation from Rumelhart in Recanati 2004: 139-140; and the discussion of Bühler in Recanati 2000: 88ff.

emotions) is the cancellation operation at the second level, which has also the effect of inhibiting the action tendencies generated at the first level.¹¹

Corresponding to the two levels, we have to distinguish *two* notions of imagination or simulation: a first-level notion (imagination₁) and a second-level notion (imagination₂). This makes the debate initiated by Matravers terminological to a certain extent. At the first level, when we build a mental model for a discourse, we can say (as I did several times) that we imagine the situation it represents or (as Matravers puts it) that we ‘simulate scenarios’. Matravers is right that imagination/simulation in *that* sense is not characteristic of fiction as opposed to nonfictional discourse. Fiction comes to be differentiated from serious talk only at the second level, when the assertive force present at the first level is cancelled. In that case we can characterize the subject’s attitude as that of ‘mere’ imagination, that is, imagination *rather than* belief, and the acts of assertion or reference as being simulated *rather than* genuinely performed. It is this contrastive, second-level notion of imagination/simulation (imagination₂) that proponents of ADT such as Currie have in mind when they say that fiction is essentially simulative and involving imagination rather than belief. Properly understood, therefore, ADT is compatible with the two-stage model (on its non-Fregean interpretation). We can simultaneously accept that

(ADT)

- it is characteristic of fiction to mandate a special kind of attitude on the part of the consumer, viz. imagination₂ rather than belief
- that attitude itself is the simulation of belief¹²

and that

(Two-stage model)

- Understanding a representation is a matter of imagining₁ the situation it describes, that is, building a mental model of it
- that is something we do whether the representation is fictional or not.

¹¹ The simulation view thus provides a neat solution to the so-called ‘paradox of fiction’.

¹² Recall Currie’s passage cited in section 2: “Simulation transmutes belief into imaginings... Believing that it will rain has certain connections to perception and behaviour which, if they are severed, transmutes the belief into a case of imagining that it will rain” (Currie 1995: 149).

4. Parafictional statements: a problem for the simulation approach

Merel Semeijn has elaborated a Stalnakerian analysis based on Matravers' idea (Semeijn 2017; Maier and Semeijn, this volume). In processing both fictional and nonfictional texts, she says, we start by constructing a mental model, which for Semeijn means that incoming information from the text is used to update a 'temporary workspace' that corresponds to the text and exists alongside the (permanent) Stalnakerian common ground. The latter, which she refers to as the 'official common ground',¹³ corresponds to Matravers' 'pre-existing system of beliefs':

What differentiates assertions from fictional statements is how, at the end of the discourse, they update the official common ground: whether the content of the updated workspace is adopted as belief (for nonfiction) or as metafictional belief (for fiction).¹⁴ Hence, in the second step of the algorithm, I define assertions and fictional statements as different 'closure operations' that take an ordered pair $\langle C, W \rangle$ containing [an official common ground and] an updated, active workspace, and return an ordered pair with a new official common ground and an inactive workspace. (Semeijn 2017: 420)

In the second stage of processing serious discourse, the content of the temporary workspace is adopted as belief, Semeijn says — it is used to update the common ground. If the discourse is fictional, the content of the temporary workspace is not adopted as belief; rather, it is embedded under a Lewisian 'in the fiction' operator (e.g. 'in the Conan Doyle stories'), and the content resulting from embedding is adopted as parafictional belief and

¹³ Some authors, e.g. Eckardt (2015) and Stokke (2013, 2018), distinguish the common ground corresponding to what the conversational protagonists mutually presuppose concerning the actual world, from various additional ('unofficial') common grounds corresponding to what is mutually presupposed concerning particular fictions (in the case of the Conan Doyle stories: that Holmes is a detective, that Watson is his friend etc.). Semeijn's temporary workspace is meant to substitute for the unofficial common grounds. While, at least for Eckardt, the unofficial common grounds corresponding to various fictions are supposed to exist permanently alongside the official common ground, Semeijn's temporary workspace is only active during the processing of a fictional text. Semeijn's workspace is similar to the 'possible world box' posited by Nichols and Stich in their theory of pretence (Nichols and Stich 2000, 2003).

