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Fictional Singular Imaginings*

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1. The Problem of *De Re* Thought

More than fifty years ago, Quine (1956) brought the *de re* / *de dicto* distinction back to the attention of the philosophical community. Through its impact on the debate confronting direct vs. descriptivist accounts of reference started by Barcan Marcus, Keith Donnellan, David Kaplan and of course Saul Kripke in the following decade, the nature of *de re* or singular thoughts became one of the leading concerns of contemporary philosophers. As perhaps we should expect, in spite of extended discussion we are still a long way from achieving a generally accepted philosophical account; this is shown, for instance, by the contrasting recent takes on the issue by writers such as Scott Soames (2005)—who adopts the view by Donnellan (1979) to be outlined in the following paragraph—and Robin Jeshion (2001), otherwise sharing a similar direct-reference approach to the prototypical expression of *de re* thought. Philosophical progress has been made, though, in the way it occurs: relevant additional intuitions have been brought to bear on the issue; relevant distinctions have been made on that basis, correcting initial confusions and precluding future ones. Thus, Quine gave two criteria for *de re* thoughts based on semantic features of thought-ascriptions—availability of the embedded positions occupied by singular terms to inferences governed by the rules of substitutivity of co-referential terms and existential generalization. These are potentially

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misleading indirect guides to distinguish singular from general thoughts: some *de re* ascriptions (by Quine's criteria) ascribe *de dicto* or general thoughts, and vice versa—a point that, as for instance Tyler Burge (2007) candidly admits, was not clear to many early writers on the topic.

Discussing the matter in connection with the status of the Kripkean category of the contingent a priori,¹ Donnellan (1979) argued that what can be properly classified as knowable a priori about utterances like those involving “one meter” or “Neptune” famously proposed by Kripke (1980) cannot be the very same singular content that is contingent;² he distinguished to that end between *knowing a true proposition* expressed by an utterance, and *knowing that an utterance expresses a true proposition*.³ Gareth Evans (1979) replied that, for a very specific sort of cases involving “descriptive names,” a related descriptivist account should be preferred, in which it is not the singular contingent content, but rather a general descriptive one which is knowable a priori. Both Donnellan and Evans assume here that to entertain a *de re* thought, one should be acquainted with the relevant *re*, making assumptions on the nature of acquaintance such that Le Verrier was not acquainted with Neptune when he descriptively introduced the name.

A certain ideology of *genuine direct reference*, which many contemporary philosophers (wrongly in my view) derive from Kripke (1980), hinders a correct understanding of the nature of singular thought, confusedly suggesting that it should be thought somehow uncontaminated by descriptive components; some appeal to the label “nonconceptual” is sometimes made

¹ This is the class of truths unveiled by Saul Kripke (1980) to which contrasting modalities intuitively paradoxically appear to apply; they are contingent, in that, although true with respect to the actual world, we can easily imagine possible circumstances with respect to which they would be false, while we seem to be capable of knowing their truth a priori.

² Kripke does not speak of contents or propositions; wisely he speaks rather of “statements.” Here is a relevant quotation (1980: 56): “What then, is the *epistemological* status of the statement ‘Stick *S* is one metre long at *t*’, for someone who has fixed the metric system by reference to stick *S*? It would seem that he knows it a priori. For if he used stick *S* to fix the reference of the term ‘one metre’, then as a result of this kind of ‘definition’ (which is not an abbreviative or synonymous definition), he knows automatically, without further investigation, that *S* is one metre long. On the other hand, even if *S* is used as a standard of a metre, the *metaphysical* status of the statement ‘Stick *S* is one metre long’ will be that of a contingent statement, provided that ‘one metre’ is regarded as a rigid designator: under appropriate stresses and strains, heatings or coolings, *S* would have had a length other than one metre even at *t*. (Such statements as ‘The water boils at 100 degrees centigrade, at sea level’ can have a similar status.) So in this sense, there are contingent *a priori* truths.”

³ If, while listening to an utterance in a language that I do not know, I am told by a reliable person who knows the language and whom I trust that the utterance is true, I may come thereby to know that the sentence expresses a truth, without knowing the truth that it expresses.

in this regard, to gesture in the direction of this alleged purity of singular thoughts vis-à-vis descriptive excrescences.⁴ Here is an example of the unstable trains of thought on these matters I have in mind. After quoting Russell's famous contention in "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," "Here the proper name has the direct use which it always wishes to have, as simply standing for a certain object, and not for a description of the object," Donnellan (1990: 101n) says, approvingly: "This is the mark of the genuine name; its function is simply to refer without any backing of descriptions, without any Millian connotation or Fregean sense." Later however, while discussing Kaplan's character rule for "I," which he describes in a way that obviously provides descriptions like "the utterer of this token of 'I,'" he says: "This rule, however, does not provide a description which 'I' goes proxy for nor a Fregean sense. It simply 'fixes the referent', in Kripke's phrase" (Donnellan 1990: 109). So: genuine reference is not in any way backed by description; reference with cases of "I" is genuine; reference with cases of "I" is fixed by description. If this is not a formal contradiction, it is only because of the unexplained difference between "backing" and "fixing."

There are two indirect considerations suggesting that entertaining *de re* thoughts cannot be understood as not having a fully descriptive representation of the relevant *res*. One is that the traditional division into deictic and anaphoric uses of indexicals does not appear to have any significance regarding the nature of the thoughts expressed by means of them; in fact, it does not seem to draw a semantic boundary. As Heim and Kratzer (1998: 240) put it, "anaphoric and deictic uses seem to be special cases of the same phenomenon: the pronoun refers to an individual which, for whatever reason, is highly salient at the moment when the pronoun is processed."⁵ The second comes from the phenomenon

⁴ This is confused because non-conceptual thoughts, in the only clear-headed way I (2006a) know of tracing the distinction, are simply pre-linguistic thoughts; and these can be as "descriptive" as linguistic thoughts.

⁵ A full defense of my arguments here would therefore require confronting views like Siegel's (2002), who argues for an asymmetry in demonstratives depending respectively on perception and discourse; this is a view germane to a requirement of acquaintance in a very strict sense (actual causal relation with the referent) for proper understanding of *de re* contents, which I will be rejecting in accepting inductively or abductively based acquaintance. Cf. Sainsbury's (2005: 95–6) and Jeshion (2004) in favor of grouping together both descriptive names like "Jack the Ripper," "Unabomber," or Evans's "Julius" and ordinary proper names into (as Sainsbury puts it) a single semantic category or linguistic kind.

of referentially used descriptions. This is independent of whether the phenomenon is a non-semantic, “merely pragmatic” one, for we should distinguish here a narrow from a wider notion of what counts as a semantic phenomenon.

