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Does Sherlock Holmes Exist?

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Fictional names have specific, cognitively relevant features, putting them in a category apart from the category of ordinary names. I argue that we should focus on the name or name form itself and refrain from looking for an assignment procedure and an assigned referent. I also argue that we should reject the idea that sentences containing fictional names express singular propositions. These suggestions have important consequences for the intuition that 'Sherlock Holmes exists' is either true or false, and they put our intuitions concerning fictional names into perspective. If Millianism is the view that names only have a referent only as their semantic value, then my proposal on fictional names is not Millian in nature.

Keywords: Fictional names, existence, pluri-propositionalism, cognitive significance.

1. *Fictional Names and Existence*

It is widely assumed that 'Sherlock Holmes' is a fictional name, that is, a name introduced in fiction, and a name with no referent in the real world (see Kripke 1980; Kripke 2011; Kripke 2013).[1] If a fictional name such as 'Sherlock Holmes' originates in fiction and has no three-dimensional referent located in space and time then, on the orthodox analysis of names, the name lacks a referent. *Prima facie,* it has no semantic value. As a consequence 'sentences containing it say nothing' (Braun 1993: 449). However, intuitively sentences such as

(1) Sherlock Holmes exists

are true or false, and convey information we can agree or disagree about; e.g., you and I may disagree about whether or not (1) is true.

[1] There is a distinction to be made between fictional names, like 'Sherlock Holmes', and names of imaginary friend, or fantastic creature ('Nessie'), the speaker wrongly believes to exist and to be the referent of that name. My paper concerns fictional names only.

You can even argue that

(2) Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

is true. However, just like (1), (2) says nothing and expresses no proposition. Thus, it has no truth conditions and it is neither true nor false. I am interested in singular existential and negative singular existential sentences containing fictional names, like (1) and (2). The question, then, is in determining how such sentences can be truth-apt despite the fact that, intuitively, 'Sherlock Holmes' lacks a real world referent. Furthermore, how can someone believe that (1), or (2), is either true or false if 'Sherlock Holmes' has no referent in the real world? Why do we disagree if 'Sherlock Holmes' has no referent? What is our disagreement about? Problems concerning fictional names are, arguably, semantic in nature, concerning key semantics notions such as reference and truth.[2] People have a strong inclination to model fictional names on ordinary names—i.e., to think about 'Sherlock Holmes' as analogous to ordinary proper names such as 'Barack Obama', and are subsequently tempted to assign referents to fictional names as well. Following the now orthodox view on names, an utterance of (1), or (2), expresses a singular proposition just as an utterance of 'Obama exists' expresses the singular proposition <OBAMA, exists>, which contains Obama himself as a constituent. The problem is that there is purportedly no such thing as Sherlock Holmes to be introduced into a proposition (see Braun 2005; Adams 2011). Many philosophers have tried to account for fictional names (see Kripke 2013; Currie 1990; Walton 1990; Thomasson 1990; Braun 2005; Adams 2011; Kroon 2014). In section 3, I will sketch and criticize two main, paradigmatic perspectives on such names and fictional sentence—a 'pretense' perspective (Kripke, Walton) and an empty proposition perspective (Braun).[3]

Ordinary and fictional names differ in many important ways. In contrast with ordinary names, fictional names are not assigned to individuals by ordinary speakers the way that 'Barack Obama' is. Moreover, fictional names should not be characterized simply by the fact that they lack a three-dimensional referent in the real world, which can be a constituent of a singular proposition. To give them a purely negative characteristic only lays ground for an oversimplified picture of such names. Fictional names have specific, cognitively relevant features, putting them in a category apart from the category of ordinary names. In section 2, I introduce ordinary names and fictional names, and two problems raised by fictional names. Section 3 briefly discusses,

[2] There is an important literature on fictional names and existence, e.g. Kripke (2011; 2013); Walton (1990; 2000); Braun (2005); Everett (2003; 2007). Everett and Hofweber's *Empty Names, Fiction and the Puzzle of Non-Existence* provides a good collection of articles on the problem.

[3] There are too many different views on fictional names and existence to deal with in a short paper. Moreover, my paper is not intended as a criticism of these views, but as a new, modest contribution to what remains a puzzling issue.

first Kripke's suggestion invoking pretense. Calling it pretense suggest that it is not literal. If I am right, singular existential sentences are literal, and the idea of pretense should be dispensed with. I discuss, second, Braun's view. The point here is to reject views according to which fictional names make room for an object in a proposition, while leaving this room not filled. Section 4 introduces the framework I use, pluri-propositionalism. Section 5 sketches my perspective on what fictional names are. Section 6 applies pluri-propositionalism to fictional names in existence sentences, and offers solutions to the problems presented in section 3. Section 7 concludes the paper. I argue that we should focus on the name or name form—that is, its written form—itself and refrain from looking for an assignment procedure and an assigned referent. I also argue that we should reject the idea that sentences containing fictional names express singular propositions. These suggestions will have consequences for the intuition that (1) is either true or false, and put our intuitions concerning fictional names into perspective. If Millianism is the view that names have only a referent as their semantic value, then my proposal on fictional names is not Millian in nature. I argue that by abandoning the analogy perspective certain problems raised by existence sentences such as (1) and (2) can be addressed in a novel way.

