

**teorema**

Vol. XXXVIII/2, 2019, pp. 73-100

ISSN: 0210-1602

[BIBLID 0210-1602 (2019) 38:2; pp. 73-100]

## THE STATE OF THE ART

### Semantics of Fictional Terms

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#### RESUMEN

Este artículo ofrece una revisión un tanto personal de algunas contribuciones recientes –que abarcan aproximadamente la última década– de nuestra comprensión de cómo funcionan los nombres y otras expresiones referenciales en el discurso de ficción, y aborda preocupaciones filosóficas bien conocidas que estos plantean. Los puntos de vista sobre la semántica de las expresiones referenciales en el discurso de ficción *va*, usualmente de la mano de concepciones metafísicas sobre la ontología de los personajes de ficción, de modo que este asunto será también objeto de nuestra preocupación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *referencia a entidades de ficción, nombres vacíos, personajes de ficción, referencia.*

#### ABSTRACT

The paper provides an opinionated survey of recent contributions – roughly, in the last decade – to our understanding of how names and other referring expressions work in fictional discourse and addresses well-known philosophical worries that they raise. Views about the semantics of referring expressions in fictional discourse are usually accompanied by metaphysical views on the ontology of fictional characters, so this will also come under our focus.

*Keywords: Fictional Reference; Empty Names; Fictional Characters; Fiction; Reference.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

I'll start by circumscribing our topic. Let us assume that an assertion is what is done by default by means of declarative sentences: “[i]n natural language, the default use of declarative sentences is to make assertions” [Williamson (1996), p. 258]. It is a feature of assertions that we evaluate them as correct or otherwise depending on whether they are *true*. Let us thus consider three sorts of *prima facie* assertoric uses made with declaratives in discourses involving fictions:

- (1) When Gregor Samsa woke, he found himself transformed into a gigantic vermin.
- (2) According to *Metamorphosis*, when Gregor Samsa woke, he found himself transformed into a gigantic vermin.
- (3) Gregor Samsa is a fictional character.

Consider first an utterance of (1) by Kafka, as part of the longer utterance by him of the full discourse which, with a measure of idealization, we can think constitutes the act of putting forward his “word-sculpture” [Alward (2010)] *Metamorphosis* for us to enjoy.<sup>1</sup> These uses of fictional declarative discourse, which I will call *textual*,<sup>2</sup> are distinguished by the fact that they are not intuitively truth-evaluable. ‘Gregor Samsa’, we would intuitively say, fails to refer to anything; given this, an assertion of (1) would intuitively fail to be true, and would therefore be incorrect. However, we don’t intuitively find it plausible to criticize Kafka on this regard. Textual uses of fictional declarative discourse do not hence intuitively count as assertions.

The other two types differ in that they do intuitively appear to be truth-evaluable, and hence *prima facie* candidates for assertion. There is, firstly, the use of sentences such as (1) when we report what goes on in a fiction, that is, the character of the *fictional world* it presents, its *plot*. I will call these plot-reporting uses *paratextual*; according to Lewis (1978) and others, they are simply elliptic for intuitively equivalent ascriptions of propositional content like (2), which on such grounds I’ll also count as paratextual. Readers of *Metamorphosis* would count (1) in such a use as true, as they would (2), and as false the results of substituting ‘rat’ for ‘vermin’ in them. Finally, I will call the uses of sentences such as (3) *metatextual*; they are intuitively truth-evaluable, but not content-reporting, in that they are not (or at least not obviously) equivalent to explicit content ascriptions like (2).

Sawyer (2012), p. 153, articulates a main goal that philosophers pursue vis-à-vis terms like ‘Gregor Samsa’ in (1)-(3), or corresponding referring expressions like indexicals in fictions in which they are supposed to designate equally intuitively non-existing nameless characters: to “make sense of the apparent phenomena of meaning, reference, and truth in the specific context of sentences containing names that fail to refer (either by accommodating the relevant intuitions or by explaining them away)”. The three phenomena are these: “sentences containing empty names can be understood, and hence appear to be meaningful”, for instance (1) in its two uses; “some empty names appear to name the same individual

and hence to be co-referential”, for instance ‘Santa Claus’ and ‘Father Christmas’, or ‘Samsa’ in Friend’s (2011) example (9) below, §IV, as affirmed and denied respectively by Nabokov and a critic; and “some sentences containing empty names appear to be straightforwardly true”, like those in paratextual and metatextual uses.

My aim in this article is to provide an opinionated survey of recent contributions – roughly, in the last decade – to our understanding of how names and other referring expressions work in textual, paratextual and metatextual uses, addressing the philosophical worries that Sawyer mentions. Discussing issues about the semantics of referring expressions in fictional discourse inevitably leads us to take a look at metaphysical views on the ontology of fictional characters, so this will also come under the focus in the following pages. I will relate my presentation of recent contributions on these matters to the most influential earlier proposals, but I will not go into the details; they have been already surveyed in other articles that readers can check – cf. Friend (2007), Sawyer (2012), Kroon & Voltolini (2016); cf. also García-Carpintero (2010a).

In the next section, §II, I’ll present uniform accounts of referring expressions in the three kinds of fictional discourse, discuss some motivations for them, and some illustrative views. In §III I’ll do the same for non-uniform accounts. Finally, §§IV-V address the more general issue of how the debate about referring expressions in fiction impinges on arguments confronting direct reference with descriptivist viewpoints. Throughout I will focus mostly on names, but I hope the reader will easily extend what I say to other cases, such as indexicals, or referential uses of definite and indefinite descriptions. The details of the formal semantics would substantially differ in each case, but I will not touch upon them at all here; formal semantics is by now an autonomous discipline, with its own concerns, methodologies, and theoretical assumptions.