In the narrow sense, Gricean conversational implicatures are the paradigm of the non-semantic; in this sense, semantic features are, roughly, those to be taken into consideration in answering the theoretical questions addressed by linguistic accounts of natural languages, foremost among them accounting for the phenomena of systematicity and productivity by providing a compositional theory. But there is a wider notion, on which a semantic proposal is, roughly, an answer to any other good theoretical question essentially posed in terms that pre-theoretically relate to *meaning*. Accounting for the differential behavior Donnellan revealed in our intuitions concerning referential and attributive uses of descriptions is a semantic problem in this wider sense. In fact, it is one closely related to the present problem of providing a philosophical account of the nature of *de re* contents; for referential uses are those on which descriptions are used to express singular thoughts, in contrast with the general thoughts that they express in attributive uses. Hence, even if, as I will be urging, *de re* thoughts are not independent of descriptive features, we nonetheless need a way of distinguishing *de re* from *de dicto* thoughts, particularly *de dicto* descriptive purely general thoughts.

In a series of papers, Robin Jeshion (2000, 2001, 2004) has forcefully criticized both Donnellan’s and Evans’s claims on the contingent a priori, and she (2002, this volume: Chapter 4) has developed an “acquaintanceless” account of singular thoughts as an alternative view. Jeshion claims that one can fully grasp a singular thought expressed by a sentence including a proper name, even if its reference has been descriptively fixed and one’s access to the referent is “mediated” by that description. On the other hand, she (2006, this volume: Chapter 4) still wants to reject “semantic instrumentalism”, the view that “there are no substantive conditions of any sort on having singular thought. We can freely generate singular thoughts at will by manipulating the apparatus of direct reference.” Her account of singular thoughts is a psychological one, rejecting any epistemic requirement. Having singular thoughts is for her a matter of deploying “mental files” or “dossiers” that play a significant role in the cognitive life of the individual (Jeshion 2002 and this volume: Chapter 4).

In this chapter I will elaborate on an alternative descriptivist-friendly view that I (2000, 2008) have presented before, which has important points of contact with Jeshion's—in fact the present elaboration has benefited from her work in many ways. It differs, particularly in that it is an epistemic view; it is only a broadly understood acquaintance view, as it will transpire, but I hope that this does not make it a mere terminological variation on Jeshion's acquaintanceless one, not at least obviously so.⁶ To argue for it, I will pursue an indirect strategy. I will discuss some relevant aspects of the semantics of fictional discourse, thus aiming both to clarify the proposal, and to provide evidence in its favor. I will study the behavior of intuitively empty referential expressions, proper names, indexicals, and referentially used descriptions, mostly in two specific and related sort of cases: the use of those expressions by the creator of the fiction, while putting forward the speech acts which I (2007) take to be constitutive of that activity; and critical discourse of fictions aimed at getting its content right. I will argue that the epistemic account of singular thoughts I favor provides an intuitively satisfactory account of those cases.⁷

2. Varities of Fictional Discourse

Consider the following sentences, to make intuitively clear these distinctions:

- (1) Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls
- (2) Leopold Bloom is a fictional character
- (3) Leopold Bloom does not exist

The semantic issues that fiction raises may well not have to do with a semantic account of the sentences themselves, nor with a semantic account of the semantic values of their tokens or contextualized versions, but rather with one of their uses. I am using here “semantic account” in the wider

⁶ I.e., except perhaps in the non-obvious way in which many *prima facie* different philosophical views are mere notational variants of each other.

⁷ I will not try to argue that defenders of alternative accounts cannot on their part account for the data, or that the accounts they could provide (including the few possibilities I will be exploring on their behalf) are worse all things considered. Going back to the philosophical skepticism envisaged in the previous footnote, I am not sure to what extent philosophical views like some of the alleged alternatives we will be considering here are not deep down merely notational variants.

of the two senses distinguished earlier; that is, not in the narrower sense in which it is used to refer to a part of a theoretical account of natural language, distinguished from the accounts provided by syntax and especially from pragmatics. For in this narrow sense, it may well be that there is no interesting semantic account for fiction-related uses.

Thus, consider first an utterance of (1) by Joyce, as part of the longer utterance by him of the full discourse that, with a measure of idealization, we can think constitutes the creation of *Ulysses*. It is distinctive of such uses, which I will be calling *textual*, that they are not intuitively truth-evaluable.⁸ Now, a semantic account of natural language is mainly concerned with explaining the data of systematicity and productivity, the fact that we can understand an unlimited number of new sentences, by providing a compositional account of the contributions (*in context*, for most cases including the present ones) of expressions, lexical units and phrases built out of them in accordance with syntax; and the usual strategy is to consider primarily their contribution to the content of the assertions made by default in uttering declarative sentences. That being so, it may well be that (as in fact I will suggest later) semantics should content itself with claiming, with respect to (1), that it signifies a necessarily untrue “gappy” content.⁹ The speaker of (1) we are considering is interpreted as intending to do something else in addition to signifying that false gappy content; but this is for pragmatics to theoretically describe.

Now, semantics in this narrow sense is so-called because the theoretical account it provides deals with properties for which we have pre-theoretical notions such as *meaning* and *reference*. But the remaining task of accounting in a theoretically elaborated way for what Joyce intended to do, here left to pragmatics, will also appeal to theoretical elaborations of *meaning*, *reference* and their cognates. It is thus justified to appeal to a wider, philosophical notion of *semantics*, which encompasses what, in the more restricted sense, may be put in the pragmatics basket: anything theoretically sufficiently elaborated so as to provide answers to sensible questions posed in terms of those intuitive notions such as *meaning*, *reference* and cognates—questions *prima facie* deserving carefully researched answers, such as the ones we will be examining here.

⁸ I derive the terminology for this and the other two uses I will be distinguishing from Bonomi (2008).

⁹ Braun (2005) and Sainsbury (2005) argue for a view like this; see also Walton (1990: 396).