From the perspective of someone reading a fictional story containing fictional names, fictional names behave like regular names. This is part of what explains why reading fiction is an enjoyable activity. Fiction readers use their imagination, as they read the fictional story, to create a picture of what the individual designated by such a name would be like. I read Hammett's books, and I have a picture of Sam Spade; you read the same book and you (most) probably have a different picture of Sam Spade. However, outside of the enjoyment that it provides while reading fiction, it is not really appropriate in semantics to see fictional names as ordinary names. Discussions about existence sentences such as (1) usually take fictional names to be just that, names, thereby disregarding the aspects that make them fictional names—aspects which distinguish them from ordinary names such as 'Barack Obama', for instance. Standard analyses place too much emphasis on 'exists' rather than on the fictional name itself in (1). Locutions such as 'exists in fiction' are frequently invoked to avoid an array of problems that are raised by 'exists' where fictional names are involved. My approach does just the opposite: it emphasizes fictional names.[4] The category of a fictional name deserves special attention, and it can be characterized in an epistemically fruitful way, echoing speaker's intuitions. Once fictional names are considered, 'exists'—as well as 'exists in fiction'—takes a back seat and is innocuous.

[4] With, as a result, evading complex issues concerning existence examined by Predelli (2002).

2. *Ordinary and Fictional Names*

According to the Theory of Direct Reference (Kripke 1980), the sole semantic function of a name, e.g., 'John Smith', is to refer to an individual, e.g., John Smith, and a name's sole semantic value is the individual it is assigned to. The general principle underlying this view is the assignment of a value to a variable: the latter being the sequence of sounds or the sequence of letters playing the role of a name, while the relevant value is the bearer of such a name, e.g., John Smith. On this picture, the sentence 'John Smith is a detective' expresses a singular proposition which contains the individual the name is assigned to (i.e., John Smith) and the property of being a detective as constituents: < JOHN SMITH, being detective>. Clearly, many people bear the name 'John Smith'. Although it may seem as though a single name gets different individuals assigned to it as its various values, it is arguable that we, in fact, have different names. According to this theory, multiple instances of 'John Smith' are to be counted as homonymous expressions with each name being individuated by its semantic value (i.e., the individual). A sentence containing the name 'John Smith' expresses a singular proposition containing the specific individual that the name is assigned to. This singular proposition provides the truth conditions of the sentence. If a phonetically identical name is assigned to a different person, then there are two different names, which contribute two different referents to the propositions expressed by sentences containing them. These sentences express two different singular propositions and therefore have distinct truth conditions.

Philosophers of language usually address the problem of fictional names directly, and usually treat them as names just like any other names. If fictional names are similar to ordinary names but lack a referent, then analyzing them like ordinary names via the direct reference paradigm leads to the result that the proposition that the sentence determines is, at best, the incomplete proposition: < , exists>. An affirmation of the existence of Holmes does not, then, make much sense. Nevertheless, the question of whether or not Sherlock Holmes exists seems to persist. Moreover, if a fictional name has no semantic value, then it cannot be individuated by it. It then becomes difficult to draw a distinction between the name of Doyle's famous 19th century detective and the name of his also famous 21st century counterpart in a television series. Which Sherlock Holmes is the existential question about? Is it about the 19th century detective, or about its 21st century counterpart? Or is it about another Sherlock Holmes? Unless further details are added, these questions remain difficult to answer, if they can be answered at all. Fictional names, in contrast with names such as 'Vulcan', do not seem to lack a referent because a mistake happened when assigning the name. Fictional names are, arguably, not designed to designate an object located in space and time—that is why the name is fictional to begin with (Kripke 2013). In this respect, one cannot re-

ally say that a fictional name 'fails to refer' since there is no object it is supposed to refer to in the first place. Fictional names are not mere empty names. I will address fictional names in an indirect way in section 5.

Many competent speakers are inclined to judge both (1) and (2) as true. Herein lies a puzzle: assuming that we are talking about the same Sherlock Holmes, *prima facie* our intuitions to judge both (1) and (2) to be true leads to a contradiction, since Sherlock Holmes cannot exist and not exist at the same time. However, perhaps the puzzle is misguided, since 'Sherlock Holmes' does not designate anything. Let's call this the contradiction problem. Some may argue that there is a sense in which Sherlock Holmes does exist and another sense in which he does not. But this is just a description of the problem.