## II. UNIFORM ACCOUNTS

Uniform accounts of fictional terms aim to give a similar explanation for their occurrences in our three types of use. We get two contrasting views, realism and irrealism, depending on whether we take inspiration from, respectively, metatextual or textual uses. I’ll start with the former. Kripke (2013), based on talks originally delivered in 1973, argues that a proper account of metatextual uses requires interpreting

names such as ‘Gregor Samsa’ in them as referring to fictional entities. Van Inwagen (1977) provides an influential argument for such realism about fictional entities: a Quinean appeal to non-eliminable quantification over, and reference to, such entities in *prima facie* serious, truth-evaluable discourse, such as utterances of (3) and related metatextual uses in contexts of literary criticism.<sup>3</sup> Such *ficta* could then be taken to be concrete Meinongian non-existent entities (Priest 2011), concrete non-actual *possibilia* (Lewis 1978), or (as both Kripke and van Inwagen recommend) abstract existent entities of various sorts, fully-fledged Platonic *abstracta* as in Wolterstorff (1980) and Currie (1990), or rather created artefacts, as in Salmon (1998), Thomasson (1999, 2003) or Schiffer (2003).<sup>4</sup>

These fictional entities could then be invoked to account for textual and paratextual uses. A view like this appears to follow from Ludlow’s (2006) main claim, that in textual uses predicates such as ‘is a vampire’ acquire an extended sense in which they truly, literally apply to the props representing vampires in the relevant fiction, such as actors playing vampire roles in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Ludlow doesn’t say what the props are in verbal fictions, but if we take them to be the representations to which fictional names refer in metatextual discourse on Walters’ non-uniform realist view presented below, the resulting proposal is a natural extension of his view to textual discourse. Walters himself dismisses such a uniform view, on the following grounds (personal communication): (i) it seems implausible to think that authors are referring; (ii) we need empty uses anyway, to make sense of negative existentials (see below), and (iii) it seems better to say we have *de dicto* – rather than *de re* [Salmon (1998), p. 316] – pretense in textual uses.

Although he doesn’t explicitly embrace it, it is also natural to ascribe this view to Manning (2014); for he argues that fictional names do have reference in textual uses, to something very much like Walters’ representations (taken as socially created objects). Martinich & Stroll (2007) defend a related view of textual uses, including those of sentences with apparently empty names like (1) – which, in contrast to the proposals just mentioned, they take to be in fact empty, without this preventing those uses from being true. They advance a performative view of the acts of the fiction-maker, which create “institutional facts” making their claims true – as just said, Manning (2014) seems to have something similar in mind.<sup>5</sup>

The contextualist views put forward by Predelli (1997), Reimer (2005) and Voltolini (2006) make similar suggestions.<sup>6</sup> The context in which ‘The battle happened here.’ is uttered might require us to evaluate

the assertion not with respect to the place where the utterance takes place, but rather with respect to another, contextually provided location. On Predelli's, Reimer's and Voltolini's views, the context of textual and paratextual uses of (1) similarly leads us to evaluate its truth not at the actual world, but at a counterfactual or imaginary one, "the" world of the fiction (actually, of course, a plurality thereof if these are taken as standard possible worlds, on Lewis' (1978) view those in which the story is told "as known fact").<sup>7</sup> Predelli (1997) only considers examples involving real names, but he extends the view to cases involving fictional names, arguing that they refer to *ficta* – actual abstract created existents [Predelli (2002).

Tiedke (2011) holds a related view. She doesn't distinguish textual and paratextual uses of (1), but seems to have the latter in mind, for she wants to assign the sentences a semantics such that they are literally true (in the case of (1)) or false (if we replace in it 'vermin' with 'rat'). To do that, she claims that names get their semantic values relative to *dubbings*, something like Kripke's (1980) baptisms. She also contends that, while in ordinary dubbings referents are assigned to names, in the fictional case they are associated with a set of properties; intuitively, those ascribed in the fiction to the relevant character. Predication is taken as ambiguous between the ordinary sense in the referential case, and another in which a simple sentence is true if the predicated property is among those in the set assigned as semantic value to the name in the relevant dubbing [*op. cit.*, pp. 718-20]. This looks to me like a notational variant of realist views on which fictional names uniformly refer to abstract entities individuated by the properties assigned to the characters in the fiction, as in Wolterstorff's (1980) *kinds* or Currie's (1990) *roles*.<sup>8</sup> Like Tiedke, such realist views need to pose an ambiguity in predication, to be discussed presently.

It was due to views like these that I only described textual uses when introducing them as such that "they are not *intuitively* truth-evaluable"; for these views allow us to take declarative sentences in textual uses to make straightforward assertions, capable of being truth-evaluated, and, as we have seen, some of them do. They also forestall the *prima facie* problem that empty referential expressions pose to the intuitive truth of paratextual uses of (1), and that of (2), in the same way as they account for the truth of (3): namely, by simply denying the assumption that the names are empty. However, when it comes to counting as true textual and paratextual uses, things are not so straightforward. The reason is that, while the entities that realists posit can be straightforwardly understood to instantiate the properties predicated of them in me-

tatextual uses like (3), this is not so clear in those other cases; for such entities cannot be easily taken to be the sort of thing capable of waking or going to sleep. These capacities appear to require having causal powers (which abstract objects, created or Platonic, appear to lack), and hence actual existence (which possibilia and Meinongian objects lack).

Realists deal with this problem by distinguishing either two types of properties, or two types of predication. On the latter, to my mind the better developed and explored proposal,<sup>9</sup> the realist would say that the subject-predicate combination in (1) does not mean that the referent of the subject-term truly instantiates the property expressed by the predicate, but merely that such property *is ascribed to it* in some fiction. As I said above, in her not straightforwardly realist framework Tiedke (2011) does something similar: a simple sentence is true if the predicated property is among those in the set assigned as semantic value to the fictional name in the relevant dubbing; and this set has just the properties ascribed to the character in the fiction. This prompts the request to explain how fictions ascribe the relevant properties, given that typically neither their creators nor their intended audiences have an elaborated view of the sort of object posited by realist theories, nor of the two senses of predication that these theories posit. Walters (ms) offers a plausible line of reply, which I'll present in the next section.

The intuitive obviousness of negative existentials involving fictional names ('Samsa doesn't exist') counts against non-Meinongian realist views, a point that Everett (2007), (2013) ch. 7, forcefully presses. As Walters (ms) explains, it is straightforward to give a semantic account of their truth, assuming that the names are empty and an adequate Free Logic. Non-Meinongian realists usually deal with this by taking 'existence' to have a more restricted meaning in them, such as *being concrete*. Everett (2005), (2013) ch. 8, also provides an interesting elaboration on equally well-known indeterminacy concerns about fictional realism, echoing Quine's (1948), p. 23, indictment: "the possible fat man in that doorway; and, again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man, or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones? How many of them are alike?" Everett (2013) ch. 7, and Sainsbury (2010), ch. 3 & 4, also articulate related problems for the Meinongian and possibilist alternatives. Bueno & Zalta (2017), pp. 761-4, compellingly argue this to be a main concern for contemporary versions of Meinongianism.