In addition to textual uses of sentences involving fictional names, there are two other uses that we should keep in mind; they differ initially in that they appear to be truth-evaluable. There is, firstly, the use of sentences such as (1) that we make when we are stating the content of a fiction. I will call these content-reporting uses *paratextual*; they are those which according to Lewis (1978) are simply elliptic for intuitively equivalent ascriptions of propositional attitudes such as:

- (4) *Ulysses* has it that / leads one to imagine that Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls.

Finally, I will call such uses of sentences as (2) and (3) *metatextual*; they are similarly intuitively truth-evaluable but not directly content-reporting, in that they are not (or at least not obviously) equivalent to propositional attitude ascriptions like (4). Here I will not try to provide an account for them, and I will be focusing mostly on textual and paratextual uses.

The semantics of fictional discourse confronts us with an ontological issue: do any of the uses we have mentioned require positing fictional entities? The most popular argument these days for realism about fictional entities is indeed van Inwagen's (1977) Quinean appeal to non-eliminable quantification over, and reference to, such entities in *prima facie* serious, truth-evaluable discourse, such as utterances of (2) and related metatextual uses in contexts of literary criticism.¹⁰ The thus posited *ficta* could then be Meinongian nonexistent entities, concrete Lewisian *possibilia*, or abstract existent entities of various sorts, fully fledged Platonic *abstracta* or rather created artefacts, as in Salmon (1998), Thomasson's (1999) and Schiffer's (2003).¹¹ Fictional entities of any of these sorts could also be invoked to account for any of the other two uses, textual and paratextual. I will thus distinguish *committal* accounts of different aspects of fictional discourse, which posit fictional entities of some sort to account for a given use, from *noncommittal* accounts, which account for the use without positing fictional entities of any sort.

My strategy for the rest of this chapter is to argue that the sort of account of singular contents that I will be presenting provides a satisfactory account

¹⁰ Note, however, that the intuitively obviousness of (3) counts against realist views, a point that Everett (2007) rightly presses against them. Everett (2005) provides interesting elaboration on equally well-known indeterminacy concerns about fictional realism.

¹¹ See Voltolini (2006) for a helpful detailed exploration of those alternatives.

of textual and paratextual uses involving empty referring expressions, consistent with pre-theoretical intuitions and free from the problems of alternative views. So let me begin by stating what I take to be our intuitions about these cases, and then outlining the account of singular thought on which I want to elaborate here.

I think we intuitively support noncommittal accounts of both textual and paratextual uses. Joyce's uses of "Mr. Leopold Bloom" did not refer to any entity, but were mere pretences of reference: Joyce was merely pretending to refer to something, but he was not in fact referring to anything; merely asking us to imagine him referring to someone named "Bloom," without in fact doing anything of that sort; and something similar applies to our uses of that expression to state the content of the fiction he produced.

There are "intuitions of singularity" of sorts with respect to fictions. A purely general fiction with only quantificational sentences sounds different than an otherwise equivalent one about a particular character. Suppose that you open a very thin instalment of the fiction series of Haiku Press, a work with only one printed page, containing just this: "Pinot Noir on the rocks with a slice of pumpkin and leek juice, that makes an enticing cocktail. There is one and in fact only one male person who has ever entertained this thought just before dying"; imagine in contrast that the second sentence runs "he thought this just before dying." The second fiction, unlike the first one, is clearly about a particular character; this is of course much more clearly so in the case of fictions depicting richly imagined characters, such as *Ulysses*' Bloom.¹² But none of this contradicts the previous point: our intuitions prima facie support noncommittal accounts of textual and paratextual uses, also regarding the most usual "singular" fictions. The intuitions I appeal here are simply those that lead three-year-old children to tweak adults who try to participate with excessive enthusiasm in their interactions with their imaginary friends: "But Meg does not exist, you know?"

Let me sketch now the account of singular thought I prefer. I take it that there are two sets of intuitive data to be accounted for by theories of singular contents. There is, firstly, the Quinean distinction between (general, "*de dicto*") belief-states concerning particular spies with contents that would be uninteresting to intelligence agencies (such as believing that the shortest spy

¹² Later I will be appealing to helpful considerations by Stacie Friend to elaborate on the nature of these intuitions, and I will indicate how my proposal purports to account for them.

spies) vs. those (singular, “*de re*”) that do not. Secondly, there is the intuitive data that Kripke and others marshaled against traditional descriptivist accounts of the thoughts expressed by utterances including literally used proper names or indexicals, and referentially used descriptions; in particular, the “intuitions of rigidity,” that when we consider possible states of affairs compatible with the truth of a given utterance we keep fixed the denotation of the referential expression in the actual state of affairs, if any.¹³

The account I support for those intuitions has (appealing to Kaplan’s (1989) distinction) semantic and metasemantic aspects.¹⁴ On the semantic side, we should distinguish the contribution of the referential expression to the content of the main speech act being made—the assertion or judgment, given that we are considering a default utterance of a declarative sentence for methodologically useful concreteness—from its contribution to an ancillary presupposition.¹⁵ The contribution to the asserted content is the object itself, as in Millian views, if any; the contribution to the presupposition is an assumed “important predicate,” a *prima facie* identifying property that could be offered as an answer to questions as to who or what the referent is.¹⁶ On the metasemantic side, I take reference to be an ancillary speech act. I will assume a normative account of speech acts, along the lines of Williamson’s (1996) well-known account of assertion. According to Williamson, assertion is constituted by a simple knowledge rule, KR; I propose the ancillary reference rule RR, which is just an application of Russell’s Acquaintance Principle:

(KR) One must ((assert *p*) only if one knows *p*)

(NR) One must ((refer to *o*) only if one knows who or what *o* is)

The semantic side of the account has affinities with other suggestions in the literature, and thus for present purposes it can be further sketched

¹³ “My main remark [. . .] is that we have a direct intuition of the rigidity of names, exhibited in our understanding of the truth conditions of particular sentences” (Kripke 1980: 14; cf. 6, 62).

¹⁴ The word ‘semantic’ in both labels is still understood in the wider sense, for I would like it to apply to referential uses of descriptions, which I (2005) take to be non-semantic in the narrow sense, a generalized conversational implicature.

¹⁵ Remember that we are considering the semantics of uses of sentences, not the semantics of sentence-types. I think that the account to be outlined can be transferred from linguistic acts to mental acts with small variations; a useful starting point is to consider the judgments made by default by “uttering” declarative sentences in *foro interno*, as it were, instead of assertions.

