FICTIONAL NAMES WITHOUT FICTIONAL OBJECTS

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SUMMARY: In this paper, I criticize Mark Sainsbury's proposal concerning the semantic analysis of fictional discourse, as it has been put forward in chapter 6 of his *Reference without Referents*. His main thesis is that fictional names do not refer, and hence statements containing them are genuinely false and must be interpreted in terms of true paraphrases, arrived at on a case-by-case basis. In my opinion, the proposal has a problem derived from the fact that the relation between some problematic examples —"Holmes is a detective", "Tony Blair admires Holmes"— and their suggested paraphrases needs to be clarified and further elaborated.

KEY WORDS: fictional name, direct reference, deflationary account, free logic, paraphrase

RESUMEN: En este artículo analizo críticamente el análisis semántico de los enunciados que contienen nombres de ficción propuesto por Mark Sainsbury en el capítulo 6 de su libro *Reference without Referents*. Su tesis principal es que los nombres de ficción carecen de referentes y, por lo tanto, los enunciados que los contienen son estrictamente falsos y deben ser interpretados en términos de ciertas paráfrasis. En mi opinión, la propuesta tiene el problema de que la relación entre ejemplos problemáticos de tales enunciados, como "Holmes es detective" o "Tony Blair admira a Holmes", y las paráfrasis ofrecidas requiere mayor desarrollo y fundamentación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: nombre de ficción, referencia directa, enfoque deflacionario, lógica libre, paráfrasis

1. *Introduction*

Take S to be "Holmes is a detective". Then

(1) S is (grammatically) of the subject-predicate form

(2) "Holmes" is the grammatical subject of S

(3) S is meaningful

(4) If S is meaningful, then S is true or false

(5) A sentence of the subject-predicate form is true if and only if there is an object named by the subject that possesses the attribute expressed by the predicate; and it is false if and only if there is an object named by the subject that does not possess the attribute in question

(6) Holmes exists

The structure of this argument has been worrying many analytic philosophers since Meinong's times, and non-analytic philosophers since the very pre-Socratic beginnings of philosophy. How is it possible to talk about objects, such as the characters of fiction, which in an intuitive sense of the word do not exist? Do we have to conclude that there is another, non-intuitive sense of "existence" in which they do exist? As is known, the last path has been taken up by the so-called ontologically committed conceptions of fictional discourse, namely, Meinongianism —which take fictional objects to be actual non-existent entities—, possibilism —for which they are existent objects but merely possible ones— and abstractism —which regards them as a kind of abstract entities.[1]

In "Existence and Fiction", chapter 6 of his book *Reference without Referents* (henceforth, *RWR*), Mark Sainsbury's main objective is showing that the kind of ontological commitment that serves to characterize those positions can and should be avoided; in other terms, that there is no need to establish ontological conclusions regarding characters of fiction from certain assumptions about grammatical and semantic form. In clear contrast with Meinongianism, possibilism and abstractism, he sets out to show that the semantic functioning of sentences like *S* can be accounted for with no "heavyweight" ontological commitment whatsoever. To this aim, he makes a specific explanatory proposal, which belongs in the general framework set forth in the rest of the book. Moreover, he argues that his proposal, though sharing a disadvantage with the ontologically committed ones —namely, the fact that sentences of the likes of *S* must be taken to be genuinely false—, has also a clear advantage over them that should inspire our preference for it —it does not commit us to the existence of some dubious intentions towards fictional objects.[2]

From Sainsbury's perspective, there are two main ways of interpreting the claim that there are fictional characters: in a weak sense, it means that there are stories in which characters are portrayed; in a strong sense, it means that there are some entities correlated with those characters, which are part of an extra-fictional reality. The

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[1] Meinongianism, originated in Meinong's theory of objects, has been more recently represented by Terence Parsons; possibilism is the view put forward by David Lewis; finally, abstractism has been originally proposed by Saul Kripke and then further developed by Nathan Salmon and Stephen Schiffer. Recently, Amie Thomasson has defended a new version.

[2] His attack, though meant against all the ontologically committed conceptions, is explicitly directed towards abstractism, in particular, the theories held by Salmon and Schiffer.

chapter under consideration has been included to show that there are no good reasons to go beyond the first, weak sense, which does not involve the rather implausible claim that reality is partly constituted by objects of fiction.

Sainsbury's proposal is interesting and forcefully argued for. Although I feel definitely attracted by its ontological lightness and pragmatic flavor, there are certain aspects that I have not found entirely persuasive. After a brief presentation of the proposal as well as its more general semantic background, I will focus on those aspects that remain obscure to me.