Focusing on metatextual uses leads us to think of (1)-(3) as uniformly including referring names, and uniformly making assertions. As said, this might address qualms that Millians (those who take the referent of a name to exhaust its semantic content, see §IV) might otherwise have with endorsing the intuitive view that paratextual uses of (1) indeed make assertions like the one explicitly made with (2). Focusing instead on textual uses leads to a contrasting uniformly irrealist picture. When the creator of a work of fiction uses declarative sentences such as (1), or when she uses sentences of other types, we do not intuitively think of her as really performing the speech acts that one typically performs with them in default contexts. In such cases, the sentences are used in some form of *pretense*, like the acts that actors perform on stage: they do not need to be actually drinking whisky, rather they merely pretend to do so; hence, we do not evaluate them by invoking any norms we would apply to non-pretend uses.

Now, if the apparent assertions are merely pretend, the same might apply to the apparent (ancillary) acts of reference; and in this way an avenue is opened to account for such uses without the need to posit actual referents for fictional singular terms. Walton (1990) has provided a very sophisticated and deservedly influential account of textual uses along such lines, which he then extends to deal with both paratextual and metatextual uses; Everett (2013) offers an illuminating, nicely precise elaboration of the program. But as before with the realist picture, the extension from the best case for the irrealist approach – textual uses – is not straightforward, here because there does not appear to be any pretense in assertions of (2)-(3).

### III. NON-UNIFORM ACCOUNTS

The intuitively best option would be to combine fictional realism for metatextual uses, as in (3), with a pretense-theoretic account of textual uses of sentences like (1); this is in fact Kripke's (2013) "pluralist" suggestion, on which fictional names such as 'Gregor Samsa' have an empty, pretend use in (1), but a polysemy-induced non-empty serious one in (3). In addition to the resulting profligacy [which writers favoring uniform accounts object to, cf. Maier (2017), p. 3], however, paratextual uses – in particular ascriptions like (2) – occupy a problematic middle ground for this ecumenical rapprochement. Also, as Everett (2013), pp. 163-178)

emphasizes, there are many mixed cases such as (4) below; for note that here whatever ‘Gregor Samsa’ designates is ascribed properties both from the internal, conniving perspective underwriting paratextual uses, but also (in the parenthetical remark) from an external, metatextual viewpoint:

- (4) At the start of *Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa – an emotional *alter ego* of himself created by Kafka for his best-known novel – finds himself transformed into a gigantic vermin.

Everett takes these data as a good reason to extend the pretense-theoretic treatment to paratextual and metatextual uses. This, however, doesn’t afford an obvious account of negative existentials such as ‘Samsa doesn’t exist’; and there remains the intuitively strong impression that (1) in paratextual uses, (2), (3) and (4) make straightforward, truth-evaluable assertions.

Walters (ms) provides a compelling defense of Kripkean pluralism for names, combined with an artefactualist view of the referents of some such names, drawing on ideas also nicely articulated by Everett and Schroeder (2015).<sup>10</sup> Rejecting Millianism (see below, §IV), Walters assumes that empty names are meaningful, and he extends to paratextual uses a Waltonian, pretense account of textual uses of (1). Against Walton (1990) and Everett (2013), Walters takes the likes of (2) to make truth-evaluable assertions, in which fictional names are nonetheless empty; he assumes a non-Millian semantic account of propositional attitude ascriptions for that, although he grants to pretense theorists that it is the paratextual pretend use of (1) that grounds assertions such as (2), and empty names in them. In metatextual uses, however, we find (according to him) a non-empty form of the empty name that occurs in those other uses. It refers to a representation: intuitively, the (created) representation(-type) of Samsa which is a part of the whole representation of the fictional events portrayed in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*.<sup>11</sup> Walters then goes on to explain mixed cases like (4), suggesting that they involve a form of independently well-attested metonymy-induced polysemy, as when we straightforwardly apply ‘lion’ to a representation of what literally, primarily is not a lion, like a sculpture of one; for we also naturally find similarly mixed cases there. Thus, a sculptor can say this of one of her creations:

- (5) That lion is the best sculpture I’ve made this month; it is as ferocious as the one we saw yesterday at the zoo.



In previous work I have defended a similar package of views (see below, §V), but assuming a slightly different philosophical ideology. Like Walters, I argued that no adequate pretense-theoretic account can be happily combined with Millian views of singular reference, as Walton (1990) and Everett (2013) would like to do. This is not just for the reasons suggested by Walters; more fundamentally, we need to explain how the semantic content of (1) contributes to determining the content the fiction-maker proposes readers to imagine, or make-believe [García-Carpintero (2010a), pp. 286-7; forthcoming-b, §IV]. By relying on my own version of a non-Millian, descriptivism-friendly view of names and other referential expressions,<sup>12</sup> I then defended what I consider a form of irrealism for metatextual discourse: a version of Yablo's (2001) *figuralist* brand of fictionalism, on which the semantic referential apparatus (*de jure* directly referential expressions such as names and indexicals, quantifiers generalizing over the positions they occupy, expressions for identity) is used metaphorically in the likes of (3), deploying the figure of speech called *hypostatization* [García-Carpintero (2010b)]. It is a rather dead, conventionalized kind of metaphor, so, in contrast to pretense-theoretic fictionalist proposals, on this view utterances in metatextual discourse are straightforward assertions with truth-conditions.<sup>13</sup>

This might suggest that the view is after all realist, committed to referents of some sort for singular terms in metatextual discourse, but I do not think so. One could follow Brock (2002) and claim that the literal content apparently involving commitment to fictional entities is in fact along the lines of (2): one about what is true according to a pretense – the pretense that some realist theory is true. Or – like Yablo (2001) himself – one could follow Walton (1993) in thinking that this applies in general to metaphors, which are a “prop-oriented” form of make-believe put forward with the aim of asserting a metaphorical content non-committal to fictional entities, through the process that Richard (2000) calls “piggybacking”.<sup>14</sup>

My own preferred line, however, follows Yablo's (2014a) recent development of his views,<sup>15</sup> articulating the notion that the truth of metatextual sentences including fictional names and their generalizations do not really commit us to the existence of fictional characters; for this is merely pretend-presupposed and, when we look at what they are really *about* (and hence the truth-makers for the claims we make with them) we do not find the referents they appear to pick out.<sup>16</sup> We find instead the “ideas for fictional characters” of Everett & Schroeder (2015), or Wal-

ters' (ms) representations thereof.<sup>17</sup> My preferred story thus has significant similarities with Walters' artefactualist view. We end up interpreting (2), (3), and (4) as making genuine assertions, whose truth is grounded on the pretenses thereof in textual and paratextual uses of (1).

