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The semantics of fiction

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The paper reviews proposals by Abell, Predelli, and others on the semantics of fiction, focusing on the discourse through which fictions are created. Predelli develops the *radical fictionalism* of former writers like Kripke and van Inwagen, according to which that discourse is contentless and does not express propositions. This paper offers reasons to doubt these claims. It then explores realist proposals like Abell's in which singular terms in fictions refer to fictional characters, understood as socially created representational artifacts, and irrealist alternatives in which the discourse is fully meaningful even though those terms fail to refer.

KEYWORDS
fiction, fictional content, fictional entities, fictionality, reference in fiction

1 | INTRODUCTION: VARIETIES OF FICTIONAL DISCOURSE

This paper critically reviews work on the semantics of fictional discourse. Related surveys include a recent one by this author (García-Carpintero, 2019a). The novelty here lies first in focusing on significant new proposals such as Abell's (2020) and Predelli's (2020), among others, and in adopting the unusual perspective of focusing on fiction-constituting discourse.[1] To set the stage, I will make a distinction within what I called "fictional discourse", implicit in works from the 1970s that shaped current debates, by Lewis (1978), van Inwagen (1977, 1983), Kripke (2013), and Walton (1990), which others made explicit later (cf., e.g., Currie, 1990, pp.

[1]To avoid overlaps, I refer the reader to the previous paper for further references and discussion of earlier work. I will target here works not reviewed in the earlier piece. All references to Lewis's paper are to the 1983 version with postscripts in his *Philosophical Papers* vol. 1.

158, 171; Thomasson, 2003, 207).[2] I rely on Bonomi's (2008) apt terminology, which I regularly use in discussions of these issues. By default, declarative sentences convey assertions, which we evaluate as correct or otherwise depending on whether they are true (García-Carpintero, 2021a). Consider three uses of declaratives in connection with fiction:

1. Emma Woodhouse had lived nearly 21 years in the world.
2. (According to/In *Emma*) Emma Woodhouse had lived nearly 21 years.
3. Emma Woodhouse is a fictional character.

Take first Austen's utterance of (1), as part of her longer utterance which, simplifying slightly, we can think of as the act of putting forward *Emma* for readers to enjoy. Following Bonomi, I will call uses like this *textual*. Even when, if taken literally as assertions, they conflict with what we believe, we do not typically find any tension in accepting them in this context and we would not find it plausible to criticize Austen on this regard.[3] The other types lack this feature. There is, first, the *paratextual* use of sentences such as (2)—with or without a prefix—to report on what goes on in a fiction concerning the character of its *fictional world*, its *plot* or *story*. Readers of *Emma* would count (2) in such a use as true, while they would reject as false the result of substituting "51" for "21" in it. Finally, I will call uses of sentences such as (3) *metatextual*; they are also intuitively truth-evaluable relative to the actual world but not content-reporting, in that they are not (obviously) equivalent to explicit content ascriptions like the prefixed version of (2).[4]

Given the intuitive differences, it is understandable that most writers who discuss the issues I will review focus on paratextual and metatextual uses.[5] Semantics aims to assign truth-conditions to sentences in a systematic way, explaining in so doing the *systematicity* and *productivity* of our semantic mastery.[6] Being intuitively truth-evaluable, paratextual and metatextual uses appear to have a semantics in this sense. Thus, Lewis's (1978) aims to provide truth-conditions for paratextual uses like (2). He acknowledges metatextual uses like (3), but chooses

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[2]Related classifications are sometimes made by resorting to Lamarque's (1996) distinction between *internal* and *external* perspectives (García-Carpintero, 2022a), but I find them less clear-cut for present purposes (Semeijn & Zalta, 2021, Section 2.2).

[3]The "typically" hedge acknowledges cases of *imaginative resistance*, compare Stock (2017, Chapter 4). To illustrate, I learnt that fact-checkers at the *New Yorker* asked Antonya Nelson to correct the "inaccurate" color of the Wichita police cars for her 1992 fiction piece *Naked women*. The fact-checkers must have thought that Wichita readers would find the initial piece's proposal to imagine in that respect jarring. Most of us share this incongruity experience.

[4]The hedge is here due to the appeal to "extended fictions" envisaged by Walton (1990, Chapter 10) and other irrealists like Brock (2002) and Everett (2013). Negative existentials like "Emma does not exist" count as metatextual (and true) in their more intuitively accessible use; "Emma exists" contradicts it in that use, but it is intuitively taken as paratextual and true. Such baffling impressions (Reimer, 2001) motivate pragmatic, metalinguistic treatments, (van Inwagen, 1977, p. 308, fn. 11), (Kripke, 2013, p. 159), (Yablo, 2020), and (Felappi, 2021).

[5]Yablo (2020, p. 78) does not mention textual uses; Collins (2019, Section 1) has a category of *in-fiction* uses, examples of which appear to be all paratextual uses. Semeijn and Zalta (2021, pp. 173–174) note the neglect, but they argue that "the [textual] use of fictional names ... distinctively differs" from others (p. 175), on account of which they also brush off the semantics of names in that use. Their argument relies on the observation that the mixed uses that (7) below illustrates are awkward with textual uses. My feeling is that the awkwardness is to be explained by the mixture of fictionalizing and assertoric force that, according to DR (see below), they exhibit. On both the realist and irrealist views presented in Section 3 this is not to do with the semantics of names, which is uniform for textual and paratextual uses.