¹⁴ 'Metafictional belief' is (or, rather, was) Semeijn's name for what I call parafictional beliefs such as 'In the Conan Doyle novels, Holmes is a detective'.

fed into the common ground. In a nutshell: entertaining the proposition that it is raining in a nonfictional context gives rise to the belief that it is raining (assertive closure), while entertaining the same proposition in a fictional context gives rise to the belief that in the fiction, it is raining (fictive closure). Either way, the content entertained in the first stage is used, in the second stage, to update the common ground, directly (the nonfictional case) or indirectly (the fictional case, where the content is fed into the common ground after embedding).

If we opt for the simulation approach, however, fictive closure raises a problem. Parafictional statements like (3), repeated here, seem to express genuine beliefs, endowed with a truth-value:

(3) In Conan Doyle's novels, Sherlock Holmes is a detective who solves mysteries and whose adventures are narrated by his friend Dr Watson.

The problem is that the sentence embedded under the Lewisian operator contains fictional names, 'Sherlock Holmes' and 'Dr Watson'. According to the simulation view, these names do not actually refer to anything. Reference is merely simulated: the author does as if he (or the narrator whose role he is playing) was referring to particular individuals using these names. The names themselves are not genuine proper names – they are pretend proper names, invented by the fictional writer.¹⁶ But if that is so, then the embedded sentence fails to be either true or false. It fails to express the singular proposition which it purports, or pretends, to express. How then is it possible that embedding that 'proposition' under a modal operator will yield a truth-evaluable content?

Frege famously held that even if a name lacks a reference (as fictional proper names do) they still have a sense, so the sentence in which they occur expresses a thought even if the thought in question is neither true nor false (because the step from sense to reference is not taken). Regarding the sense of the the fictional name 'Nausicaa', Frege writes:

¹⁶ As Russell once wrote, "The fundamental falsehood in the play [*Hamlet*] is the proposition: the noise 'Hamlet' is a name" (Russell 1940: 277).

The name 'Nausicaa' (...) does not mean or name anything (...), but *it behaves as if it names a girl, and it is thus assured a sense*. And for fiction the sense is enough.
(‘Comments on Sinn und Bedeutung’, Frege 1979 : 122; emphasis mine)

This passage fits rather well with the two-stage approach discussed in the previous sections. The mental model constructed in the first stage of processing a sentence containing the name 'Nausicaa' features a certain girl to whom the name refers. Since the sentence occurs in fiction, reference to that girl is merely simulated: it is pretend reference – the girl does not actually exist. That is why the sentence does not have a truth-value. But there being an individual in the mental model is sufficient to endow the name with a sense, even though it lacks (genuine) reference.¹⁷

Again, this raises the issue: how can the parafictional sentence be true if the embedded sentence is neither true nor false because reference is merely simulated? Frege's likely response is that in certain contexts a name refers not to its ordinary reference (which, in the present case, does not exist) but to its ordinary sense. The Fregean idea of a shift in semantic value in certain contexts seems almost inevitable if one holds the simulation view while accepting that a parafictional sentence like (3) can be true. But that means that we give up the principle of *semantic innocence*: the name 'Sherlock Holmes' in (3) does not do the same thing as it does in the fictional sentence which (3) embeds.¹⁸

In a fictional sentence, the name 'Nausicaa' is a mock proper name which pretends to refer; since this is merely pretence, the fictional sentence itself is neither true nor false. As Frege says,

If the sense of an assertoric sentence is not true, it is either false or fictitious, and it will generally be the latter if it contains a mock proper name. ('Logic', Frege 1979: 130).

¹⁷ When I say that there is an individual in the mental model I simply mean that the individual is represented; I do not mean that it exists. So the issue of the 'metaphysical status' of that individual (raised by several readers of this paper) does not arise.