This is not to say that there are not substantive differences between the "easy ontology" behind current realist proposals,<sup>18</sup> and the form of fictionalism I advocate, even if both are intermediate position between heavy-duty Platonism and straightforward eliminative irrealism. The recent exchange confronting Thomasson (2013), (2014) and Yablo (2014b) manifests such differences. On Thomasson's approach (2015), p. 261, an uncontroversial claim such as (6) analytically entails (7), and hence (8), given "linking principles" which are constitutive of the meaning-constitutive application conditions of the sortal *fictional character*:

(6) Kafka wrote a novel using the name 'Gregor Samsa' to pretend to refer to and describe a man.

(7) Kafka created a fictional character.

(8) There are fictional characters.

Given the analytical character of the entailment, Thomasson (2017), p. 775, contends that the inference from (6) to (7) is not really ampliative: although (7) "does involve us explicitly quantifying over entities that [(6)] doesn't mention", it "doesn't contain any 'new information'" not already contained in (6). However, as Yablo (2014b) points out, there are similar "linking principles" taking us, say, from claims about observable facts to claims about theoretical entities explaining them; or from claims about how things perceptually look to claims about how they are. Moreover, whatever reasons there might be to count Thomasson's linking principles as features of the conceptual role of sortals such as 'fictional character', there are indiscernible ones to count the linking principles in the alternative cases as aspects of the conceptual roles of the relevant concepts of theoretical entities or observable objects. But the inferences in such cases do appear to be ampliative, and their conclusions to contain new information. This provides, I think, good grounds for preferring a fictionalist account, on which (8) is merely a pretend presupposition in (7), (7)'s literal content is not really asserted, and the utterer of (7) is only assertorically committed to something very much like (6).<sup>19</sup>

#### IV. FICTIONAL NAMES AND THE DESCRIPTIVISM VS. MILLIANISM DEBATE

Sawyer's phenomena about fictional terms that philosophers aim to account for, particularly *meaning*, have been traditionally one of the motivations for *Descriptivism* about names. Like Braun (2006), p. 491fn, I take the contrasting Millian view to share with the view called *Direct Reference* the claim that names, unlike descriptions, contribute just their referents to an aspect of semantic meaning: *propositional content*.<sup>20</sup> Unlike him, however, and with what I take to be the standard understanding, I see Millianism as including also the claim that, unlike indexicals, names do not make additional descriptive contributions to any other sort of semantic meaning. It is Millianism thus understood that fictional names pose a very serious threat for, as I said I have argued previously [García-Carpintero (2010a), pp. 286-7; forthcoming-b, §IV].

Like Braun (2006), p. 494 also, I take *Descriptivism* about names to be the view that they make the same sort of contribution to propositional content as descriptions do; they are in this sense *synonymous* with a description expressing a property or *individuating type* that competent speakers "authoritatively associate" with the name. Lewis (1978), p. 267 and Currie (1990), 159, defend a standard version for names in textual and paratextual uses, which deals with the likes of (2) through some Fregean account of the semantics of attitude ascriptions.<sup>21</sup> On such views, the individuating type is obtained roughly as follows (the details differ in different accounts, but we don't need to go into them). When it comes to declarative sentences like (1), competent interpreters imagine a fictional narrator asserting them "as known fact", or one whose beliefs they are to infer from what they say.<sup>22</sup> In that way a statement of the fictional content is obtained. "Ramseyfying" away a given fictional name such as 'George Samsa' in it, we get a description specifying the relevant individuating type: *the person changed into a vermin when waking up from anxious dreams, lying on his armour-hard back in his bed in his small room ...*

These views are to be developed in a fully-fledged descriptivist theoretical framework that rejects, or explains away, Kripke's (1980) very influential arguments. In addition to the very serious challenge that poses, Friend (2011), (2014), raises a compelling objection to this traditional form of descriptivism. She considers a debate between Nabokov and another critic about the more precise nature of the "vermin" that Gregor Samsa is changed into; Nabokov asserts (9), while the critic denies it:

## (9) Gregor Samsa is changed into a beetle

She then suggests two features, *co-identification* and *counter-fictional imagining*, which “indicate the *intentionality* of imaginings about fictional characters: the sense in which they are object-directed, even though there is no object they are about” [Friend (2011), p. 189]. *Co-identification*, or *intersubjective identification* is “the phenomenon of thinking and talking about the same thing, even when there is no such thing” (*op. cit.*, 188); *counter-fictional imagining* consists in that “I might imagine what the Samsa family’s life would have been like had Gregor never changed into a vermin. Even though I imagine contrary to what Kafka’s story prescribes – thinking of Gregor in ways contrary to the fictional descriptions – I continue to imagine about the same character. And that is how it should be: considering the question of what would happen if Gregor were not transformed is central to understanding the Kafka’s story” (*ibid.*).