¹⁶ I borrow the notion of “important predicate” from Boër and Lycan’s (1986) well-known account of knowing who, on which this is a matter of knowing identifying properties relevant for contextually specific purposes.

in relation to them. Thus, consider S's literal utterance of a declarative sentence such as "he is hungry." In truth-conditional terms, the proposal delivers familiar hedged truth-conditions (Sainsbury 2005: 54–9): *on the assumption that x is the demonstrated male that S's use of 'he' refers to, S's utterance is true iff x is hungry*. The view differs from truth-conditional accounts such as Sainsbury's in providing a more complex semantics, with two different contents: (focusing just on the contribution of a referential expression) the singular asserted truth-condition and the conventionally implicated descriptive presupposition. In that respect, it is closer to views such as Perry (2001), with the singular asserted proposition being Perry's *referential* or *official* content, and the conventionally implicated proposition close to Perry's *reflexive* content. In the case of a use of a proper name N , the descriptive presupposition conventionally implicated is that the use of N refers to the object saliently being called N in that use. "Being called N " in a use leads us to a contextually naming practice. I mostly agree with what Sainsbury (2005: 106–24) has to say about naming practices and their identity conditions, in particular with his view that a naming practice has at most one referent, but may lack one. These conventionally implicated descriptive contents are usually pragmatically enriched with further assumed properties of the referent derived from context, from perception, memory, or anaphoric relations to previous discourse: on the assumption that x is the demonstrated male that S's use of "he" refers to, *the one looking so-and-so from that perspective*, S's utterance is true iff x is hungry.

The view has a further important affinity to Sainsbury's, in that it admits "reference without referents"; utterances of "Vulcan is bigger than Mercury" are fully meaningful expressions signifying (with respect to every possible world) "gappy" untrue singular propositions (Braun 1993, 2005). Referring expressions purport to have referents, but they do not need to have them; on the present account, this is not just a teleological feature but a normative one: they should have them for their uses to meet their constitutive norms. The account thus requires a free logic—which in my view (unlike Sainsbury's (2005) or Braun's (2005)) should be a supervaluationist non-bivalent one, but we do not need to go into that here. Sainsbury's is of course a modest truth-conditional proposal, but I think that the relative full-bloodedness that comes from acknowledging a further level of presupposed contents is required, both to properly account for the datum of rigidity, and also to help us understand how

utterances signifying necessarily untrue gappy contents can nonetheless be fully meaningful.¹⁷

According to Sainsbury (2005: 76–81), the explanation for the datum of rigidity is given by the “essence of reference”, which on his view is captured by Evans’s principle (P):

- (P) If S is an atomic sentence combining the n -place concept-expression R with singular terms $t_1 \dots t_n$, then S is true iff \langle the referent of $t_1 \dots$ the referent of $t_n \rangle$ satisfies R .

However, I do not think this principle can adequately carry the explanatory burden. Sainsbury has to stipulate the restriction to atomic sentences so as to exclude sentences formed with definite descriptions; and he must interpret the metalinguistic descriptions used in the principle as referring expression themselves, or alternatively rigidify them by inserting “actual,” for the principle to deliver the intuitively correct rigid truth-conditions. Hence, in both respects, in order to obtain the intuitively desired results from the principle, we must already apply it in accordance with the distinction we are trying to account for. On the present view, the explanatory burden is rather carried by the metasemantic epistemic norm of reference. Some literal speech acts that language allows their users to make express singular thoughts: thoughts involving different objects (in the same “positions”) would be different thoughts; properly understanding these thoughts requires knowing those objects.

The norm of reference by means of which I try to capture Russell’s Acquaintance Principle requires much more elucidation than I can provide here. It requires first of all motivation, which (following Russell) I am assuming comes from general requirements on understanding. Its normative character should be further clarified, to emphasize that the norm is still in place in cases in which it is not fulfilled, the clearest among them being “Vulcan”-like cases involving failure of intended reference. The context-dependence that its application shares with all knowledge-ascriptions should also be addressed, in the framework of a general account of such apparent context-dependence: Is it really the case that ascriptions of knowing-which/who are interest-relative, as Böer and Lycan (1986) claimed, or is the

¹⁷ I do not make much here of the additional full-bloodedness that comes from indulging in talk of propositions, as opposed to merely mentioning truth-conditions.

appearance of this just a pragmatic effect, as Braun (2006) contends? Last, but of course not least, the (absolute, or context-relative) epistemic requirement that it imposes should be explored and clarified. In particular, I (2008) have defended that Leverrier's uses of "Neptune," or similar uses of "Jack the Ripper" or "Unabomber" in worn-out examples, *meet* the requirement, in that there is a sufficiently substantial causal-evidential relation with the referent (a perceptual relation with other objects related to it, together with good evidence concerning the relevant relations).¹⁸ This should be further elaborated in a general epistemic framework; it must be shown that the account can still avoid the pitfalls of "semantic instrumentalism," that is, that it still can diagnose some cases in which speakers purport to use referential expressions ("that (the shortest spy)," say) as cases of failure of reference because the norm is not met—and not just cases in which there is no referent.

A fuller exploration of this kind is out of the question here. What I aim to achieve in this chapter is to provide some support for any theory of singular thought incorporating the two main features of the one I have outlined, on the basis that it is in virtue of them that any such theory can provide a satisfactory account of the semantics of textual and paratextual uses of fictional sentences. The two features in question are: an epistemic requirement on singular thought (as opposed to a merely psychological one in terms of "cognitively significant mental files," like the ones by Jeshion and Friend to be considered below); and a semantics with descriptivist features, even if they remain merely at a presuppositional level in the case of the assertoric utterances made by default when uttering declarative sentences that we have considered so far. In the following section I will show how any such proposal explains, and is to that extent supported by, intuitions about textual and paratextual uses, by contrasting the merits of the account it allows us to provide with the difficulties of the most significant alternative views.