¹⁸ Semantic innocence is so-called (after Barwise and Perry 1981) in reference to a passage in which Davidson criticizes Frege's idea that indirect discourse and attitude ascriptions involve a shift in semantic value: 'If we could recover our pre-Fregean innocence, I think it would seem to us plainly incredible that the words "The Earth moves", uttered after the words "Galileo said that", mean anything different, or refer to anything else, than is their wont when they come in different environments' (Davidson 1968: 108).

In a footnote, Frege adds: ‘We have an exception where a mock proper name occurs within a clause in indirect speech’, because in such contexts a name refers to its ordinary sense, and as we have seen, even a mock proper name has a sense. If we apply the same strategy to the case of parafictional statements, we can explain how such statements can be true; but as I said, that means that we renounce the idea that the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in (3) merely simulates reference, as it does in the fictional statement which (3) embeds.

Many authors want to preserve semantic innocence, however. They are *radical simulationists*: they maintain that the use of the fictional proper name in (3) is ‘a continuation of the pretence’ at work in the fictional statement which (3) embeds (Evans 1982 : 365). And they extend this simulation-based analysis to the occurrences of blatantly empty proper names in indirect speech and attitude reports.¹⁹ How, then, can this position be made compatible with the fact that parafictional statements (and belief sentences alike) can be true or false? It is not obvious that it can, and radical simulationists are sometimes tempted by the view that parafictional statements are *not really*, not *literally*, true or false: taken at face value, they themselves are only pretend assertions, but such pretend assertions pragmatically convey something which *is* true or false. As Crimmins says, ‘Somehow, the context of pretending allows me to generate with a pretend assertion of one sort of claim a genuine, serious assertion of a different sort of claim’ (Crimmins 1998: 4).

Maier and Semeijn do not have this problem because, like David Lewis, they embrace a form of descriptivism. For Maier (2017a), the content of the imagining triggered by a fictional statement featuring a fictional name such as ‘Holmes’ or ‘Frodo’ is an existentially quantified proposition rather than a (mock) singular proposition. Maier writes:

On my account, the name Frodo triggers the existential presupposition that there is someone by that name, and this presupposition gets bound or accommodated within the imagination. As far as purely fictional statements are concerned, the resulting

¹⁹ ‘Suppose an interpreter finds an expression — say, ‘Mumbo-Jumbo’ — which functions, syntactically, like other expressions which he can construe as names, but for which he can find no bearer, and reasonably believes there is no bearer... In practice, an interpreter might say things like ‘This man is saying that Mumbo-Jumbo brings thunder’, and might explain an utterance which he described that way as expressing the belief that Mumbo-Jumbo brings thunder. (...) *Such an interpreter is simply playing along with his deluded subject — putting things his way*’ (McDowell 1977: 124-27; emphasis mine). In other words, the interpreter *simulates* the deluded subject’s failed act of reference to the nonexistent entity.

interpretation I predict is roughly equivalent to classical descriptivist analyses (...): in all imagination worlds there is some hobbit named Frodo, who ... There is no rigid designation here. (Maier 2017b: 115)

It follows that the proposition expressed by the sentence embedded under 'In the Conan Doyle novels' in (3) is itself an existentially quantified proposition rather than a (mock) singular proposition. What (3) really means, according to Maier and Semeijn, is

(3') In Conan Doyle's novels, there is an individual x named 'Sherlock Holmes' and an individual y named 'Dr Watson', such that x is a detective who solves mysteries and y is x 's friend and y narrates x 's adventures.

On this view, no empty reference takes place in the scope of the Lewisian operator, so the problem which parafictional statements raises for the simulation view does not arise.