Plausibly, Donald Trump believes that Sherlock Holmes does not exist. One can then ask what he believes exactly if 'Sherlock Holmes' is a fictional name. One can also ask which Sherlock Holmes is his belief about? Is Trump's belief about the Doyle character in his 19th century novel or about the character in the television series? Or about both, assuming that they are one and the same? In any case, his belief is not about a three-dimensional, real individual. Presumably Obama also believes that Sherlock Holmes does not exist. Which Sherlock Holmes is his belief about? Do Trump and Obama share a belief in common? Let's call this the belief attribution problem. Intuitions about the truth conditions of existential statements about fictional characters are complex (see Braun 1993; Thomasson 2003; Predelli 2002). Braun (2005) is right in noting that speakers have a cognitive relationship to fictional names 'that [is] importantly similar to the cognitive relations they bear to referring names' (Braun 2005: 600). However, Braun also suggests that they are not entirely analogous. Neither (1) nor (2) are made true by facts, since *prima facie* facts drop out of the picture as far as sentences containing fictional names are concerned. Existential statements, such as (1) and (2), need to be more aptly analyzed.

3. *Using the Ordinary Name Paradigm*

There is an important literature on fictional names invoking pretense (see for example Kripke (2013); Walton (1990; 2000); Kroon (2014)). Call it the pretense family type of theory. In *Reference and Existence* (2013), Kripke writes that 'the type of names which occurs in fictional discourse are pretended names', and that 'the propositions in which they occur are pretended proposition rather than real propositions' (Kripke 2013: 29). The speaker does not, then, literally refer to an object or express a proposition. The speaker only pretends to use the name and to express a proposition. Such a view does not entail that pretend names refer to fictional objects.[5] Suppose now that fictional names are

[5] Let's suppose that fictional names do refer to fictional objects, a view which

pretended names, and that sentences containing such names do not determine propositions, but just pretended propositions. We are owed details on what a pretended name is, and on what pretended propositions are. An approach to fictional names preserving the intuitions that such names are actual names, not pretended names, and that such sentences express propositions, not pretended propositions, would have much in its favour. Walton (1990) also uses the notions of pretense, as well as the notion of make-belief, and resists the intuition that (1) and (2) are literal, or used literally. He offers a very rich view on fictional name sentences. I will not offer detailed criticisms of Walton's picture. My view dispenses with the notion of pretense and takes sentences containing fictional names to be literal.

A different strategy, or family of strategies, is to argue that fictional names are, in fact, referring expressions, but that they refer to nothing. The way out is to argue that such names lack referent, and that a sentence like (1) expresses a gappy proposition, e.g., <___ , exists>, (Braun 2005). Braun argues forcefully for this position, and he suggests what the truth conditions are for both (1) and its negation, here (2). He would contend that the gappy proposition determined by (1) is false, and that its negation is true (see Braun 2005: 599).[6] Falsity is used in an odd sense here, in that it does not consider facts. Assigning falsity to (1) seem arbitrary. On this view, a sentence such as 'Donald Trump believes that Sherlock Holmes exists' is a belief report containing a gappy proposition. If the gappy proposition is false, and if its negation is therefore true, then the sentence 'Donald Trump believes that Sherlock Holmes does not exists' is true, and it attributes to Trump a true belief. This does not seem correct.[7] Braun's picture, leave many questions unanswered. According to his view, different sentences containing different fictional names—'Sherlock Holmes exists', 'Philip Marlow exists' and 'Martin Beck exists'—determine the same gappy proposition and share the same truth conditions. Important differences are obliterated. In addition, 'Sherlock Holmes is not Philip Marlow' and 'Martin Beck is not Sherlock Holmes', as well as 'Sherlock Holmes is not Martin Beck', determine the same gappy proposition: < ___ is not ___ >. *Prima facie*, they determine different propositions and have dif-

has been defended quite strongly in the literature (see Thomasson 1990). However, it is often assumed that such fictional characters either exist or do not exist. This assumption just begs the question, and it is not a satisfactory response to puzzles such as (1) and (2). We are also owed an account of how fictional names are assigned to such fictional objects, whatever the latter are supposed to be Moreover, if the name refers to a fictional object, then the truth conditions of (1), or an utterance of (1), for instance, then remain puzzling. How can a fictional object make a sentence true, in a non pickwikian sense of 'true'? Are (1) and (2) contradictions? For a critical perspective on Thomasson'view, see Everett (2007).

[6] Adams (2011) argues for gappy propositions, but in contrast with Braun, he contends that gappy propositions, determined by a sentence like (1), are neither true nor false. If he is right, then (1) and (2) are not contradictions.

[7] I will not examine Braun's proposal in detail here.

ferent truth conditions. Braun's view seems to imply, against intuitive judgements, exactly the opposite: that they determine the same gappy proposition.