3. Committal and Noncommittal Accounts of Fictional Discourse

I said before that our intuitions suggest a *noncommittal* account of the semantics of textual and paratextual uses of sentences such as (1): one

¹⁸ Cf. Pryor (2004).

not committed to the existence of fictional entities. The most popular contemporary account in sync with those intuitions is Walton's (1990) deservedly influential theory, or variations on it such as Currie's (1990) or Lamarque and Olsen's (1994). On the version that I myself (2007) have advanced, Joyce's utterance is not an assertion, but a different speech act of pretending or make-believe, which should be understood in terms of norms stating contents that proper appreciators of Joyce's tale should *imagine*. As Walton rightly emphasized, these are not just pretence views; for it is not enough to say that the fiction-maker pretends to assert—or to order, ask, and so on—to fully characterize what he does, among other things because there are cases of pretence which in no way constitute fiction-making. The fiction-maker is engaged in a fully contentful intentional behavior.

This poses a problem for Walton's own proposal, or the related one by Evans (1982). Evans adopts Walton's appeal to practices of make-believe, but Walton follows Evans in assuming a very strong non-descriptivist version of referentialism for (most uses of) singular terms, according to which sentences including empty singular terms lack content, whether or not they are embedded in intensional contexts. Singular thoughts are object-dependent not just in that a difference in objects is thereby a difference in thoughts, as I assume is required to account for rigidity, but in that the thought cannot exist unless the object does. Now, even if Joyce's act is not an assertion but rather an invitation to his readers' imagination, the purported imaginings should nonetheless have contents; and non-descriptivists must tell us what, on their view, the contribution of names such as "Mr Leopold Bloom" to such contents is.

Evans (1982: 349–50) correctly questions Kripke's attempts on that score in his unpublished Locke lectures:

we are told that there is a special use of a singular term (a 'quasi-intensional' use) available to those who believe the term is empty. But we are not told what this use amounts to. [. . .] And since we are given no account of this use, it remains intensely problematic how it can be that, although there is no proposition expressed by '*Fa*', there can nevertheless be a proposition expressed by 'There is a proposition which says of *a* that it is *F*'.

However, I do not think Evans is ultimately more successful, and the same applies to Walton's own efforts. The problems for both extend to paratextual uses; because, as Evans (1982: 364) rightly emphasizes, "the

recognition of such an operator [‘It is fictionally the case that . . .’] cannot provide a general solution to the problem posed by the conniving use of empty but Russellian singular terms. For if a sentence fails to be properly intelligible when used on its own, the same will hold of any more complex sentence in which it is embedded.” To solve this problem, both Evans and Walton suggest that “serious discussion of ‘what went on in the novel’ or ‘what went on in the play’ also involves pretence” (364).

Evans’s very brief account (contained in two paragraphs, 1982: 361–2) allows for “quasi-understanding” empty Russellian (i.e., non-descriptive) singular terms; for this to occur, the subject must “possess, and call upon, certain information” (363). He illustrates this with a case of a perceptual illusion, or apparent illusion, of a little green man. The “information” he appeals to is the perceptual experience that may or may not be caused by an actual green man, and may or may not be accordingly a perception. There is quasi-understanding if the information is brought to bear on the interpretation of the perhaps empty singular term, exactly as if the experience was veridical and the term not empty. However, I cannot see how this plausible psychological story helps to answer the semantic question: on the assumption that (1) lacks the content that it is supposed to have, how can it help determine the proposition that we are supposed to make-believe, imagine, or whatever it is we are supposed to do with it? As far as I can see, this question remains unanswered, both for the textual and the paratextual uses.

The same applies to Walton’s account of paratextual uses of sentences such as (1). His main idea, like Evans’s, is that by making such assertions we primarily illustrate by exemplification further acts made fictional by the fiction, in the present case Joyce’s *Ulysses*. It is not just what intuitively constitutes the content of such a fiction that is fictional, or correctly imagined when appreciating it; the fiction also makes it fictional—that is, authorizes us to imagine—that we make correct speech acts in reaction to it, such as true assertions. By uttering (1), we are asserting by exemplification that it is *also* made fictional by Joyce’s fiction that one who asserts in response to it that Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls asserts truly: “when a participant in a game of make-believe authorized by a given representation fictionally asserts something by uttering an ordinary statement and in doing so makes a genuine assertion, what she genuinely asserts is true if and only if it is fictional in the game that she speaks truly”

(Walton 1990: 399). This is an interesting suggestion; but it does not suffice to deal with our problem, because, as Walton himself notices (400), the class of pretended assertions thus authorized by a given fiction should be characterized semantically, and it remains totally unclear how, under the referentialist assumption, this can be done. The account should allow that a Spanish speaker who reacted to *Ulysses* by uttering a Spanish translation of (1) would thereby be making an equally true claim. Thus, Walton's account appeals to "kinds" of pretences. But how can "Mr Leopold Bloom" semantically contribute to characterizing any such kind of pretence, if it lacks semantic content?

What Walton has to say in response is as disappointing as Evans's reply: "I know of no informative individuating description that can be given of this kinds of pretence. To pretend in this way is not to pretend to assert the proposition that [Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls] if there is no such proposition. It is to pretend to make an assertion, more specifically, to pretend to assert de re of someone that he [ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls]. But not all acts of pretence of *this* sort are of [the relevant] kind. We need not insist that an individuating description be provided, however" (Walton 1990: 402; I have replaced Walton's example with mine). But the problem is not, as this may suggest, that it may be indeterminate which among several *prima facie* acceptable paraphrases are fully adequate, or what the relative merits of each one are, as may happen in the case of metaphorical or ironic utterances. The problem is rather that the object-dependent conception of singular thought does not leave room for any candidate.¹⁹

Let me take stock. We have been examining the problems posed by apparently singular claims concerning the contents of fictions, such as textual and paratextual uses of (1), to accounts that want to remain noncommittal, as seems intuitively correct, and assume a very straightforward conception of the distinction between singular and general thought. We have seen that this straightforwardness makes it difficult for these accounts to characterize the semantic content of the pretences (or otherwise non-assertoric intentional acts) they posit to remain noncommittal. Let us see in contrast how an account of singular thought with the two features I highlighted at the end of the preceding section can deal with these problems; and let us consider

¹⁹ Friend (2007: 145–6) expresses related concerns.

to begin with a case involving indexicals, such as the short story I imagined earlier including the sentence “he thought this just before dying.” The semantics *in the narrow sense* of utterances of sentences like this I outlined before has it that they are assertions of singular contents about the most salient male when the token of “he” is produced, if any, that is, if the speaker meets the norm of reference relative to the purported referent. If this is not the case (say, in the most obvious case, because there is no such male), the utterance still semantically (in the narrow sense) constitutes the meaningful, though unsuccessful, assertion of a singular content.