Maier's descriptivist approach would not be very attractive as a general theory about the semantic contribution of proper names, since proper names are usually considered as referential and (therefore) rigid. But Maier restricts it to *fictional* proper names:

Regular proper names of course do refer rigidly to their bearers, by virtue of the mechanisms of internal and external anchoring. (...) My uniform analysis of fictional and other names consists in the uniform treatment of all names as presupposition triggers, not in associating truly referential readings to all occurrences of names. (Maier 2017b: 115n)

Against Maier I argued for a more fully uniform analysis, according to which fictional proper names themselves should be construed as 'referential' and involving a mechanism of *fictitious anchoring* (Recanati 2017; see also Kamp, this volume). That is the simulation view. Still, to solve the problem which parafictional statements raise for that view, one might be tempted to appeal to Maier's descriptivist analysis construed, in a more limited setting, as an implementation of the Fregean strategy specifically concerning *parafictional* uses.²⁰

²⁰ My debate with Maier in *Theoretical Linguistics* concerned *fictional* uses of names such as 'Frodo' or 'Holmes' (Maier 2017a, Recanati 2017).

According to the resulting proposal, while the proper name in the fictional statement is a mock proper name that pretends to refer, its status changes when it occurs in the scope of a parafictional operator – in such contexts the name’s role is to contribute an individual concept rather than an individual. This, of course, is incompatible with the principle of semantic innocence.

To sum up, there is a *prima facie* inconsistent triad:

1. (*Simulation*) In a fictional statement, a fictional name such as ‘Holmes’ or ‘Frodo’ only pretends to refer. As a result, a fictional statement involving such a name is neither true nor false.
2. (*Semantic Innocence*) A fictional name such as ‘Holmes’ or ‘Frodo’ does the same thing in a fictional statement (‘Frodo is F’) and in the corresponding parafictional statement (‘In *Lord of the Rings* Frodo is F’).
3. (*Truth*) A parafictional statement such as ‘In *Lord of the Rings* Frodo is F’ can be true or false.

Radical simulationists want to preserve both Simulation and Semantic Innocence, at the cost perhaps of giving up Truth. Simulation and Truth can be held together at the cost of giving up Semantic Innocence. Giving up Simulation makes it possible to preserve Semantic Innocence and Truth. But can we do better? Can we preserve Simulation, Truth, *and* Semantic Innocence? My answer, briefly sketched in the next section, is that we can.

5. Exemplifying pretence for demonstrative purposes

I think it *is* possible to maintain both radical simulationism (the view that fictional names pretend to refer, *both* in fictional *and* parafictional statements) and the view that parafictional statements can be true or false. The general idea is that the parafictional speaker engages in pretence (e.g. pretends to refer to Sherlock Holmes and to predicate properties of ‘him’) but does so *in order to show what the fictional world of the story is like*. In other words: the parafictional statement *embeds a piece of pretence* (corresponding to the fictional statement) *for demonstrative purposes* and says, truly or falsely, that this is what the world of the fiction is like.

This view relies on a framework which various philosophers have gestured at for handling attitude reports.²¹ Mark Sainsbury, who calls it ‘display theory’, presents it as follows:

In attributions of intentional states concepts are *displayed*, and the attribution is correct if the concepts displayed match those in the mind of the subject. When we say that Ursula is thinking about unicorns, we do not use the concept UNICORNS in the normal way, the way we would use it if we said there were unicorns in the park. Instead, we put the concept UNICORNS on display, and our attribution is correct if Ursula is exercising that concept in her thinking. (...) Display theory predicts that a concept that refers to nothing may be used in a correct attribution of what someone is thinking, explaining how Ursula can think about unicorns. (Sainsbury 2018: 1-2)

I would rather put things this way: in reporting a thought about unicorns (or about Mumbo-Jumbo, as in McDowell’s example²²), one uses *and* mentions the concept UNICORN at the same time. One uses it *simulatively*, by ‘playing along with the deluded subject’ whose thoughts one is reporting (McDowell 1977: 127). But the aim of the simulation is to convey to the audience what the thought is like; so the embedding operator itself (here, the belief operator ‘Ursula thinks that’) has to be construed as involving a demonstrative component referring to the concepts deployed in the current simulation, as in Davidson’s paratactic analysis of *oratio obliqua* (Davidson 1968). This type of semi-quotational analysis is what we need to reconcile radical simulationism and the truism that parafictional sentences can be true or false. On this view the parafictional operator ‘in fiction *f*’ has to be construed, not as an ordinary intensional operator (as in Lewis 1978), but as involving a hidden demonstrative reflexively referring to the pretence exemplified by the fictional sentence it embeds.²³ Thus understood, a parafictional statement ‘In fiction *f*, *p*’ is true just in case the piece of pretence exemplified by the use of the embedded fictional sentence matches that which practitioners of fiction *f* engage in, or, in slightly different terms, just in case what one imagines when processing the embedded fictional statement matches what fiction *f* mandates its practitioners to imagine.