Most of the various approaches to fictional names address issues concerning their reference and their contribution to the truth conditions of sentences containing them. They are mainly designed to deal with the truth-value problem. I will not try to give details on how such approaches deal with the contradiction problem and the belief attribution problem. Other important issues can also be raised. For example, do fictional names contingently lack a referent? What are the features of fictional names that make these expressions referential terms, which nevertheless lack a referent? Such lack of referent is *prima facie* not accidental (see Kripke 1980). If 'Sherlock Holmes' is found to have a referent, then that name does not count as a fictional name. Being fictional is arguably not a contingent feature of fictional names. Finally, different uses of 'John Smith' can be individuated distinctly so long as the name is tied to different objects. Different 'Sherlock Holmes' can be found in Doyle's book, in movies and in the television series. Are they different names? If they lack referents then they cannot be individuated. To avoid the problems that these questions raise, some philosophers, such as Braun, suggest taking the modes of presentation, the names themselves, 'Sherlock Holmes', used to express that proposition as relevant for distinguishing the proposition and truth conditions associated with each sentence or utterance. Such a procedure, however, cannot distinguish some pairs of fictional names. Suppose that, impressed by Conan Doyle's books, I decide to write mystery novels, and Berlin in 2018 is a great place for a mystery. I also decide to call my German detective 'Sherlock Holmes.' Now, two tokens or utterances of the sentence (1), one about Conan Doyle's detective and the other about the Berlin cop, determine the same gappy proposition. They *prima facie* also contain the same name, i.e., 'Sherlock Holmes'. The name, by itself, is useless in distinguishing what proposition is determined by each sentence or utterance. Such a result is counterintuitive. A more fine-grained individuation of fictional names is called for, one not invoking any fictional character. Braun, for instance, addresses neither the identity problem for fictional names nor the problem of the multiplicity of similar fictional names like 'Sherlock Holmes' in Doyle's books or in a television series. The individuation of fictional names is puzzling, yet it is also relevant in addressing sentences such as (1) and (2).

In a passage I quoted earlier, Braun (2006) suggests that the cognitive relations ordinary speakers have to fictional names are not exactly the same as the relations they have to fictional names when the speakers know that a name is fictional. On this point I believe that Braun is right. Linguistically competent or informed speakers know that there is a difference between ordinary and fictional names—e.g., that there is a difference between the name 'Frank Serpico' and the name 'Sherlock

Holmes'. The first one is a real name, and the second one is a fictional name. They also know that 'Frank Serpico is a detective' and 'Sherlock Holmes is a detective' are, in some way, at odds. Consider an utterance such as 'Frank Serpico is a detective, and so is Sherlock Holmes'. Such an utterance is quite complex. The difference between these names does not simply trace back to their referential aspects. Features of fictional names make it such that they do not refer to objects. In addition, fictional names have a specific cognitive impact on speakers, an impact quite distinct from the cognitive impact of ordinary names. Before examining fictional names, let me introduce the pluri-propositionalist framework that I will be using. Such a framework provides interesting ways to address the issues raised by fictional names.

4. *The Many Truth Conditions*

In philosophy of language, the idea that each sentence or utterance determines one single proposition, or mono-propositionalism, is paradigmatic. It is found in Frege's pioneering work and in most of the subsequent views. Pluri-propositionalism offers a different perspective on sentences and utterances. Following pluri-propositionalism (see Perry 2012; Korta and Perry 2011), utterances rather sentences are in the foreground. In this respect, pluri-propositionalism focuses on linguistic communication. It also argues that many different propositions or truth conditions can be determined by a single utterance of a sentence. Linguistic expressions have linguistic meaning, that is, a rule determining the content of utterances of those expressions. Meaning fixes the semantically determined proposition, content, or truth conditions of utterances.[8] Consider for example an utterance of

(3) Meryl Streep exists.

The utterance, **u,** of (3) is individuated by the speaker, the time, say May 16, 2018, and the location of the utterance, say San Francisco. 'Meryl Streep' is an ordinary proper name. Following the Theory of Direct Reference, it has no linguistic meaning and a referent only. The name is associated with a referent by a convention. These features are echoed in an understanding of the utterance. Being linguistically competent and relying on their knowledge of language only, including their knowledge of what a proper name is, speakers know that:

> Given that (3) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (3) is true if and only if the individual[9] that the convention exploited by the utterance **u** allows us to designate by 'Meryl Streep' exists.

[8] For simplification, I do not make a difference between spoken and written utterances of a sentence or a name.

[9] An individual is whatever is designated by a proper name.

Meryl Streep does not have to exist to obtain such content. The speaker does not even have to know who Meryl Streep is. The content of the semantically determined truth conditions of the utterance, without considering facts, accounts for the cognitive significance of the utterance (Perry 2012). Note that the name itself is part of the cognitive significance of the utterance. Different utterances of (3) have different cognitive significance, because each contains a different utterance. Such contents can be accepted as true. Accepting such contents as true is an attitude toward the utterance or the content of the utterance. The latter itself cannot be said to be true, because facts have not been introduced. If the cognitive significance classifies as an episode of thinking, we can take the latter to be in the speaker's head. Such content contains the utterance **u** itself as a constituent and is, hence, reflexive in relation to the utterance itself. I underline the fact that the name itself, 'Meryl Streep', is mentioned in the cognitive significance of the utterance giving it, as an object, a major cognitive role. What follows 'if and only if', and precedes 'exists', captures an important aspect of the reference or designation relation. Yet, what you then understand when hearing an utterance of (3) does not depend on the referent of the name on that particular utterance. Actually, at this stage the referent plays no role at all. The name is associated with a convention tying it to a real individual, MERYL STREEP herself, that is: after taking into account facts required for fixing the designation of referring terms,

> Given that (3) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (3) is true if and only if MERYL STREEP exists.