It is difficult to see how Lewis’ and Currie’s descriptivism can adequately answer these serious concerns. On that view, Nabokov and the other critic appear simply to identify ‘Samsa’ with different descriptions, and hence to be not really disagreeing, but rather talking past each other.<sup>23</sup> And it just appears plainly contradictory to imagine that Samsa is called Joseph, or not transformed into a vermin, when it is part of the meaning of ‘Samsa’ that it picks out somebody called ‘Gregor’ who is transformed into a vermin.<sup>24</sup>

## V. A DIRECT REFERENCE DESCRIPTIVIST ACCOUNT

In my work on reference [cf. García-Carpintero (1998), (2000), (2006b), (2017)], I have articulated and defended a descriptivism-friendly view that, I contend, accounts for the “singularity” data that Friend marshals against traditional descriptivism about fictional content (cf. García-Carpintero (2010a), forthcoming-b).<sup>25</sup> I’ll just outline the gist of the view; details can be found in the referenced works. The proposal has four features relevant for these explanatory purposes, on which I’ll briefly elaborate in this section: (i) The singularity of assertoric contents standardly conveyed by simple declarative sentences with referential expressions doesn’t preclude semantically constrained descriptive reference-fixing. (ii) It is only a selected class of properties associated with the expressions that play that semantically constrained reference-fixing role. (iii) Referential expressions contribute their semantically associated descriptive fea-

tures to some assertoric contents, à la Frege, or 2-D semantics. (iv) They behave in that way when it comes to the determination of the content of textual uses.

(i) I agree with many contemporary philosophers that the singular/general divide among contents (based on Kripke's (1980) rigidity intuitions, and those supporting the *de re/de dicto* distinction in attitude ascription) is a substantive one, requiring an illuminating account. On the basis of the Yablonian skepticism expressed above, however, I think we should adopt a stance as deflationary as possible about theoretical posits of philosophy like *propositions*, and hence I reject accounts of the singular/general divide in terms of features of propositions themselves. I have espoused in previous work a view originating with Stalnaker, namely that propositions are just properties picking out *represented circumstances*.<sup>26</sup> Singular propositions are those that we must use singular terms in our metalanguage in order to specify the circumstances they pick out; or, alternatively, those that are "directly about" objects, as opposed to being about actual objects by specifying circumstances – and hence actuality – in terms of properties identifying them. But these are not illuminating accounts, because they are meant to be understood as just reproducing the indicated intuitions behind the singular/general distinction.

A more illuminating account can only be given in terms of features of the content-vehicles — the representational states to which the propositions are ascribed. In the linguistic case, I have argued that the explanation has to do with the semantic function of genuinely referential expressions, and with reference-fixing presuppositions that they lexically trigger on account of it. The account shares with Direct Reference and Millianism the view that their contribution to asserted semantic content is just their referents, if any – and hence, semantically, the likes of (1) express "gappy" assertoric contents (Braun 2005) that are neither true nor false. But it rejects Millianism in ascribing both to names and indexicals a reference-fixing descriptive meaning.

(ii) In the case of indexicals, this presupposed descriptive meaning is standardly token-reflexive: *being the utterer* of the relevant token of 'I', say, for utterances of the first-person pronoun. In the case of names, it also involves in standard cases a linguistic item, but this is not because they are indexicals. The linguistically triggered presupposition is *being named N*, where the schematic letter stands for a name individuated by a specific

naming-practice, linked to a particular act of naming, pre-semantically picked out in the utterance context. These semantic presuppositions are standardly enriched pragmatically with more informative properties, determined perceptually in some cases, by convention or other sources of common knowledge. I take this view to carry over to thoughts. What corresponds there to singular terms are (subpersonally) the “dossiers”, or “mental files”, of recent debates.<sup>27</sup> What corresponds to reference-fixing presuppositions are the (personal-level) “labels” that file theorists sometimes posit, which for me are just background attitudes like beliefs, suppositions or imaginings.<sup>28</sup>

(iii) Unlike the recently popular predicativist metalinguistic views of names, the outlined account is not *descriptivist*, as characterized above, because it accepts *Direct Reference*: names, like indexicals, contribute just their referents to the assertoric contents of simple sentences in which they occur. However, it can help itself to the descriptive reference-fixing meanings the account assumes, for different explanatory purposes. A standard one is that of characterizing the contribution of referring expressions to the assertoric content of some complex sentences, for instance attitude ascriptions, at least in some contexts; this is a traditional Fregean move, updated in contemporary 2-D semantics [García-Carpintero (2006b)].<sup>29</sup>

I use this strategy to understand how sentences like (1) in textual and paratextual uses, and (2) work. In the case of (2), this is a semantic affair, albeit a context-dependent one; fictional names there convey only associated descriptive meanings to assertoric contents, exactly in the way that some ordinary names do in ordinary attitude ascriptions, and for similar context-dependent, pragmatic reasons, to be outlined below. In the case of both the textual and the paratextual uses of (1), it is rather a pragmatic affair.<sup>30</sup> The interesting case is, in my view, the account of what is pragmatically conveyed by the textual use of (1), because to me it grounds both its (equally pragmatic) paratextual use, and the related context-dependent semantics of (2). I just take it that it provides abductive support for my proposal that there are plausible semantics for attitude ascription sentences, with formal semantic implementations, that take referring expressions in them to contribute in some contexts to the expression of non-singular, descriptive contents.

(iv) I'll thus focus on textual uses. We need a view on what such uses are, in the first place. Walton's work has been deservedly influential here. On

his view, fictions are artefacts with a socially ascribed function, from which specific *prescriptions to imagine* result; this determines the fictional content of the work, i.e., what is fictional according to it. As he recently summarizes the view, “a proposition is fictional in (the world of) a particular work, *W*, just in case appreciators of that work are to imagine it, just in case full appreciation of *W* requires imagining it”, Walton (2015), p. 17. Currie (1990) proposes to understand this so that textual uses are a *sui generis* speech act, fiction-making.<sup>31</sup> Following Currie, I have argued that we should take fiction-making to be a specific sort of invitation or proposal to imagine, addressed to a specific kind of audience [García-Carpintero (2007), (2013), (2016)]. Like Currie and others [see Grant (2001)], I thus disagree with Gale (1971), Searle (1974/5), Alward (2009), (2010), Friend (2012), or Green (2017), that acts of fiction-making are just (as Green (2017), p. 54 puts it) mere “acts of speech”, as opposed to speech acts proper with specific force and contents: e.g., acts of pretending to do something, devoid of the representational aims distinctive of speech acts. Unlike Currie’s (1990) and Stock’s (2017), my account is along Austinian normative lines, as opposed to Gricean psychological ones; but this difference is irrelevant for present purposes.<sup>32</sup> Textual uses are thus proposals by fiction-makers for their audiences to imagine specific propositional contents. Our question then turns out to be what the contribution of referential expressions to such contents is.