²¹ See e.g. Quine 1960: 92, Stich 1983: 83-84, and Gordon 1986: 166-67.

²² see footnote 19.

²³ As Walton says, the parafictional speaker ‘indicate[s] the relevant kind of pretense by exemplifying it’ (Walton 1990: 400).

On this analysis parafictional discourse turns out to be intermediate between fictional discourse and metafictional discourse. In parafictional discourse, we do talk about the fiction, as much as we do in metafictional discourse. When we say ‘In Conan Doyle’s novels, Sherlock Holmes is a detective’, we explicitly refer to the fiction, by means of the phrase ‘Conan Doyle’s novels’ ; to that extent, we do take a ‘metafictional’ perspective. This is very different from being immersed in a fiction and not reflectively thinking about it. At the same time, parafictional discourse discloses the *content* of the fiction, what it represents; and this it does, in continuity with fictional discourse, by giving to imagine what the fiction prescribes its practitioners to imagine. That is what the audience of a parafictional utterance does : she imagines a fictional state of affairs while simultaneously ‘tagging’ the imagined state of affairs as one that is depicted in the fiction.

On this view the proper name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in a parafictional statement like (3) simulatively ‘refers’ to the flesh and blood individual Sherlock Holmes, just as it does in the fictional statement which (3) embeds. In such parafictional discourse we ‘*retell* a small portion of the story in order to characterize its content’ (Everett 2013: 50-51). In so doing we take a metafictional stance towards the Sherlock Holmes story, but the task of the audience is merely to imagine the flesh and blood individual Sherlock Holmes, in the course of imagining the state of affairs of which it is a constituent, while understanding that this is what the Sherlock Holmes story mandates its readers to imagine. No reference is made to ‘fictional characters’ construed as cultural artefacts, in contrast to what happens in metafictional discourse such as (1). As I wrote in my paper on that topic,

The irreducible metafictional component involved in parafictional discourse is located in the reference to the fiction conveyed by the [parafictional operator, ‘in fiction *f*’]; all the rest is a continuation of the pretence that is constitutive of fictional thought and talk. (Recanati 2018: 50)

6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have defended the view that fictional discourse is asymmetrically dependent upon ‘serious’ (nonfictional) discourse: fictional reference and fictional assertion alike are parasitic on genuine reference and genuine assertion, which they mimic. I have shown this

view to be compatible with the two-level picture according to which processing both fictional and nonfictional discourse involves constructing a mental model of the situations talked about: the assertoric/judgmental force inherent in such mental representations is cancelled when the discourse is tagged as fictional. On this view the parafictional operators ('in *Lord of the Rings*', 'in the Sherlock Holmes stories'...) through which such tagging is effected in discourse about the fiction should not be construed as intensional operators in the manner of Lewis (1978), but as hyperintensional operators involving a demonstrative component referring to the pretence exemplified by the fictional sentence they embed. The fictional names occurring in the sentences embedded under such operators work exactly like the fictional names occurring in a text of fiction; they do not refer to 'fictional characters' construed as cultural artefacts, in contrast to what happens in metafictional discourse, but pretend to refer to ordinary flesh and blood individuals, thus exemplifying and continuing the pretence at work in the fiction they attempt to characterize.²⁴

²⁴ I am indebted to Gregory Currie, Emar Maier, Merel Semeijn, Andreas Stokke, and an Oxford University Press reviewer for discussion and comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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