'MERYL STREEP *exists'* is the designational content of the utterance, giving the conditions under which the utterance is true given the facts. The designational content of the utterance of (3) does not contain the utterance of that sentence. Neither does it contain the name. The designated individual has that feature, i.e., it exists or not, independently of whether or not there is an utterance at all, and whether or not that name has been assigned to that individual. All utterances of (3) with that specific name associated with the same convention have the same designational content and, given the facts, are true. In contrast with ordinary names, fictional names do not designate real objects, and *prima facie* an utterance of (1) does not have designational content. Therefore, they do not introduce anything to the truth conditions of sentences or utterances of which they are a part. Yet, the cognitive significance of utterances containing fictional names remains on the table.

5. *Introducing Fictional Names*

It is assumed that fictional names have no referent in the real world. It is also widely agreed that there are no ordinary speakers introducing them into discourse. One must make a clear distinction between the author of the fiction, Conan Doyle, Dostoievky, or Marcel Proust

for instance, and the fictive narrator, the latter introducing fictional names in the fiction itself. Such a distinction is part of the tools used by authors, and it is standard in the literature on fiction. Doyle, the author, created the Holmes stories; Watson, the fictive narrator, tells them and introduces, and uses as well, 'Sherlock Holmes'. Doyle never met Watson, and vice-versa. If it were discovered that a novel, previously thought to have been told by a fictive narrator—Watson—turned out to be the work of the author himself—Doyle—it would not be fictitious novel anymore. If Doyle's mysteries were, in fact, autobiographical, they would not be fictional. In the philosophy of language, the distinction between the author and the fictive narrator is not always clearly made or it is simply ignored altogether. My suggestion takes it into account.

Whereas ordinary names are simple entities lacking meaning, and are individuated by a sequence of phonemes and an object assigned to it by another three-dimensional creature, fictional names lack both meaning and a referent. There is no name assignment of a fictional name by a real person. Fictional names are certainly individuated by a sequence of sounds or letters. But that is clearly not enough, and it is insufficient to distinguish the name of the famous Doyle detective and, say, the name of a character in a different fiction. Nonetheless, readers individuate fictional names, and can see a difference between 'Sherlock Holmes', the name of the famous detective, and 'Sherlock Holmes', the name of a different character, say, a sailor in a fiction. Furthermore, if no fictive narrator introduces a fictional name in fiction, then there is no fictional name at all. If Watson does not use 'Sherlock Holmes', it is difficult to say something about Sherlock Holmes. An author using created names, without fictive narrators, is not introducing fictional names. Arguably, fictive narrators can also use the name of real people, or ordinary names, like 'Aristotle' or 'Ludwig Wittgenstein', despite the fact that these are not fictional names. I propose to individuate fictional names by taking the source of the name in fiction into account -Watson in a Doyle mystery for instance, and any book will do here. I do not want to explore the specifics of particular fictional names. My aim is more general and, up to a point, detached from literary theory.

The name 'Sherlock Holmes' is introduced by Watson, a fictive narrator, in Doyle's mysteries, and 'William de Baskerville' is introduced by Adso of Melk, also a fictive narrator, in Eco's *The name of the rose*. I want to draw attention to the fact that neither Kripke, nor Thomasson or Braun, the main contemporary theorists concerned with fictional names, gives fictive narrators a role. They all take only the actual authors into consideration. Philosophers of language ignore the semantic impact of what is a major literary element. The name of the author, or the title of the book, is sometimes used to focus on and identify the relevant fictional name. Real objects are then relied on to zoom in on a specific fictional name and, as things happen, on a character. That

does not imply that it—the title of the book for example—individuates that name. Fictional names are not introduced in the usual way that ordinary names are in language. A fictional name is never assigned a three-dimensional entity having causal relationships with other objects because, obviously, the fictive narrator, being fictive, has never met any.[10] A fictional name is also individuated in a very specific way. Let me explain.

Consider the sentence

(4) Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with.