Now, I do not think we should stop here if we want to provide an accurate account of what the fiction-maker is doing, that is, of the semantics (now *in the wider sense*) of textual uses. This is essentially because of a point that Walton makes in the text quoted above: “not all acts of pretence of *this* sort are of [the relevant] kind.” Both when Conan Doyle writes “Holmes is a clever detective” and when Chandler writes “Marlowe is a clever detective,” the sentences they use express the very same gappy singular proposition; in both cases the utterer pretends *to assert de re of someone that he* is a clever detective. But I do not think we want to say that the contents of *their* speech acts (the contents we, as sensible appreciators, are supposed to imagine) are those “gappy” singular contents shared by the two utterances. Fiction-producers merely pretend to assert these gappy propositions; what they want thereby fiction-consumers to imagine are not those rather uninteresting contents, but other related richer descriptive ones instead.

The present account of sentences like “he thought this just before dying” or “Marlowe is a clever detective” is “two-dimensional,” in that it gives us descriptive contents additional to the singular contents. These descriptive contents are still singular, in that they are about the tokens of the referential expressions or, in general, the contexts in which they are produced; in our cases, that the salient male when the token of “he” was produced thought such and such before dying, and that the object called “Marlowe” is a clever detective.²⁰ These are the contents I contend we are supposed to imagine. In textual uses, as Walton suggests, the fiction-makers are

²⁰ See my (2006b) for elaboration. Two-dimensional contents like those I am envisaging were firstly introduced in Stalnaker (1978); Stalnaker provides at the end of the paper an application to “Sherlock Holmes does not exist.” A similar idea is contained in Perry’s (2001) multi-propositional proposal; Perry’s reflexive propositions are described in a framework of structured contents closer to the one I am assuming than Stalnaker’s possible worlds metatheory.

primarily indicating by exemplification the kind of speech acts that should be imagined; we avoid Walton's and Evans's difficulties because the speech acts that the sentences they use signify by default, the ones intended to serve as illustration for those that the readers are supposed to imagine, even if unsuccessful if taken at face value, are fully meaningful. On this view, the semantics in the wider sense of textual uses is descriptive.²¹ The same applies to paratextual uses, which I take to pragmatically implicate explicit ascriptions of content to fictions, along the lines of (4). To deal with the semantics of the latter, we would need to draw on neo-Fregean accounts of propositional attitudes, such as "hidden-indexical" or "interpreted logical form" views, taking advantage of the descriptive features already present in non-embedded uses.²²

Stacie Friend (forthcoming) has objected that a descriptivist view concerning the content of imaginings cannot properly capture a certain "object-directness" which we also have regarding the content of fictions. I will discuss her arguments in the next and final section, after concluding this by contrasting the present view again with an alternative account, now a committal one.

Accounts invoking referents to fictional names are a permanent temptation to referentialists, because they promise to fill the gaps left in their proposals by empty singular terms. However, it is not enough to assume the ontology of fictional entities and posit them as the referents of expressions such as "Bloom" in (1)–(3). There is still much more work to do, and it is unclear that it can be done without in effect invoking the apparatus of pretences and imaginings deployed in noncommittal accounts.²³ Thus, for instance, even if our intuitions concerning (2) might straightforwardly

²¹ In this respect, the proposal is close to Currie's (1990) and Lamarque and Olsen's (1994).

²² See Crimmins and Perry (1989) for the former, and Pietroski (1996) for the latter. Of course, the proposal should not have it that a paratextual use of 'he thought this just before dying' ends up ascribing to the relevant fiction a content concerning the token of 'he' used by the ascriber, or (1) one concerning a 'Bloom' naming-practice leading to the token used in its context, in the latter case because the existence of no such practice needs be assumed, in the former because such token is irrelevant to the content of the fiction. The ascribed content concerns a token of 'he' used by the fictional narrator that my account presupposes, or a naming-practice fictionally depended upon in the context of that narrator's acts. On everybody's account, ascriptions of propositional attitudes are heavily context-dependent, independently of the issue of whether or not descriptive material ends up constituting the truth-conditions of the report, as I assume. I will discuss these problems later, in relation to the issue of the "intuitions of singularity."

²³ Friend (2007) helpfully summarizes the difficulties for committal accounts, among them the ones I am interested in to be mentioned presently.

suggest an ontology of fictional entities, the case of (3), as Everett (2007) insists, points in the opposite direction.²⁴ Going back to the textual and paratextual uses we are discussing here, we find versions of this very same difficulty. Thus, as Braun (2005: sec. 6) emphasizes with regard to Salmon's (1998) proposal, it is not clear how referential expressions in textual and paratextual uses can refer to any entity, fictional or otherwise, if the referential intentions of their users in no way underwrite this. Similarly, the committal theorists should distinguish predications in which properties are ascribed to fictional entities as such (*being famous*, *being a fictional entity*) from predications ascribing properties they only fictionally have (*eating inner organs*), and they should explain what in the intentions and thoughts of speakers underwrites this distinction.

4. Lessons for Singular Thoughts

Let us go back to the wider issue of the nature of singular thought. I said before that there are two basic sets of intuitions any account should explain: Kripke's intuitions of rigidity, and Quine's intuitions about cases in which thoughts about spies would (being about specific individuals)) and would not (being general) make us interesting to intelligence agencies. It is clear that the first set of intuitions do not establish that, in thinking singular thoughts, we cannot be at the same time thinking descriptively of the relevant *res*; and not only because rare descriptions such as "the even prime" or "the actual inventor of the zip" are rigid, but more importantly because we very commonly express rigid thoughts by referentially using ordinary descriptions. Focusing on the second set of intuitions, referentialists such as Evans insisted on a clear-cut distinction between descriptive and acquaintance-based thoughts. The problems with such a view are well known and widely discussed. Here I have argued that it is difficult to see how it can be combined with intuitively desirable noncommittal accounts of textual and paratextual uses of fictional discourse involving empty singular terms.