[6]*Systematicity* concerns the fact that speakers who competently understand "John loves Mary" can equally understand "Mary loves John"; *productivity*, the fact that competent understanding is in principle unbounded: "The son of Mary swims", "the son of the son of Mary swims", and so on.

to put them aside (p. 263). The main explanatory goal he sets up for himself concerns the behavior of prima facie empty names like "Emma Woodhouse" in utterances like (2): How could they be true or even merely truth-evaluable, if we reject the "Meinongian" view that the names (against first appearances) do refer after all? Lewis uses "Meinongian" in a capacious sense, encompassing all realist views that take fictional names to refer to some exotic entity; it applies to theorists like Kripke (2013) and van Inwagen (1977). Their arguments for positing such entities focus primarily on the metatextual uses that Lewis casts aside, but both extend their accounts to paratextual uses.[7] Lewis (1978, p. 263) grants that they can thus score abductive points.

In this review, however, the focus will be on the semantics of textual uses—if there is one for them. The standpoint will be foundational; from this perspective, I will argue that textual uses play a fundamental, grounding role. Our first issue (Section 2) will be whether they have a semantics. Kripke (2013, p. 24), Lewis (1978, pp. 266–267), and van Inwagen (1977, p. 306) casually assumed an account articulated by Searle (1975), which was then common among analytic philosophers: the view that textual uses are *mere pretense* ("MP", henceforth).[8] MP suggests that they do not have a semantics, a view that both Kripke (2013, pp. 24–25) and van Inwagen (1977, p. 306)—but not Lewis (1978)—explicitly embrace.[9]

Searle (1975) rejects the alternative view—which Currie (1990) elaborated later along Gricean lines—that, in proffering declarative sentences, authors of fiction are "not performing the illocutionary act of making an assertion but the illocutionary act of telling a story or writing a novel" (p. 323); I will refer to this representational act as *fictionalizing*. I call Searle's view *mere* pretense because the proponent of the alternative view (which I will call the *dedicated representation* view, "DR") agrees that fictionalizers may resort to pretense to perform the fictionalizing act: They may have actors pretending or themselves play a role; Lewis (1978, p. 266) describes Doyle as playing the role of Doctor Watson. But they need not do so, and this distinguishes DR from MP: They might convey the contents of their dedicated fictionalizing act directly, without any pretense. On DR, fiction need not be "parasitic on 'serious' discourse" (Walton, 1983, p. 84).[10]

2 | DO TEXTUAL USES HAVE A SEMANTICS?

Predelli (2020) presents a powerful defense of Searle's claims, by developing Searlian themes into a compelling argument against DR. In addition to MP, the view that textual uses do not have a semantics is motivated by Millianism, which Predelli (2017) defends in another recent book. This is the view that "a proper name is, so to speak, *simply* a name. It *simply* refers to its

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[7]Van Inwagen (1977, pp. 299–300) rejects *Meinongianism*, because he uses the term in a more restricted sense than Lewis's, applying only to views on which fictional names refer to the specific sort of exotic entity that Meinong is supposed to have envisaged.

[8]Proponents include MacDonald (1954), Ohmann (1971), and many others.

[9]Lewis (p. 267) says: "[A]t our world, the storyteller only pretends that 'Sherlock Holmes' has the semantic character of an ordinary proper name. We have no reason at all to suppose that the name, as used here at our world, really does have that character. As we use it, it may be very unlike an ordinary proper name." In conceding that fictional names in textual discourse are not names Lewis is granting too much to Millians, see footnote 27 below; but he assumes that they do have a use with its specific semantics. Wolterstorff (1980, p. 154) and Currie (1990, p. 131) defend a view like Lewis's.

[10]Recanati (2021) argues for the *asymmetric dependence thesis* that "fictional reference and fictional assertion are parasitic on genuine reference and genuine assertion" (p. 19); Szabó (2020, p. 62, fn. 5) also assumes it. This is what Walton correctly rejects. But Walton (1983) casts off DR too. He (1990, pp. 36, fn. 24, 391, 396, 417) also agrees with van Inwagen and Kripke that textual utterances do not express propositions, see footnote 13 below.

bearer, and has no other linguistic function. In particular … a name does not describe its bearer as possessing any special identifying properties" (Kripke, 1979, pp. 239–240). This appears to entail that (1) does not have a content—does not express a proposition. If "Emma Woodhouse" has "no other linguistic function" than to "simply refer", then it appears not to have any meaning.[11] Predelli (2020) endorses Millianism, but he offers reasons beyond it for the view that he calls *radical fictionalism*, "RF", henceforth: The view that a sentence in fictional discourse including prima facie empty fictional names like "Emma Woodhouse" "is not a sentence, and it encodes no proposition whatsoever" (p. 23).