'Holmes' can be an ordinary name (e.g., the name of a London taxi driver) or a fictional name. A token of (4) retains no information about its origins. Tokens of names, like those in (4), can be found in very different places, including Chinese cookies, books, and songs. An utterance is an event, which is located in space and time, and is the production of a sentence by a speaker. An utterance of (4) keeps no trace of its speaker, nor its space and time parameters. A sentence such as (4) can be uttered and unless you are in contact with the original utterance, these parameters remain unknown. As a consequence, no one can tell whether 'Holmes' is a fictional name or not. Now, if I tell you that that token came from a mystery novel, *A Study in Scarlet,* by Arthur Conan Doyle, you are informed that it is a token originating in fiction. Let's call this the source of the fictional name. You know something extralinguistic about the token of the name. The sentence is reproduced in different copies of the book, and you can confidently expect to find that sentence, or more precisely tokens of that sentence, in every copy of that book. It is definitely not like an ordinary token. Common sense suggests that this is not an autobiography and that Doyle is not the fictive narrator. Maybe you remember your literature classes and you know that Watson is the narrator. If you do not, you just call the storyteller 'the narrator'. If you know a little bit more about that piece of literature, you also know that 'Holmes' is a fictional name. This is part of your knowledge of that name. You also know that that name, in every token of that sentence, in every copy of the book, is a fictional name. Fictional names have identifying features, which trace back to their source—e.g., a Doyle mystery. That token, and the name, was not designed to be located in the 17th century, and it was not designed to come from China or Japan. Watson, a fictive narrator, wrote in London at the end of the 19th century, and you read it in *A Study in Scarlet*. Neither (1) nor (2) are specific about the name 'Sherlock Holmes' they contain. There is different fictional 'Sherlock Holmes'. I will come back to it.

The sentence (4) is a fiction sentence. The sentence is indexed to a narrator, the fictional Watson, a time (end of 19th century), and a location (i.e., London). Call this its fictional index. These are part of what

[10] One can easily imagine a fiction without fictional names. Just substitute a definite or an indefinite description to each and every fictional name, in *A Study in Scarlet* for example.

makes it is a fictional sentence. The fictional index gives individuating features of the fiction sentence.[11] The fiction sentence keeps its fictional index even in different copies of the book, in graffiti, written on pieces of paper in Chinese cookie, etc. Different tokens of that sentence share the same fictional index. I think that fictional names are complex objects individuated by a sequence of letters and the fictional index, composed of the fictive narrator, time, and location of the sentence token wherein the name is introduced in fiction: e.g., 'Sherlock Holmes' (Watson, end of 19th century, London).[12] The name coming from (4) is individuated by the fictional index of the token it is taken from. Neither the location nor the time need be very specific. If the specific index is not given (or known), we can have: (narrator of **t**, time of **t**, location of **t**).[13] **T** is a token of the fictional name found in the fiction. The index gives the source of the name. I call it the indexed token of the fictional name. Names like 'Vulcan', not coming from fiction, are not assigned a fictional index. A fictional name can be extracted from a fictional sentence with its index, and then proceeds to have a life of its own. For example, 'Sherlock Holmes', 'Raskolnikov', 'Madame de Villeparisis' and 'William of Baskerville' are all famous fictional names coming from fictions and having a life of their own. Sometimes the narrator has a name, Adso of Melk for instance, and a time as well as a place, are provided. Time and location can be fuzzy and not very specific—a year or a city—as is usually the case in fiction. Readers often do not even know who the fictional narrator is. In the same way, they do not care much about the time of the writing. They also very often ignore the location of the writing. Except when they are essential to an understanding of the story, these features are just irrelevant to most readers. Hence, the narrator of the name, the time and the location of the writing are used only sometimes. In any event, the fictional status of the name 'Sherlock Holmes' is echoed in the truth conditions of the utterance of (1). That being said, 'Watson' is also a fictional name and it needs to be indexed as well: e.g., 'Watson' <Watson, London, end of 19th century>. Being indexed is a characteristic of fictional names. Given the scope of the present paper, I will set aside the issue of indexing the name used by the fictive narrator.

A fictional name can be used outside of the context of the fictional work that it originated from, while nevertheless keeping its identifying fictional index as in an utterance of (1). All fictional name tokens have a fictional index. If a name does not, then the name refers directly

[11] In that respect, its role is very different from, and should not be confused with, the role of indexes in theories of indexicals. Fictional indexes are introduced and used to account for fictional names in Vallée 2018.

[12] I give a minimal fictional index, and leave it as an open question whether more indices should be added.

[13] Different sequences of phonemes should be considered because in different languages (Russian, Japanese, French, and so on) names are written and pronounced in different ways. I put aside this issue for now.

to its designata by default. Knowing that a name is fictional means knowing that it has a fictional index, and vice-versa. In day-to-day casual conversation about Holmes the index is mostly left unspecified and remains in the background. Consequentially, casual conversations involving fictional names are occasionally unclear, since they involve utterances which have no well determined truth conditions. As a result, sometimes it is necessary to pause the conversation in order to clarify which 'Sherlock Holmes' is relevant. Different tokens of a fictional name sentence such as 'Sherlock Holmes is a detective', whether they are found on a school wall, a London bus or a piece of paper in a Chinese cookie, do not indicate whether the name used is a fictional name, the name of a London detective, or the name of an American cowboy. Regardless, the name is indexed, and this is what makes it the specific fictional name as found in Doyle's mystery, for example.

6. *On Fictional Names and Pluri-Propositionalism*

Let us return to the questions concerning fictional names and existence. Mono-propositionalism is a framework assumed by all currently proposed theories of fictional names. Pluri-propositionalism provides a new perspective through which we can examine them. Consider a sentence such as (1). Without specifying whether or not it is a fictional name the questions can hardly be answered since one has to index the fictional name. The new pluri-propositionalist framework focuses on utterances instead of sentences. Rather than being individuated by its referent, 'Sherlock Holmes' is individuated by the fictive narrator, the time and location of the indexed token: e.g., 'Sherlock Holmes' <Watson, end of 19th century, London >.