When we read at the start of *A Continuity of Parks*, a story by Cortázar that I quoted in full in previous work [García-Carpintero (2007), “He had begun to read the novel a few days before”, we competent interpreters may consider a token of (the Spanish equivalent of) ‘he’ used by Cortázar in the sort of idealized utterance I conjured up above for Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. We know that with that token comes only a pretend act of demonstrative reference to the nameless protagonist of the story, made by an implicit narrator whose linguistic actions Cortázar is pretending to perform – i.e., whom he is “playing” [Alward (2009), García-Carpintero (ms)]. Something analogous can be said of fictional names such as ‘Gregor Samsa’ in textual uses of (1): in using it, Kafka plays an implicit narrator who presupposes a ‘Samsa’-naming practice, which fixes its referent. Now, my account takes reference-fixing presuppositions in ordinary cases to primitively express singular contents [cf. García-Carpintero (2017), §III]. Those singular presuppositions, however, entail purely existential ones: that there is a ‘he’-act of demonstration and a male it picks out; that there is a ‘Samsa’-naming practice and a thereby

so-called individual it picks out. And it is only these purely existential contents that competent interpreters are prescribed to imagine in fiction-making acts through the pretenses of their agents.<sup>33</sup>

The fundamental reason for this is that, in contrast to straightforward assertoric acts, given the kind of act *fiction* that fiction making is, it is not enough, and it need not even be required, to get a referent right. What is essential is to grasp how it is descriptively presented. That it is not required to get a referent right is shown by the full intelligibility of fiction-making acts involving non-referring expressions like those we have been considering so far. However, I have argued that the same semantic story just outlined also applies to non-empty names in fiction, like ‘Napoleon’ in *War and Peace* [García-Carpintero (2015), forthcoming-d].<sup>34</sup> For this more general point, the non-sufficiency point – obviously analogous to the master Fregean argument for the significance of referring expressions in (some) attitude ascriptions – is the crucial one.

When we make an ordinary assertion with a simple sentence including a demonstrative or a name, the assertoric content is singular, perhaps gappy if the associated referential act is unsuccessful; the reference-fixing description is merely presupposed. This reflects the fact that, although grasping the description is essential in context for fully understanding the assertoric act, someone can grasp the very same content – thereby coming to be in a position to evaluate our act with respect to its constitutive normative features (truth, information-provision-aptness) – without representing the relevant object in the same way. This is precisely what is not the case when it comes to the contribution of names and indexicals embedded in attitude ascriptions to the assertoric content of such sentences in some contexts.<sup>35</sup> And exactly the same applies to their contribution to the content that audiences are prescribed to imagine in textual uses.

This concludes the outline of the form of descriptivism I have been defending for referential expressions, and how it explains the semantics of textual and paratextual uses. Even though it adopts a pretense-theoretic account of textual uses, and I also hold a view along such irrealist lines for (3), the resulting view is burdened with some methodological profligacy, because the account of how names contribute to metatextual uses is substantively different than the one just outlined. I think the explanatory virtues of the account overcomes this *prima facie* methodologically questionable non-uniformity that Maier (2017), p. 3, objects to.

Important of course among them for present purposes is how the proposal accounts for Friend’s data. I have explained at length how the proposal deals with the *co-identification* data [García-Carpintero (forthcom-



ing-b)], which, as I pointed out, are a particular case of Geach's famous problem of *intentional identity*. In a nutshell, if Nabokov and the critic are talking about the same it is because they *would be talking about the same object if there was one that any of them was talking about*. The descriptivist proposal just outlined has the resources to justify how counterfactuals like this can be true. We don't need to assume for it that the expressions which would counterfactually ground the assignment of a referent to the concepts that Nabokov and the critic respectively deploy (i.e., fiction-maker uses of the relevant singular terms in textual uses) behave truly referentially; the explanation also works when those expressions behave descriptively, along the lines outlined above. Friend's datum of counterfactual imagining can be handled along essentially the same lines [see Maier (2017), §7.2, for elaboration].

Aside from Maier (2017), Alward (2011) offers the closest recent proposal to the one just sketched. On the basis of questionable assumptions that I have objected to elsewhere [García-Carpintero (ms)], he identifies a paratextual use of (1) with an assertion of (2), and provides a Fregean, descriptivist account for attitude-ascription utterances. He doesn't neatly distinguish textual from paratextual uses, but I understand he intends the account to give also the contents we are invited to imagine in textual uses. He identifies descriptive senses with something very much like mental files ("cognitive relations", as he calls them). He individuates them quite finely, but he has an ontological account of those that go into fixing the contribution of names in attitude ascriptions – as "teams" of properties, which, in contrast with sets thereof, might retain their identity in spite of losing or acquiring members – which makes them sufficiently coarse-grained for these purposes. This allows him to evade the problems that Friend points out with Lewis's or Currie's proposals. Finally, as in my account, or in Walters's, the only individuals to which we need to be "cognitively related" through the relevant files in the case of fictions are the specific representations of fictional characters in them.

Beyond these similarities, there remains, I think, a reason to prefer my own account. Namely, it offers a more principled justification for the two main ingredients needed in any proper answer to Friend: selecting the properties in the descriptions we semantically associate with fictional names, and giving them a metalinguistic character.<sup>36</sup> In addition to this, I have qualms with the treatment Alward outlines [*op. cit.*, p. 447] for the disagreement case that he considers, involving readers exposed to different installments of a serial fiction [cf. fn. 21]. Even if it works in its own