This creates a problem. Walton (1990) describes Austen's use of (1) as a "prop in a game of make-believe", inviting a fiction-constituting imagining. On this view, fictions have contents conveyed by the textual uses constituting them, which readers are to imagine. It would be difficult to deny this; Predelli (2020, pp. 37–38) and Recanati (2021, p. 26) do grant it. Such imaginings have propositional contents (Ryle, 1933, p. 29; Stock, 2017, pp. 4–9). This raises the question, how does the sentence found in Austen's text help to fix what audiences are to imagine? (Predelli, 2021, pp. 77, 89). How does its occurrence help to determine the propositional content of the relevant imaginings? Unlike Kripke and van Inwagen, Walton at least confronts this question, but he does not answer it convincingly (García-Carpintero, 2010, pp. 286–287; von Solodkoff & Woodward, 2017, pp. 413–414; Zemach, 1998). Predelli does a better job.

Predelli's (2020, Section 1.5, 2021, p. 84) Millianism admits some empty names; he accepts the idea of "gappy propositions" (Braun, 2005), hence emptiness per se is not for him the problem with fictional names.[12] His worry is that real names must be "launched": Something like an "initial baptism" must have taken place; but in the case of fictional names it has not, he claims, which is why they are not real names (2020, Section 2.1; 2021, pp. 88–89). Nonetheless, when we speak, we convey (or "impart", as Predelli, 2020, Section 1.5 puts it) information (or misinformation) beyond what our words semantically encode, and beyond implicatures that they pragmatically communicate. For example, we convey that our words are uttered in a certain tone, or that they belong to a given language. Similarly, when Austen "displays" the sentence-like expression (1)—she does not produce a *sentence*: "Emma Woodhouse" not being a name, what she uttered is not a sentence (2020, Section 2.3)—she *imparts* that a bearer of "Emma Woodhouse" had lived nearly 21 years.

Predelli accepts an inchoate proto-theory of fiction, on which it is a "contentful exercise"; by performing locutionary acts, the (verbal) fiction-maker conveys propositions constituting the "storyworld" for them to be imagined (Predelli, 2020, p. 38). Now, Austen cannot be inviting us to imagine a singular proposition signified by the sentence-like expression she displays, because on RF there is no such sentence, and there is no proposition, not even a "gappy" one (2020, p. 23). But Austen can ask us to imagine the metalinguistic, reflexive proposition that she imparted; according to Predelli (2020, p. 29), this is what she does. Predelli (2020, pp. 31–32) offers quotes showing a usually surreptitious and unmotivated reliance on metalinguistic ascent to report fictional content conveyed with fictional names.[13] He thus can explain how fictions

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[11]Kripke (2013) argues that "the propositions that occur in a work of fiction would only be pretended propositions" (p. 24) on the basis of a "pretense principle" (roughly, Recanati's *asymmetric dependence thesis*, fn. 10). This is a non-sequitur, see below, footnote 18. Van Inwagen (1977, 1983) takes the intuitively problematic (cf. fn. 3 above) claims that Dickens is not "writing about anything" and is "asserting nothing" (1977, p. 301) to establish the even more questionable contention that he does not "express any proposition" (p. 306; 1983, p. 73).

[12]Recanati (2021, pp. 19, 20) does motivate his related view with Millian considerations.

[13]Here is one more example: "[I]n my view, there are no propositions 'about' mere fictions, and hence none that are make-believe. It is make-believe not that Gulliver visited Lilliput, but that a man named 'Gulliver' visited a place called 'Lilliput'", Walton (1978, p., 12, fn. 7). Compare Stokke (2021, pp. 7830, 7833) for a further illustration.

invite contentful imaginings even though many of their expressions lack content. He (2020, Section 4.5) also offers compelling replies to other problems for metalinguistic accounts, such as von Solodkoff and Woodward's (2017, p. 413) worry that, on them, translation may alter content.

Nonetheless, RF is hard to swallow. How does Austen invite the relevant imaginings? Doyle does it through the pretense of a teller, Watson, fictionally asserting, and displaying in doing so the sentence-like expressions that Doyle writes down. The same applies to Austen, Predelli (2020, p. 46; 2021, p. 95) says, through the pretense of a covert teller. Like Lewis (1978) for his own needs, and Recanati (2021), Predelli thus commits to ubiquitous fictional narrators. This provides him with an agent who, by displaying (1), pretends to assert it and pretends to refer with "Emma Woodhouse", thereby imparting metalinguistic information in the pretense. It is through such pretenses that the fiction-maker asks us to imagine the imparted proposition *that a bearer of "Emma Woodhouse" was twenty-one years old*. This requires a fictional narrator in fictions deploying fictional names—in all fictions, to prevent *ad hocery*. This is already highly problematic; there are fictions that appear to be directly conveyed by their fiction-makers without the mediation of a narrator, as DR allows (García-Carpintero, 2022, 2022a, 2022b).