The alternative is to liberalize the conception of singular thought; and the problem is how to do so without simply collapsing singular thought into

²⁴ My own view (forthcoming) about metatextual uses is a figurativist one along the lines of Yablo (2001).

general, descriptive thought, perhaps trying to account for the second set of intuitions along the lines of “semantic instrumentalism”: the appearance of a distinguished “singularity” comes simply from the deployment of the apparatus of singular reference. In a classic paper on these matters, Sosa (1970) appeals instead to differences in the significance (vis-à-vis contextually relevant plans, projects or interests) of the descriptions, to distinguish singular from general (ultimately equally descriptive) thoughts. The recent work by Robin Jeshion is, as I said before, the most interesting development of views such as this. Here the idea is that to think singular thoughts is to think by using mental files, which by their nature play a significant role in the cognitive life of the subject. For her, thinking of individuals from mental files is constitutive of singular thought. We think singular thoughts about individuals if and only if we think of them through a mental file. Furthermore, mental file is initiated for an individual only if that individual is significant to the agent (Jeshion this volume: Chapter 4).

Against this, I have been pointing out that fictional discourse would then force defenders of these views to say that users of textual and paratextual utterances of (1) entertain singular thoughts about Bloom, be they “gappy” thoughts, or thoughts about abstract fictional entities; for, to the extent that there is some psychological reality to the notion of “mental files” (which I think there is), I assume that psychological research on producing and understanding fiction will confirm the phenomenologically obvious proposition that we keep such files about fictional characters, frequently at the very least as rich and as significant in our mental lives as those we keep about real objects.

How bad is this? I have already mentioned the difficulties for the two options. The problem with positing *ficta* as the referents of mental files in these cases is that this is not enough to have an accurate account of the case. We still need to know why in some cases mental files allow us to think straightforwardly about concrete objects, while in other cases they are only intended to help us think about *ficta*. Relatedly, we need to know why in ordinary cases the mental predicates that go inside the files are supposed to represent properties that the referents of the files exemplify, while in fiction-related cases some at least of those predicates (“eating inner organs of beasts and fowl,” as opposed to “being a fictional character”) merely serve to represent properties that constitute or individuate the referent, but are not supposed to be exemplified by it.

In view of these problems, perhaps the other alternative seems more appealing. But I do not think it is. The view I have outlined adopts from referentialists such as Braun (1993, 2005) the idea that assertions of “Vulcan is smaller than Mars” have gappy contents. Assertions of atomic sentences with these contents are untrue, false according to the free logics that Braun and Sainsbury opt for, neither true nor false according to the supervaluationist one I prefer. This captures the fact that these assertions are *wrong*, with respect to a dimension of evaluation (truth) essential for the nature of assertions; similar remarks could be made about questions or orders with these contents. However, there is absolutely nothing wrong about the acts of fiction-makers who use empty names; there is, for instance, no appearance of “imaginative resistance” on the part of appreciators of such fictions.²⁵

Similarly, by placing features accounting for differences in “cognitive significance” between “Hesperus is smaller than Mars” and “Phosphorus is smaller than Mars,” or “today is Tuesday” and “tomorrow was Tuesday” (with the respective contexts of utterance coordinated so that indexicals and tenses have the same referents) at a different level than that of the asserted content—be they the level of the “ways of believing” of referentialists such as Salmon and Braun, or my presuppositional level—we capture the intuitive commonalities in “what is said” among utterances made by people otherwise with very different perspectives on the objects they talk about, explain communicative success, etc (cf. Perry 2001: 5, 19). A good case can be made that these commonalities extend to straightforward assertions of “Marlowe is a clever detective” and “Holmes is a clever detective” by confused speakers who have taken fictional stories for factual ones; the manifest differences in cognitive significance between such utterances would be accounted for in any of the usual ways.

But nothing of this sort can be said about the contents that fictions intend proper appreciators to imagine. While the mode of thinking through which we think of Venus when we assert “Hesperus is smaller than Mars” is intuitively irrelevant to what we assert, in that many other modes of thinking about it may do, the corresponding modes of thinking “about” Marlowe and Holmes provided by the relevant fictions are essential to their contents: no proper appreciation can ignore them; no proper appreciation can do without building the corresponding files, starting with “object

²⁵ Weatherson (2004) offers a good presentation of the puzzles of imaginative resistance.

picked out by the relevant ‘Marlowe’ naming practice,” and stacking into it all the information about the character derived from the fiction. (We should not be misled here by the fact, which Walton (1990) emphasizes, that not all propositions constituting the content of fictions are on an equal rank with respect to a proper appreciation; many can be ignored, while still having a good notion of what the fiction is about.)²⁶

I would like to conclude by discussing a challenge posed by Stacie Friend (forthcoming) to noncommittal descriptivist views like the one I favor. She considers a debate between Nabokov and another critic about the more precise nature of the “vermin” that Kafka’s Gregor Samsa is changed into in *The Metamorphosis*; Nabokov asserts (5), while the critic denies it:

(5) Gregor Samsa has been changed into a beetle

On the basis of this example, she characterizes 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.” *Co-identification*, or *intersubjective identification* is “the phenomenon of thinking and talking about the same thing, even when there is no such thing”; *counter-fictional imagining* consist 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.”

I will indicate how these two features are compatible with the kind of descriptivist account I am assuming here. My proposal for fiction-making (2007), following Walton’s, gives an important role to the “props” that fiction-makers use to indicate the imaginings required of accurate

²⁶ The reader will have noticed that the preceding arguments apply equally well to non-empty singular terms occurring in fictions, such as ‘Napoleon’ in *War and Peace* or ‘London’ in *1984*. Indeed, my view is that their contribution to the content of the relevant fictions is as much descriptive as it is in the case of empty terms. Friend (2000, forthcoming) argues against this. One of her arguments is that there is a clear an important intuitive sense in which *1984* is about, or refers to, the real London. I think this forgets that there is also a clear intuitive sense in which descriptive claims (say, concerning the object picked out by a given naming practice) are about, or refer to, the entities uniquely satisfying the description. However, there is much more to say about this matter, which is why I have concentrated on empty terms, leaving it for further work.

appreciators; in the cases we have been discussing, the (more or less idealized) concrete utterances they produce, and the semantic features they have in the language to which they belong. I assume a fictional narrator, who acts in a given fictional context, fictionally including the presupposed appropriate utterances of demonstratives such as “he,” and the fictional naming practices relevant for the interpretation of proper names like “Gregor Samsa.” We are supposed to imagine, of the given token (or expression-in-context), that it meets the associated semantic requirements; namely, that there is a related naming practice involving the name-type “Gregor Samsa,” a salient male when “he” is used, and so on.