terms – which, for lack of proper development, I am not entirely sure that it does – the account is importantly different from the one that his views entail for a more ordinary case like Friend's (9). This is another methodological cost.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have provided an opinionated survey of recent contributions to our philosophical understanding of how names and other referring expressions work in fictional discourse, explaining how utterances involving fictional names might be meaningful, even true or false in some cases, and in some way about particular objects. I have distinguished three importantly different kinds of fictional discourse. I first presented different sorts of uniform accounts of referring expressions in them, realist accounts that uniformly assign referents to them, and irrealist accounts in which they uniformly fail to refer. Then I presented non-uniform accounts, which treat some such discourses in relevantly different ways. Finally, I addressed a more general issue lurking behind this debate, namely, how it impinges on arguments confronting direct reference with descriptivist viewpoints. I have shown that there are views sufficiently close to traditional descriptivist frameworks, like them partially motivated by facts about fictional names, which resist contemporary arguments for Millianism, and considerably improve on Millian accounts.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Financial support was provided by the DGI, Spanish Government, research project FFI2016-80588-R, the award *ICREA Academia* for excellence in research, 2018, funded by the Generalitat de Catalunya, and the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement no. 675415, *Diaphora*. Thanks to Daniela Glavaničová and Lee Walters for their comments, and to Michael Maudsley for the grammatical revision.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I assume, with Currie (1990), that such acts are speech acts proper, with specific force and contents (*fiction-making*, as he calls them), see §5. This is controversial; Gale (1971), Searle (1974), (1975), Walton (1990), Alward (2009), (2010), Friend (2012), and Green (2017) among others, take them instead to be [as Green 2017, p. 54 puts it] mere “acts of speech”: say, acts of *pretending* to do something, devoid of the representational aims distinctive of speech acts. In García-Carpintero (forthcoming-a, ms) I argue for the speech-act view, critically engaging with arguments by these writers.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow this and the other two related labels from Bonomi (2008). Ninan (2017), p. 69, calls them ‘authorial diktats’, which is apt for textual discourse, but I prefer Bonomi’s package. Gale (1971), p. 333, points out the distinction between textual and paratextual uses, as the relation between the paratextual use of (1) and (2).

<sup>3</sup> The editors “Introduction” to Brock & Everett (2015) provides an excellent summary of this and other arguments for and against realism about fictional characters, and further references.

<sup>4</sup> Kroon & Voltolini (2016) provide a helpful exploration of the alternatives.

<sup>5</sup> As Lamarque (2009) points out in his review, it is difficult to understand why Martinich & Stroll take the constitutive feature of textual uses to be that Grice’s Maxim of Quality (*don’t say what you believe to be false*) is suspended. For, according to their own view, those uses appear to make themselves true. By the same token, it is difficult to understand why they take fictional names to be empty in textual uses, given that their account furnishes referents for them.

<sup>6</sup> Reimer (2005) disclaims ontological commitments for her view, saying fictional utterances have truth-conditions but not propositional contents. I am not sure the distinction can be upheld.

<sup>7</sup> I don’t think a good idea to count textual uses as assertions, to be evaluated as literally true or otherwise, except that not at the actual world but at “the” world of the fiction [see Walton 1990, pp. 41-2]. I find it much less misleading the “pragmatic” view that they are simply not assertions, but alternative acts to be evaluated with respect to norms others than truth vis-à-vis the character of “the” fictional world they represent. However, as Everett’s (2013), p. 48, suggests, perhaps the difference here is not big.

<sup>8</sup> But Tiedke would reject this, because she wants her view to be free from realist ontological commitments [*op. cit.*, pp. 723-4]. Note also that, like Kripke, neither Wolterstorff nor Currie themselves defend uniform views; they just assign referents to names in metatextual discourse.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Everett (2013), pp. 170-7] for a good discussion of the two options and their problems, and references to the original works articulating the strategies. See Bueno & Zalta (2017) for a reply to usual objections to the *duality of predication* view, and an outline of its long pedigree.

<sup>10</sup> Glavaničová (2018) presents a related non-uniform account, developing ideas from Tichý.

<sup>11</sup> Everett & Schroeder (2015), call such representations *ideas* [Recanati (2018), characterizes them as *metafictional* files]. These, like Wolterstorff's (1980) *kinds* and Currie's (1990) *roles*, might be individuated by all properties that Tiedke (2011) would take to be in the set assigned to the name in the relevant dubbing. They could also be individuated by the smaller set of reference-fixing features taken as presupposed in my account, summarized in §5 – thereby dealing with problems for these views corresponding to those that Stacie Friend poses for descriptivism, discussed in §4.

<sup>12</sup> García-Carpintero (2017) is a recent presentation; see also §5 below.

<sup>13</sup> The pretense involved is hence not *pragmatic* but *semantic* on Armour-Garb's & Woodbridge's (2014) classification, if I understand it correctly. Eklund (2017), §2.3, is rightly puzzled about these issues. They are delicate, and I cannot tackle them properly here. In a nutshell: it has now become standard to split what is traditionally taken as the *semantic content* of sentence-level items into two: *compositional* and *assertoric* content [Yalcin 2014]. Compositional content is thin; on most sensible views it doesn't determine truth-values, given a fully specified possible world. It is "character content" [García-Carpintero (2006a)], a function giving semantic values relative to different parameters. At that level, we will not find distinctions between "dead" (lexicalized) and creative metonymical or figurative uses of expressions. But we could have good reasons to make them at the level of assertoric content, so that, with many contemporary contextualists, we would distinguish the lexicalized cases (which would make their contributions to semantic assertoric contents) from the creative ones, which would be properly "pragmatic", non-literal.

<sup>14</sup> This is what happens when the mother tells her child "the cowboy should now wash his hands for dinner"; i.e., it is to make an utterance which would be true-in-the-pretense if certain conditions obtained (mother and child are playing a game of cowboys and Indians, with spe-

cific principles of generation), with the intention of asserting such conditions (i.e., that the boy dressed as a cowboy now has certain obligations). Cf. Evans (1982), pp. 363-4.

<sup>15</sup> Hoek (2018) provides a nicely precise, tight variation on these ideas.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cameron (2012) for a related view.

<sup>17</sup> Hoek (2018), §4, discusses related cases in detail. Crimmins (1998), Sainsbury (2011), Howell (2015) and Manning (2015), pp. 297-301, defend similar views.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Thomasson (2015) for a recent statement applied to the present case of fictional characters, and references there to earlier proponents.

<sup>19</sup> Everett (2013) p. 143, nicely expresses my own take on this debate: “I do not mean to deny that in some cases the entities invoked by certain fictional realists, who then go on to identify these entities with fictional characters, genuinely exist. My complaint is simply that, in these cases, the relevant entities are not fictional characters; the identification made is wrong”. In this respect, Meinongian or possibilist views of fictional characters capture better our intuitions; but Bueno & Zalta (2017), §6 provide a good critical discussion of such views from the abstract object perspective, emphasizing the already mentioned indeterminacy worries.