What is the reason why fictional names are not "supported by any actual, nonfictional launching" (Predelli, 2021, p. 89)? Predelli's justification is that the fiction-maker's "aim was not that of putting forth a referential device, but rather that of making things up" (p. 88).[14] However, the adversative "but" is unwarranted: For fiction-makers "to make things up" *involves* deploying genuine referential devices. A central aspect of making up such things is that readers put together the information to be imagined about fictional bearers of names by "trading on identity", in the way that this is done with real names.[15] This is a crucial role that ordinary names have, to help *de jure* co-identification, that is, to help speakers to put together information or misinformation on their purported referents (cf., Recanati, 2016); they play this same role in fictions (García-Carpintero, 2020a).[16] Perhaps some fiction-makers do not represent themselves as baptizers, but this is neither here nor there. Launching a proper name does not need to be a momentous act that we should pay much attention to. We do it when we put a number beside a sentence to help to refer to it, as I did with (1)–(3) at the outset, or when we nickname somebody on the spur of the moment; we may even do it inadvertently when a name we use changes its reference without our realizing it.[17]

A second reason to reject the view that Watson's pretend use of "Holmes" excludes Doyle's real use comes from fictions with indexicals instead of names, like Cortázar's *The continuity of parks*, which I have used to argue that some fictions are directly conveyed by their fiction-

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[14]Predelli is in good company here. Russell writes that the "fundamental falsehood in the play is the proposition: the noise 'Hamlet' is a name." (I took this superbly hyperbolic quotation from Recanati, 2021, p. 28.) Recanati's related justification, like Kripke's (2013), is that fiction-makers pretend to use names. This does not suffice either, see footnote 18 below.

[15]Fictionally, "Holmes" is a real name, which has been launched (Predelli, 2020, p. 26). But given DR, utterances of declarative sentences in the Holmes stories have a dual role: They are a vehicle for Watson's fictional assertions, and they are also one for Doyle's act of fictionalizing. "Holmes" has a corresponding dual role. It is for this second role that I am claiming against Predelli that Doyle has launched the name. Realists about fictional characters discussed below, Section 3.1 who, like Salmon (1998), Predelli's (2002) previous self, or Abell (2020) extend their view to fictional discourse make the same assumption.

[16]Most of Davis's (2005, pp. 233–245) compelling arguments that proper names are true words apply to textual uses; cp. Hunter's (1981, pp. 28–29) contrast between "Holmes" and a truly unlaunched name.

[17]García-Carpintero (2018, Section 4.1) accounts for "Madagascar"-like cases by defending a metasemantic view that underwrites this.

makers without the pretense of a fictional telling by a fictional teller (García-Carpintero, 2022a, see also Abell, 2020, Section 4.5).[18] The claim that fiction-makers are not using indexical expressions with their standard semantics looks desperate.[19]

Given DR, the sentence-like expressions used in textual uses may well be sentences, their fictionalizing meaning their literal, semantic content, and the expressions occurring in them, including names, literally used referring expressions. In Abell's (2020) version of DR, acts of fictionalizing belong in the speech-act category of *declarations*, "illocutionary acts that are governed by the rules of extra-linguistic institutions", like giving out players or adjourning meetings. Legitimate doubts can be raised about whether the declarative meaning of "I name this ship the Generalissimo Stalin", coincides with its literal, semantic meaning (Alston, 2000, pp. 89–91). Be this as it may, I do not find Abell's arguments for identifying acts of fictionalizing with declarations compelling. In my own, equally social-Austinian—in contrast to Currie's psychological-Gricean (1990)—speech-act version of DR, I follow Currie in identifying fictionalizings with directive speech acts, *invitations to imagine* (García-Carpintero, 2013, 2019b). If, as Ryle (1933, pp. 33), Carroll (1995, pp. 98–99), Wolterstorff (1980, pp. 219–234) and many other early writers assumed, we take the propositional imaginings invited by fictions to be just acts of entertaining propositions for their specific purposes, it is very natural to think of textual uses as having fictionalizing acts as their literal meanings. The default use of declarative sentences is to make assertions, but we also use them literally to make weaker acts like conjectures, as when we hedge, either explicitly or contextually: "It will rain, I think." We can literally invite imaginings in the same way: "S, let us imagine." The hedge may remain implicit, contextually suggested—say, by the full utterance being declared a novel. In the final section, we will consider different semantic implementations of this view.

3 | REALIST OR IRREALIST SEMANTICS?

In this concluding section, I will discuss two options for a semantics for textual discourse, one realist and one irrealist about fictional characters, and I will offer reasons for the latter.

3.1 | A realist account of textual discourse: Having and holding

As mentioned at the outset, the main argument for realism relies on metatextual uses. Kripke (2013) argues that names like "Emma Woodhouse" in (3) refer to fictional entities. In a similar vein, van Inwagen (1977) provides an influential Quinean argument for realism about fictional entities, arguing that it allows for a straightforward explanation of the validity of arguments involving apparent reference to and quantification over them in the metatextual

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[18]Some theorists assume that in pretending to do A one disbelieves that one does A (Picciuto & Carruthers, 2016, p. 317). This is wrong (Saucelli, 2021). Some actors pretend to drink whisky by drinking tea, but others (knowingly) drink the stuff. The *New Yorker*'s fact-checkers assumption (fn. 3) that one might pretend to assert *p* in putting forward a fiction by really asserting it is not just intuitively correct, it *is* correct (Friend, 2008). By the same token, one may pretend to refer with a referential expression by truly using it referentially.