'Sherlock Holmes' is a fictional name possessing a fictional index that it carries with it in utterances of the name in ordinary conversation, e.g., conversations where (1) is uttered. A speaker's knowledge of the name is also echoed in their understanding of the truth conditions of an utterance such as (1). In the case of (1), we may have something like

> Given that (1) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by the utterance **u** allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes' (Watson, end of 19th century, London) exists.

The truth conditions of this utterance give its cognitive significance. A speaker needs nothing more than these truth conditions to identify the cognitive significance. In the truth conditions associated with an utterance of (1), 'the individual that the convention exploited by the utterance **u** allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes"—where the name is indexed—echoes the fact that 'Sherlock Holmes' is a fictional name.[14]

[14] The cognitive significance containing a name does not make it about that name, and it does not make it metalinguistic.

I know that 'Sherlock Holmes' in (1) is a fictional name, and that the truth conditions mentioned give the truth conditions of the utterance of (1). Not surprisingly, an utterance of (1) has a descriptive content, which is captured in the truth conditions of the utterance. An utterance of (1) can be accepted as true, but it is not true given facts. Suppose that you believe that Sherlock Holmes is a real individual. Then you may proceed to assign an utterance of (1) different truth conditions.

> Given that (1) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (1) is true if and only if the individual that the convention exploited by the utterance **u** allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes' exists.

You and I may assign different truth conditions to an utterance of (1), and the utterance also has different cognitive significance for you and I. Moreover, I will not look for a designational content, whereas you may. There is no need to invoke a fictional character to account for our disagreement. In addition, the latter is purely cognitive. It does not, and it cannot, invoke a designational content containing Sherlock Holmes, as a real or even as a fictional creature. In any case, invoking a fictional creature is not required in order to account for the facts. The identification of a specific 'Sherlock Holmes', for instance, is often done indirectly, by means of the name of the author, the title of the book, the title of the movie or the television series, the name of the actor playing Holmes, etc. These are not fiction-relative parameters. Questions pertaining specifically to names can then be asked again: is the name in Doyle's book and the name in a television series the same name? Readers of *A Study in Scarlet* assume that every token of 'Sherlock Holmes' in the book has the same fictional index. Readers of the other books of Doyle's featuring Holmes assume that tokens of 'Sherlock Holmes' in these books have the same or similar indexes. In saying this, I am going beyond fictional names and I am talking about the readers of the fiction. Clearly, this is not part of my view on fictional names.

Moreover, there is no convention tying a fictional name to a three-dimensional individual. An informed speaker using a fictional name knows that there is no such convention, and knows the cognitive significance of an utterance of (1). Such a speaker also knows the difference between the truth conditions as cognitive significance of an utterance involving ordinary names, and the truth conditions as cognitive significance of an utterance involving fictional names. I'll let the reader give the truth conditions of an utterance of (2). There is no need to explore whether or not they are the same name in (1) and (2) here. In any case, the answer will not depend on facts. Accepting as true a fictional indexed token, or sentences containing fictional names, also allows us to set aside the famous prefix or complex operator 'It is true in the story' and any reference to a story.

The fictional name itself is part of the cognitive significance of an utterance of the sentence. If a speaker does not assign an utterance of (1) such truth conditions, then that speaker does not know that the name

is fictional. If the fictional name is poorly individuated, i.e., if it is not assigned a clear index, then the utterance lacks clear truth conditions and its cognitive significance is unclear. I contend that utterances containing fictional names carry no truth conditions confronted with facts. The initial questions concerning existence can only be about semantically determined content or the cognitive significance of the utterance. An utterance of (1), or (2), can be accepted as true, but this assumes or implies nothing concerning facts, i.e., it is not true relative to facts. If the utterance is about designational content, then it is assumed that there is a designational content and that the name refers to an object. The fictional name is then wrongly seen as having the same function as an ordinary name. If we accept utterances of sentences containing fictional names such as 'Sherlock Holmes exists' or 'Sherlock Holmes does not exist' as true, it is not because we have assessed it as true considering facts, since on the account developed here such a suggestion is altogether incoherent. Puzzles concerning the existence, or non-existence, of Sherlock Holmes concerned with facts are grounded on a reading of utterances such as (1) and (2) which misleadingly focuses on the purported designational content of the utterances, while there is none—when instead the emphasis should be the cognitive significance of such utterances.

Reasons to accept or reject an utterance of (1) can differ widely. Determining whether an utterance such as 'Obama exists' expresses a true or false proposition is rather straightforward, since we simply have to check the facts. However, determining whether utterances of (1) and (2) determine proposition one accepts as true, or reject as false, is more complicated, since it relies on things such as the name's individuation grounded on non-linguistic knowledge, knowledge of the name as fictional, the use of an index for that name, views on fiction, and so on.