I think this is enough to account for the two features that Friend mentions. Nabokov and his critic ultimately disagree about the ascription of a descriptive content to *The Metamorphosis*: Nabokov accepts, and the critic rejects, that *The Metamorphosis* has it that the person named “Gregor Samsa” there (i.e., the one picked out by the relevant naming-practice in that context of use of tokens of that expression) has been changed into a beetle.²⁷ Strictly speaking, the content that they are disagreeing about is only singular with respect to the contribution of “*The Metamorphosis*” and the tokens of “Gregor Samsa” it includes. With respect to the contribution of “Gregor Samsa” itself, the content they are disagreeing about has just a common “descriptive aboutness”: the only singularity at stake is the one existing when A and B disagree whether or not John believes that the planet causing perturbations in Mercury’s orbit is cold.

Do we have intuitions manifesting that the proposition that A and B disagree about is “more” singular with respect to the content-element contributed, say, by “John,” than with respect to the content-element contributed by “the planet causing perturbations in Mercury’s orbit”? Yes, we do have such intuitions: the proposition is rigid with respect to the first, but not with respect to the second; and any descriptive elements associated with “John” do not make it into the asserted content, while descriptive elements are contributed to the asserted content by the description “the planet causing perturbations in Mercury’s orbit.” Can these intuitions be

²⁷ As I said before, I take paratextual uses to be elliptical for explicit propositional attitude ascriptions such as (4). A full account should of course explain how contents of this sort are signified by utterances like (5). I would assimilate them to metatextual uses such as (2) and (3), and provide a “figurativist” or “fictionalist” account for them on which, in the present case, the only truly asserted content would be the attitude ascription I am assuming.

used against the proposal I am advancing? I do not think so. I do not think that our intuitions underwrite a claim that “Gregor Samsa” behaves like a rigid designator with respect to the content of (5) that Nabokov and the critic seriously disagree about.

In the first place, the descriptive content associated with “Gregor Samsa” (in particular, *person named “Gregor Samsa” with tokens used in The Metamorphosis*) is *not* intuitively irrelevant with respect to that content; in the second place, it is not intuitively the case that, when we consider counterfactual circumstances to determine whether the object of the disagreement is true or untrue there, we have to determine how things are with a single Samsa. Of course, the theorist of fictional characters will posit a Samsa-fictional character to account for the object of the disagreement; my only claim here is that he cannot base this on direct intuition concerning the character of the content disagreed about. He will need theory to back up his claim; and a theory persuasive enough to answer the objections advanced at the end of the preceding section, in particular capable of explaining how it is that the subject-predicate structure in (5) does not absurdly signify that the abstract entity he takes to be the referent of “Gregor Samsa” *exemplifies* the property that “has been changed into a beetle” signifies, but merely “encodes” it (assuming his theory appeals here to the distinction between *exemplifying* and *encoding*).

The descriptivist proposal I have put forward thus accounts for the “intuitions of singularity” that we do seem to have with respect to (5). What about “counter-fictional imagining”? Modal claims about fiction should be handled with care. As Currie (2003) points out, the fact that Anna Karenina merely contingently falls for Vronsky should be acknowledged even by proponents of fictional characters according to whom all properties ascribed in a fiction are constitutive of them—so that, *prima facie* paradoxically, Anna Karenina necessarily falls for Vronsky. Put in terms of the distinction between *exemplifying* and *encoding*, the envisaged theorist would dispel the paradox by contending that, while Anna necessarily exemplifies the property of encoding falling for Vronsky, the character *encodes* the modal property of contingently falling for Vronsky. Of course, I purport to manage without fictional characters, but a corresponding care should be exercised. The way I would put it, we should distinguish the modal contents that are part of the content of a given fiction (such as that someone called “Anna Karenina” contingently falls for Vronsky) with modal claims about the

fictions themselves (such as that, on the assumption that the contents of fictions are constitutive of them, the novel *Anna Karenina* is such that necessarily the woman called “Anna Karenina” in it falls for Vronsky.

I do not see any problem for dealing with the “counterfactual imaginings” that Friend contemplates if these distinctions are properly acknowledged. I assume that she is contemplating modal contents for *The Metamorphosis*, which as far as I can see can be ascribed to it without abandoning descriptivist assumptions. So, it can be argued for instance that *The Metamorphosis* is such that the family life of the person named “Gregor Samsa” in it would have been such and such if he had not been transformed into a vermin. (Of course, we could make less interesting modal claims about how the fiction would have been if the author had made counterfactual decisions; it is moot to what extent this alternative modal claims are consistent with the view about the essence of fictions contemplated in the previous paragraph, but this is neither here nor there for present purposes.) The singularity manifested by counterfactual imaginings does not force us to go beyond the descriptive interpretation I have outlined, or to posit *ficta* either.²⁸

In summary, fiction gives us a good case for working out in more detail than I have been able to provide here a conception of singular thought intermediate between the radical referentialist one, on which it is a matter of acquaintance without description, and the latitudinarian one on which it is a matter of significant description without acquaintance. On the strict acquaintance view, the singular-sounding utterances that fiction-makers and fiction-critics produce lack the singular contents required as departing points to convey the general, descriptive contents that their audiences are intended to imagine. On the latitudinarian view, there is nothing wrong with those singular-sounding utterances of fiction-makers and fiction-critics (to the extent that they are backed by, and provoke, significant mental files), so there is no motivation for the inferences to the descriptive contents that, I have argued, an acceptable noncommittal account of fictional discourse requires. If convinced that, as I have argued, the contents ultimately to be imagined are neither gappy-singular nor singular about fictional characters, the latitudinarian could try arguing that the speech act of fiction-making

²⁸ Although Friend (forthcoming) does criticize descriptivist views on the basis of the arguments just discussed, her proposal incorporates descriptivist elements (to deal with the ‘Marlowe’/‘Holmes’ problem mentioned before) in the contents she posits, in fact token-reflexive elements similar to the ones my own proposal envisages. Thus, I do not know to what extent we ultimately disagree.

is distinctive enough to suggest by itself the need to infer a descriptive content of the kind I have suggested. But s/he owes us, in that case, an explanation of why this is so; and the explanation should not be the one that the proponent of the intermediary view provides: to wit, that while the speech act of assertion is such that the speaker ought to know who or which the referent of the referring expression s/he uses are, the speech act of fiction-making is such that the application of this norm is precluded.

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