[19]See García-Carpintero (2022) and von Solodkoff (2022) for further development of these points, and further criticism of Predelli's (2020) *tour de force*.

discourse of literary critics.[20] *Ficta* are argued to be concrete Meinongian nonexistent entities (Priest, 2011), or (as both Kripke and van Inwagen recommend) abstract existing entities of various sorts, Platonic *abstracta* like Wolterstorff's (1980) or Currie's (1990) *roles*, or created artifacts, Thomasson (1999, 2003). Theorists of both sorts think of fictional characters as having the ontological status of the fictional works in which they occur (Kripke, 2013, p. 72; Thomasson, 1999, p. 143, 2003, p. 220; van Inwagen, 1977, pp. 302–303, 1983, p. 75).

I will not go into the ontological issues in any depth here. van Inwagen (2003) is noncommittal on the two abstractionist lines, mentioning costs for both. Friedell (2021) presents responses to worries about artifactualism, congenial to the social-Austinian view that both Abell (2020) and García-Carpintero (2013, 2019b) defend. Fictional works result on this view from the communicative acts of fiction-makers; they are social constructs, abstract created artifacts with norm-regulated functions. Fictional works have an identifiable "text" (Currie, 1991); Borges's *Pierre Menard* shows that two different works can share text. This "text" is the meaning-vehicle, constituted by words in literature, sounds, performances or images in other media. Contents are abstract; on the *possible worlds* semantic framework that I assume, along with most current semanticists, they are structureless properties selecting states of affairs. A crucial reason in favor of this view is that it allows contents to be shared by utterances in different media—in different languages but also in depictive, or dramatic media. This captures the narratological distinction between the *narration* or *sjužet* and the *narrative*, *plot*, *story*, or *fabula* that it conveys; and it allows that a film may be a faithful adaptation of a novel or a play. Works thus have a complex structure, grounded in that of the vehicles that express them; they are in part composed of singular representations.

Artifactualists take fictional characters to be such singular representations.[21] Like the works of which they are parts, they must be appropriately ontologically grounded, but this can hopefully be secured, establishing their existence. Terms like "Emma Woodhouse" in metatextual uses like (3) may thus have as semantic value a singular representation associated with that name, which is a constituent of Austen's *Emma*. Now, van Inwagen (1977, p. 307, 1983, pp. 75–76) extends the view to account for the truth-conditions of paratextual uses.[22] There is an obvious obstacle to this. While the entities that realists posit may well intuitively instantiate the properties predicated of them in metatextual uses like (3), this is not so clear for the two other uses. Such entities are not easily taken to be the sort of thing capable of living in the world; for that requires, say, breathing, something that abstract objects, created or Platonic, are incapable of. Van Inwagen (1977, 1983) deals with this by distinguishing two types of predications, *having* and *holding*.[23] The subject-predicate pattern in unprefixed (2) does not indicate that the semantic value assigned to the subject-term instantiates (*has*) the property expressed by

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[20]Compare Brock and Everett's (2015) "Introduction" and Kroon and Voltolini (2018) for helpful presentation, discussion, and further references.

[21]"Characters, together with their settings and situations, are parts of a story" (MacDonald, 1954, p. 177).

[22]Perhaps Kripke (2013, pp. 57, 74) has a similar view in mind, but his tortuous discussion evinces his worries about the implications of RF (see pp. 155–160, and Salmon, 1998, pp. 297–298). As I said, both Kripke and van Inwagen espouse RF without envisaging replies like Predelli's to concerns discussed above, Section 2. See Yablo (2020) for a good critical discussion.

[23]See Wolterstorff (1980, pp. 159–160). Zalta's *object theory* makes a similar distinction between *exemplifying* and *encoding* (cf., Semeijn & Zalta, 2021, Section 3). Zalta takes abstract objects to be constituted by the properties ascribed to them in fictions; an object is then said to *encode* the properties constituting it. The definition that follows is better attuned to the representational nature ascribed here to fictional characters.

the predicate, but rather that it *represents or characterizes an item to which the property is ascribed* in its encompassing fiction (*holds*).

To the extent that we can make good sense of the definiens (as DR plus the irrealist view described in Section 3.2 allows), I have just offered a straightforward, reductive definition of *holding* in terms of *having*—which is to be desired from a foundational viewpoint, for the latter is the basic, primitive sense of predication. However, van Inwagen claims that this cannot be done. In support, he (1977, pp. 306–307) simply offers good criticisms of two uncompelling definitions. von Solodkoff and Woodward (2017, pp. 410–411), who offer a definition that I will criticize shortly, conjecture that van Inwagen could not come up with one because Lewis's (1978) account of fictional content, which he was clearly considering, prevented him from it. I disagree; Lewis's view can, I think, be elaborated so that it offers a better account of these matters than the one that realists like von Solodkoff and Woodward provide. In my view, the true explanation lies in that van Inwagen's espousal of MP and RF precluded him from envisaging a definiens like theirs or mine. Lewis (1978) also assumed MP in the original article, but as indicated in footnote 9 he did not hold RF, and in his 1983 *Postscript A* he rightly suggests that Walton's work may offer a better foundation than MP for his account of paratextual discourse.[24]