So far, I have addressed the truth-value problem. The contradiction problem is a little more complicated but it is rather easy to deal with on my account. An utterance of

(5) Sherlock Holmes exists and Sherlock Holmes does not exist

is intuitively a contradiction if the same fictional name (i.e., a name with the same fictional index) occurs in both elementary sentences. One can say that it is a contradiction, not because of facts, but because *prima facie* both sentences cannot be accepted as true by rational speaker. However, it can be accepted as a true contradiction if, for whatever reasons, an utterance of an identity sentence with the first name with a fictional index and the second name with the same fictional index is accepted as true. In any case, assessing an utterance of (5) as a contradiction is grounded on linguistic competence only.

We are left with the belief attribution problem. Consider an utterance of

(6) Donald Trump believes that Sherlock Holmes exists.

An utterance of (6) can be assigned truth conditions. Fixing the referent of 'Donald Trump', we have, with 'Sherlock Holmes' as a fictional name:

> Given that (6) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (6) is true if and only if DONALD TRUMP believes that what the convention exploited by the utterance allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes' (Watson, end of 19th century, London) exists.

The belief attributed is fully descriptive. He might also believe that Holmes is real. We then have:

> Given that (6) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (6) is true if and only if DONALD TRUMP believes that what the convention exploited by the utterance allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes' exists.

where 'Sherlock Holmes' is, wrongly, believed to be an ordinary name. These are attributions of different beliefs. Of course, Trump cannot have a belief about a singular proposition containing Holmes himself.

We, therefore, have two options—corresponding to one reading where 'Sherlock Holmes' is an ordinary referring name, and another where it is a fictional name. It is interesting to be able to capture these two options and to make them clear in the truth conditions, as cognitive significance, assigned to utterances. We can also have

(7) Donald Trump believes that Sherlock Holmes does not exist

with 'Sherlock Holmes' as a fictional name. An utterance of (7) can be assigned truth conditions

> Given that (7) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (7) is true if and only if DONALD TRUMP believes that what the convention exploited by the utterance allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes' (Watson, end of 19th century, London) does not exist.

Finally, it is also possible that the same fictional name as used in (7) is also used in (8)

(8) Obama believes that Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

We can assign an utterance of (8) the following truth conditions and a descriptive content:

> Given that (8) is an English sentence, the utterance **u** of (8) is true if and only if OBAMA believes that what the convention exploited by the utterance allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes' (Watson, end of 19th century, London) does not exist.

In no case is a belief in a singular proposition attributed. Trump and Obama can be attributed the same belief about 'Sherlock Holmes', such a belief being about the cognitive significance of an utterance. However, (7) and (8) might also attribute different beliefs—(7) might contain the name found in Doyle's books and (8) the name found in a television series.

7. *Conclusion*

Mono-propositionalism, based on Frege's ground breaking introduction of senses in semantics or based on singular propositions, is not a framework fit to account for fictional names and the truth conditions of sentences containing fictional names. Pluri-propositionalism offers a new perspective on such sentences. Is an utterance of (9)

(9) Sherlock Holmes is Sherlock Holmes

where the first occurrence of the name is about the 19th century detective—'Sherlock Holmes' with an index containing Watson, end of 19th century and London,—and the second about the 21st century detective—with an index containing Watson, the 21st century and London—true? The question as to whether the first Watson is the second Watson remains open here. One must make a distinction between the cognitive significance of the utterance and its designational content. The utterance of (9) has no designational content and it is not truth assessable relative to the facts. Unfortunately, or fortunately, reasons to accept or reject the utterance of (9) will remain forever an object of speculation. The awkwardness of an utterance of 'Frank Serpico is a detective, and so is Sherlock Holmes' is made clear once the cognitive significance of the utterance is considered. An utterance **u** is true, if and only if, the individual that the convention exploited by the utterance **u** allows us to designate by 'Franck Serpico' is a detective, and also if and only if, the individual that the convention exploited by the utterance **u** allows us to designate by 'Sherlock Holmes' (Watson, end of 19th century, London) is also a detective. The first sentence determines a designational content containing an individual, whereas the second does not.

Fictional names do not refer to fictional or possible objects. If I am right, a fictional name is not a variable assigned a value, and it cannot be modeled along these lines: there simply is neither an assignment nor a value. A fictional name is a sequence of letters, which is indexed to a fiction, with a fictional narrator, a time, and a location. This alternative picture opens up new perspectives on fictional names and, in a sense, on fiction itself. Understanding sentences containing fictional names is a purely cognitive affair and it does not require invoking fictional entities. I do not wish to deny the ontological problems raised by fiction or to disqualify an examination of fictional creatures (see Thomasson 1990, Voltolini 2006, Sainsbury 2014, Kripke 2013). Whatever these problems, they have no impact on my view, and, I submit, on the semantics of fictional names. It also suggests they do not depend on fictional names in stories. By the same token, fictional names have no impact on ontological issues concerning fiction.

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