<sup>20</sup> This is *semantic assertoric content* on the views mentioned above, fn. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis (1978), p. 26, puts aside the account of metatextual discourse. Currie (1990) offers a non-uniform account, in this respect along the lines of Kripke’s (2013), on which names in such discourse (which he calls ‘transfictive’) do refer, to abstract entities he calls ‘roles’, related to the description they are synonymous with in textual and paratextual discourse; cf. also Glavaničová (2018). Currie (1990), p.131, claims that fictional names are not real names, because he assumes an “object-dependence” view of them, on which they lack meaning if they don’t refer. Also, the form of descriptivism I ascribe to him is explicitly stated only for paratextual uses (which he calls ‘metafictive’). I infer that it applies to textual uses too, because it captures his view [*ibid.*, pp. 146-155] about the contribution of names to what he takes to be the contents of stories, and what is required for full, idealized understanding of them, which is what I take to be involved in an account of textual uses. Note, however, that Currie (1990), pp. 162, 203, contends that the descriptions that provide the actual understanding of real, non-idealized speakers, are not those derived by Ramseyfying. Those that he suggests are actually very close to the ones my own form of descriptivism in §5 poses. Add to this that he grants (1990), p. 131, that his object-dependence assumption

about “real” names might be wrong and is prepared to contemplate that in such a case a “diagonalization” account very similar to my own might be correct [*ibid.*, pp. 141-6]. Thanks to Daniela Glavaničová for discussion of the material in this note.

<sup>22</sup> This is the core of what Matravers (1997), p. 79, calls “the report model”: “in reading a novel, a reader makes-believe he is being given a report of actual events. In other words, he makes-believe the content of the novel is being reported to him as known fact by a narrator”. Matravers is more aware than Lewis, Currie and others that the relation between this pretense and the determination of the content of the fiction is not straightforward, as I have argued [García-Carpintero (2007)] by developing against such views an argument (illustrated with a story by Cortázar), which Matravers also presents succinctly [*ibid.*, p. 79]: “It would be reasonable for a listener to conclude, were he told a supernatural tale such as *The Master and Margarita*, that the narrator was completely off his head and none of what he said was true; we all know that cats do not smoke cigars, neither are they dead shots with Mauser automatics”.

<sup>23</sup> Alward (2011), pp. 429-33] has a similar case involving two readers of serial fictions, such as Patrick O’Brien’s Aubrey-Maturin novels, exposed to different installments. The cases are similar under the assumption that serial fictions share one and the same “fictional world”, which I am prepared to grant [cf. Walters (2017), García-Carpintero (ms)].

<sup>24</sup> Currie (1990), pp. 165-8, addresses these worries by explaining away the relevant intuitions as error-induced. As was to be expected given its similarity to Currie’s and Wolterstorff’s views (in spite of the difference in ideology, which, as I said, I cannot help but consider merely verbal) Tiedke’s (2011) account summarized above, §2, is open to the same objections.

<sup>25</sup> Alward (2011) and Maier (2017) offer similar accounts; I’ll say more about them below.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. García-Carpintero & Palmira (ms), Richard (2013).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Recanati (2013), and references there.

<sup>28</sup> Maier (2017) provides an account of fictional names elaborating on his DRT view of singular terms in language and thought, which is the closest in the literature to my own. My reference-fixing presuppositions are his *anchors*. See also Recanati (2017).

<sup>29</sup> See Maier (2010), (2016), for a DRT implementation of this sort of view. Chalmers (2011) and Pickel (2016) offer related views.

<sup>30</sup> See, however, García-Carpintero (forthcoming-a), for a discussion of the issue whether acts of fiction-making (see below) are conveyed literally and directly, or only indirectly.

<sup>31</sup> Saying that it is *sui generis* means that it is a *specific* speech act, with its own individuating definition, along with others such as promises, requests, and so on. It doesn't mean that it doesn't belong in one of the highest genera for such acts in a proper taxonomy [cf. Alward (2010), p. 390].

<sup>32</sup> See García-Carpintero (forthcoming-c), for an outline of the main differences, and some reasons to prefer the Austinian picture.

<sup>33</sup> Has Kafka truly created a *specific* name articulated as 'Gregor Samsa'? Predelli (2017) assumes a framework on names similar to my own – with the crucial difference that he takes the “being-named” related descriptive propositions to express just regularities in use, as opposed to pragmatically triggered presuppositions. He then rejects this, advancing the “No-Name Hypothesis” that 'Gregor Samsa' in textual and paratextual uses is not really a name, but some sort of disguised description involving only the generic name shared with all Samsa' namesakes [cf. García-Carpintero (2017) for elaboration on the specific-generic distinction]. This was Currie's (1990) view [cf. fn. 19], although here it is not motivated by object-dependence, which Predelli in fact rejects. I am not sure that Predelli's view requires the No-Name Hypothesis. Mine certainly doesn't, and I prefer not to adopt it because of its awkward consequences, particularly for paratextual uses, the likes of (2) in particular. In the figurative, hypostatizing sense of 'object' that I assume for metatextual discourse, I find it in accordance with our intuitions to say that when we use 'Gregor Samsa' in such discourse to refer to that “object”, Kafka's fictional character, we are deploying for that purpose a specific name articulated as such, the dubbing for which was probably inadvertent [cf. García-Carpintero (2017)], created in order to accommodate the presuppositions of those who interact with Kafka's text, in the way dubbings for nicknames, for instance, are typically generated. I see it natural to take Kafka to have introduced that specific name with his uses throughout his text.

<sup>34</sup> Predelli (2017), pp. 146-8, and I are also agreed on this.

<sup>35</sup> Given the semantic character of the “being-named” associated descriptive presupposition in my account, and assuming a proper semantics for attitude-ascription, I can afford to say this without having to deprive the relevant expressions of their character as names. So, ultimately, like Currie's (1990), Predelli's (2017) allegiance to the No-Name Hypothe-

sis is motivated by a wrong view of what the Direct Reference semantic character of names really requires. Thanks to Daniela Glavaničová for discussion of the material in this and the last but one note.

<sup>36</sup> Alward (2011), p. 432, fn., considers a proposal like mine; he complains that they are not sufficiently developed for them to be contrasted with his own. I think I have put a sufficiently de developed one on the table.

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