Following Salmon (1998) and Thomasson (1999), recent work extends van Inwagen's account of paratextual uses to textual ones; compare Abell (2020, chapter 5), Glavaničová (2021), Orlando (2021), Stokke (2021), Terrone (2021), and von Solodkoff and Woodward (2017). A first issue in developing a precise semantics along these lines is whether we need to assume an implicit or explicit prefix corresponding to "according to/in *Emma*", which (2) presents as optional in paratextual uses. Lewis (1978) is usually regarded as committed to the prefix being present in paratextual uses at some *logical form* level, and Devitt (1981, pp. 170–171) follows suit for textual uses too. von Solodkoff and Woodward (2017) and Abell (2020, p. 138) support this view for paratextual uses. The formers' discussion of textual ones (*op. cit.*, pp. 412–414) is less clear-cut on this, but their stance against RF and their rejection of the view that predication is ambiguous in favor of implicit sentential operators commit them to operators in those uses as well, I think.[25] Kripke (2013) takes a noncommittal view: "One can regard this as a form of ellipsis, or not, as one pleases" (p. 58). Prefixes raise worries (cf., Bertolet, 1984). They may be avoided by adopting Predelli's (1997, 2002) earlier contextualism, which he then combined with realism. On this view, textual uses of unprefixed sentences are true or false in their contexts not

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[24]Compare for elaboration García-Carpintero (2022a), a companion piece to this paper. Van Inwagen's neglect of the possibility of extending his account of paratextual uses to textual ones has the same roots in his adherence to RF as Kripke's (2013) tortuousness, footnote 22—von Solodkoff and Woodward (2017, pp. 411–412) appear to agree on this. Predelli (2020) is again a glaring contrast. In Chapter 5, he discusses paratextual uses, offering two irrealist ways of handling them that would reward a critical attention I cannot dispense them here. On one, the utterer of paratextual uses goes along with the fiction-maker pretense, merely *displaying* sentence-like expressions and thereby *imparting* content. On the other, when embedded, the expressions are paratactically quoted. Recanati (2021, Section 2.4) suggests a similar account.

[25]Abell argues that textual uses "cannot themselves be understood as implicitly prefixed by a fiction operator." These are her reasons: "The contents of fictive utterances determine what is fictional in the works they help to produce. Fiction operators do not feature as part of the contents of fictive utterances" (*op. cit.*, p. 138). This is right, but irrelevant. As suggested in Section 2, the operator may be "it is hereby to be imagined that" (Devitt, 1981, p. 172), an explicit performative that makes a declaration, as Abell wants, or an invitation to imagine, as I prefer, whose content is that of the embedded that-clause. In contrast to paratextual uses, the primary act conveyed by the performative will thus not be truth-evaluable (Devitt, 1981, p. 171).

relative to how things are at the actual world, but at "the" fictional world portrayed by the relevant story.[26]

A second issue concerns the specific nature of the entities that these theories posit. I have talked of representations in fictions. The rough idea is clear enough and has been developed through precise formal modeling in semantics. Discourses like those constituting fictions include devices that purport (or pretend) to refer to entities of different sorts and co-refer among themselves, thereby ascribing bundles of properties to such purported referents and generating descriptions for them. These descriptive contents are modeled as *discourse referents* in dynamic traditions, naturally understood as representations (Sainsbury, 2021, p. 45). They specify *roles* (Glavaničová, 2021; Stokke, 2021) as descriptions like *the president of the USA* or *the mayor* do. Such roles can be identified as sets of the properties by means of which they pick out their occupiers, like Wolterstorff's (1980, Section 3.6) role-kinds, or Carnapian individual concepts, Fregean senses or "mental files" picking out referents relative to worlds.

3.2 | The irrealist alternative, and some reasons for it

I will now move on to present the irrealist picture for textual and paratextual discourse, and to highlight a subtle but fundamental difference with realism. The irrealist view that I think best abandons Millianism. Rigid designators like names and indexicals convey *singular propositions*, perhaps gappy ones (Braun, 2005). But they do so by triggering reference-fixing descriptive presuppositions, including metalinguistic ones like *being called Emma Woodhouse*. The difference between empty fictional names like "Emma Woodhouse" and nonfictional names (including "Vulcan") is just that the common ground (the background of shared propositions) that is meant to accommodate the presuppositions triggered by a textual use of "Emma Woodhouse" is one to-be-imagined, afforded by the fiction; while in nonfiction cases it is instead the standard common ground of what is accepted as true.[27]

Views like this share with realist accounts the notion that "Emma Woodhouse" is associated with a representation afforded by the fiction. Putting aside ontological qualms about fictions, there should not be any about parts of it like the "Emma Woodhouse"-representation, the *role* it specifies, related *mental files* or *modes of presentation*. The name "Emma Woodhouse" can thus be used in metatextual discourse to refer to that representation, making claims like (3) true—indeed, it will be thus enlisted in the metatextual discourse of semanticists to describe fictional discourse. But there is a crucial difference with realism: The irrealist view just sketched does not take "Emma Woodhouse" in textual and paratextual discourse to refer to the abstract representation that is part of the fiction. Like Lewis (1978), the view assumes that characters, which are just representations, represent in textual discourse entities in the represented stories (in the situations whose imagining they invite) *that truly instantiate* the properties ascribed to them in fictions; and paratextual uses report on them. On Lewis's modal ontology, these are real

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[26]There is no unique such world, hence the scare quotes, García-Carpintero (2019b). Reimer (2005) advances a similar account. It can be interpreted as assuming that textual uses are a sort of assertion, or, as Everett (2013, p. 48) suggests, a way of modeling a DR view of their specific fictionalizing force (declarations or invitations, as it may be).

[27]On this view names in fiction are entirely ordinary, in contrast to what Lewis (1978, 268) suggests, and Wolterstorff (1980, 154) and Currie (1990, 131) defend, footnote 9 above. Maier (2017) and Zucchi (2021) provide different formal semantics implementations, which make their standard character manifest. Salis (2021) offers a picture similar to mine, which she takes to be compatible with Millianism because, unlike me, she considers the descriptive elements "pragmatic", non-semantic; see also Sainsbury (2021).

possibilia, inhabitants of causally isolated worlds in his pluriverse. But we do not need to be committed to this ontology (Goodman, 2010; Sainsbury, 2021); we just need an adequate non-Millian semantics.

In contrast, self-conscious realists like Salmon (1998), von Solodkoff and Woodward (2017) and Abell (2020) take referring expressions to signify across-the-board the very abstract artifacts their accounts posit throughout (1)–(3). Thus, consider von Solodkoff and Woodward's (2017) definition of *holding* in terms of *having*. For them, (4) just means (5):

4. Emma Woodhouse holds having lived nearly 21 years in the world.
5. According to *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse had lived nearly 21 years.

The definition I offered in the previous section may sound identical if the difference I am pointing out is overlooked. But in their account, in contrast to mine, "Emma Woodhouse" also has as semantic value in (5) and in the reported textual discourse a representation—a real abstract artifact, not an actually nonexistent young person. For them, thus, what *Emma* invites us to imagine, and what is true according to the work, is a category mistake: something that is not just false, but conceptually and hence necessarily so—an impossibility.[28].

This view is coherent, but it raises the worry that Klauk (2014) aptly calls the *wrong kind of object* problem. Following Salmon (1998, p. 316, fn. 45) and Thomasson (2003, p. 212), von Solodkoff and Woodward (2017, pp. 414–417) and Abell (2020, p. 138) confront it by claiming that the ascriptions are *de re*; reference to fictional characters in textual invitations to imagine and in paratextual content-ascriptions has the same status as the underwritten description in R:

6. The IRA leader believes that *the infiltrated MI5 agent* is his best agent

Here a singular proposition is said to be believed by the IRA leader, but the description only provides the ascriber's way of picking out what the belief is about, not the IRA leader's. Similarly, theorists's theoretical characterizations of what fictions really are about need not align well with what ordinary creators and consumers of fictions assume them to be. Semeijn and Zalta (2021) develop in their framework a reply to Klauk along these lines.

But even though the view is thus defensible, it raises a serious worry. For (6) to be true, the IRA leader must have some conception of the infiltrated agent that makes sense of the ascribed singular belief. Correctly in my view, Abell (2020, p. 60) takes fictional content to be in principle epistemically accessible to competent users. I think this is required on normative views like hers and mine, because the relevant norms must be able to guide and rationalize behavior. This means that we should allow competent authors and audiences of fictions to have adequate conceptions of their contents. Unlike Lewis's, the semantic picture briefly outlined above allows

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[28]This crucial difference between my definition and the one by serious realists is easily overlooked. Sainsbury (2021, p. 53 fn. 7) argues that to define *holding* or *encoding*, the realist *must* appeal anyway to an irrealist notion of representation, on which the represented entities do not exist but truly instantiate at the represented situations the properties ascribed to them. This is so on the most natural definition, which is the one I provided. But he is ignoring the account that consistent Millian realists like Salmon (1998) advance, and von Solodkoff and Woodward (2017) develop. Stokke (2021) offers another illustration. He describes his view as a form of realism on which fictional names denote abstract roles (p. 7830). But aside from some metatextual uses ("The president is an office established by the Constitution.", p. 7848) in which the referring expressions truly denote roles on the semantics that he provides, in textual and paratextual uses (pp. 7835, 7846) the expressions do not denote them, but their actually non-existing occupants at the situations at which the story is true.

that fictions may have impossible contents (García-Carpintero, 2022a). There is nothing impossible or unintelligible in entertaining propositions involving the paradoxical, category-mistake involving contents that realists envisage,[29] and, as suggested at the end of Section 2, this is what I take the propositional imaginings of fictions to be. But they should sound as funny to reflective people as what Pirandello's *Six characters in search of an author* or Flann O'Brien's *At swim-two-birds* invite audiences to imagine, in ways that *Emma* does not (Klauk, 2014, p. 244; Collins, 2019, Section 2.4). This constitutes at least a clear cost for realism, which the form of irrealism I outlined does not incur.

A related second cost is a version of the traditional *indeterminacy* objection to fictional realism that concerns Lewis (1978, pp. 261–262), compare Bueno and Zalta (2017). As said, the relevant characters might be Meinongian concrete objects, abstract Platonic entities or created artifacts. Realists need to make a decision; but even after favoring the latter, as endorsed here, many issues remain open. The relevant artifacts might ultimately be concrete psychological entities, as recent versions of conceptualist nominalism envisage (Everett & Schroeder, 2015). More decisions should be made (García-Carpintero, 2020b): When do the relevant entities start existing, if ever? Which among the properties ascribed to them are constitutive of them? Is Jekyll identical to Hyde?[30] What role do the intentions of authors play in their individuation? Should we think of these objects along hylomorphic lines? If so, exactly along which ones? There are several options here too (Evnine, 2016).

Assuming realism, prima facie different responses to questions like this give us different candidate-referents for fictional terms in textual and paratextual uses. For the epistemological reasons mentioned above, I doubt that answers to them can be adequately motivated (Bueno & Cumpa, 2021). Note that the worry is not indeterminacy per se; in my view, most of our claims about *moderate-sized specimens of dry goods* like Kilimanjaro have indeterminate contents (García-Carpintero, 2021b). The worry is rather that, from the perspective of people competently engaging with fictions, seeking replies to them sounds like asking "silly questions" about fictions (Lewis, 1978, p. 270); but this is the appropriate perspective from which to address them. Once more, at the very least this is a cost that irrealism spares us.

The view I have been promoting looks as nonuniform as, say, Kripke's (2013); with the realists, I have allowed that names like "Emma Woodhouse" may refer to abstract artifacts in some metatextual uses like (3), while arguing that an irrealist view should rather be taken of textual and paratextual uses. This looks like a cost, as realists point out (Semeijn & Zalta, 2021, pp. 171–172). In favor of uniformity, they mention mixed, co-predication uses like (7):

7. Emma Woodhouse, one of the finest characters created by Austen, is almost 21 years old

Of course, uniformity cuts both ways; examples like (7) are sometimes presented from viewpoints advocating for uniform irrealism (Friend, 2007); Everett, 2013, pp. 163–178).[31] Be this as it may, it can be argued that (7) just exhibits a standard, well-attested form of regular polysemy

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[29]I once had a colleague—a very rational and extremely competent logician—who told me he imagined traveling in his proofs by helicopter from one transfinite number to the next.

[30]Abell (2020, p. 141) and García-Carpintero (2020b, p. 185) argue that they are not: They *hold* identity (the entities they represent in the fiction are the same), but do not *have* it (they are different representations, even if of the same fictitious entity).

[31]Maier (2017) aims to provide an irrealist account more straightforwardly uniform than mine, but I am not sure that his account of metatextual uses as "parasitic" on textual uses succeeds (Ninan, 2017, pp. 64–65). I do embrace below a *parasitism* of sorts.

(Everett & Schroeder, 2015, pp. 286–288; Recanati, 2018). As I would put it, the polysemy lies in the appositive sentence predicating of the character that it *has* a property, while the main sentence predicates that it *holds* another. The definition of *holding* above allows us to disentangle what the polysemous sentence ultimately conveys.[32]

Collins (2019, Section 2.5) raises co-predication worries for the theories I have discussed, including the superficially nonuniform one I have been advocating. His *maximally simple* alternative view appears to agree that textual uses have a semantics,[33] and that it is fully irrealist. The view has it that, in all three uses, (i) "Doyle moves", (ii) "Holmes moves", and (iii) "Vulcan moves" have the same semantic content—the same truth-conditions. We should separate semantics and ontology, Collins claims; we should distinguish the distinct *truth-makers* for such utterances (on account of which, he grants, (i) and (ii) are true in their more common use, (iii) untrue), from their uniform *truth-conditions*. I do agree that we should not too easily read ontology into language, but I am afraid I do not have an adequate grasp of a notion of truth-conditions on which, while (i)–(iii) share logical form, (ii) and (iii) both have a non-referring name but differ in truth-value, while (i) and (ii) share truth-value but one has a non-referring name while the other does not. Collins does not provide guidance on what the truth-conditions he envisages are.

I should add that I do not think that my acceptance of a form of realism for some uses, and the resulting nonuniformity cuts very deep. The main point I have been making here (as in the companion piece, García-Carpintero, 2022a) is that an adequate philosophical treatment of these issues should be grounded on an account of the nature of fictions and textual uses. When we think of the commitment to fictional objects I have assumed from this viewpoint, it can be argued than the resulting form of realism is so thin as to be ultimately taken as a form of irrealism (García-Carpintero, 2021b; Thomasson, 2021).[34]

In this paper I have reviewed recent work on the semantics of fictional discourse. I have argued that textual uses have such a semantics, and that irrealist views make better sense of it.

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There are no data available.

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[32]I take this polysemy to be a rather common form of metonymy, as when we say of a lion statue that it is *ferocious* (only the represented lion is) or of an idea that it is *provocative*, or *original*—only its content straightforwardly is. Both are *holding* ascriptions, as defined.

[33]I am not entirely sure that Collins in fact engages with textual uses, see footnote 5 above.

[34]It should be noted that, while Thomasson (1999) defends the form of realism for textual uses I have been objecting to here, Thomasson (2003) adopts a view very much like the one I have advocated, which she has been espousing since.

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