2. *Sainsbury's Proposal*

2.1. The Framework

In RWR, Sainsbury defends an original view on the semantic category of referring expressions, which comprises both simple referring expressions, like many ordinary proper names, and complex ones, like compound names and various species of definite descriptions. The so-called RWR view is, on the one hand, unFregean since it strongly rejects the ascription of descriptive senses to names: names do not have senses that may be construed as ways of thinking about objects, or something along these Fregean lines. On the other hand, it is unRussellian since it does not subscribe to the claim that any genuine name must have a bearer. From Sainsbury's teleological point of view, the Russellian *dictum* "Names name" is a generic truth but not a universal one: *typically* or *normally* names name but sometimes they might fail to achieve what can be taken to be their proper function —as much as typically hearts pump blood but sometimes they might fail to do it. Understanding a name involves knowing what it would be for something to be its bearer. This amounts to knowing a condition for reference but not necessarily a referent. In his own words:

> The analogues of knowing the referent of a name are knowing which things a predicate applies to and knowing which truth-value a sentence possesses. Such knowledge goes beyond, and also falls short of, what understanding requires. A special case would be needed for making the strong requirement for names, treating them differently form other expressions. The customary view is that understanding a sentence involves knowing what it would be for something to satisfy it. I do not challenge this view (it requires only explanation and elaboration rather than rejection); extending it to names delivers $RWR:$ understanding a

name involves knowing what it would be for something to be its bearer.
(Sainsbury 2005, p. 94)

It is the above-mentioned thesis that best serves to synthesize what
I take to be Sainsbury's main core idea on the reference of names, the
one that gives rise to the title of the book: the meaning of a name
is to be identified —not with its referent but— with its reference
conditions, as well as the meaning of a sentence is identified with
its truth conditions. In both cases, the corresponding conditions may
fail to occur without thereby preventing the expression from being
meaningful. A name can have a meaning without having a referent, as
much as a sentence can have a meaning without being true. Sainsbury
then complements his acceptance of a truth-theoretic framework with
the endorsement of free logic, which in general is designed to be free
from the existence assumptions made by classical logic. According to
the negative free logic preferred by him, all sentences containing an
empty referring expression, namely, a referring expression that fails
to refer, are false —with the consequence that negated simple sen-
tences containing an empty name and material conditionals with a
simple sentence containing an empty name in the antecedent turn
out to be true.

Accordingly, in as far as fictional names are a kind of empty
names, he claims:

> Semantics will recognize no special category of fictional sentences or
> fictional names. Everything will proceed just as for non-fictional regions
> of language. In particular:
>
> 4. Fictional names belong to the general category of names, and so
>   receive the standard homophonic axioms, for example: for all x
>   ("Sherlock Holmes" refers to x iff x = Sherlock Holmes)
>
> Since, by the assumption of conservative ontology, nothing really is
> Sherlock Holmes, "Sherlock Holmes" is a name that does not really
> have a referent. [...] In these pronouncements, RWR is the simplest
> and most straightforward account there is. (Sainsbury 2005, p. 202)

A simple sentence with a fictional subject, such as "Holmes exists",
is thus false, while its negation, "Holmes does not exist", is true.
This is what Sainsbury calls "the default position". There is no need
to introduce a scope ambiguity: in all sentences containing a fictional
subject and a negation, the negation operator takes wider scope than
the subject and hence the sentence turns out true.

2.2. The Problems

Now, as acknowledged by Sainsbury himself, the approach may be considered problematic. First of all, many usual fictional sentences, such as our initial S, turn out false, in opposition to what we intuitively would like to say concerning them —specially, if they are compared to the likes of "Holmes is a farmer", which do not fair as favorably.

Besides, there are some tricky cases, such as "Vulcan is not more than 1000 miles in diameter", regarding which, we would like to say that it is, in contrast with what is implied by the theory, false. In his own terms:

> If Le Verrier, having calculated a maximum diameter for Vulcan, utters "Vulcan is not more that 1000 miles in diameter", it seems wrong to say that he has stumbled upon a truth: is not the calculation part of the tissue of error? (Sainsbury 2005, p. 198)

Moreover, the theory has to account for the fact that some sentences will turn out to be unexpectedly true, in the course of a sequence of falsehoods —due to the fact that they contain a negation. For instance, "Holmes is not a standard detective: he is brilliant and has a special sense for mysteries" or, to take Sainsbury's own example, "Holmes was not deceived by the man's servile manner".

Finally, there are some relational sentences involving more than one fictional name, such as "Anna Karenina is more intelligent than Emma Bovary", which seem to be strictly and literally true. The same holds for some relational sentences involving a non-fictional and a fictional name, such as "Tony Blair admires Coriolanus" or "The Greeks worshipped Zeus". Their peculiarity is that they seem to involve a relation between a real entity (Tony Blair, the Greeks) and a fictional one (Coriolanus, Zeus). Refusing to be committed to fictional entities (fictional characters in the strong sense) amounts to giving up the idea that such sentences involve binary or relational predicates. How could the theory manage itself to give the intuitively right truth-values to those sentences?

To summarize, there are different problems, each of them acknowledged by Sainsbury, that an account like his must face and try to solve. Those problems are illustrated by the following paradigmatic examples, which I will be referring to in the following pages:

$-M$: Vulcan is not more than 1000 miles in diameter, $-S$: Holmes is not a detective (unwanted truths)

$-R$: Holmes was not deceived by the man's servile manner (unexpected truth in the course of a sequence of falsehoods)

K: Anna Karenina is more intelligent than Emma Bovary, I: Tony Blair admires Coriolanus (unwanted falsehoods)

2.3. The Proposed Solutions

Sainsbury claims that $-S$ is clearly true if construed literally, since it is implied by the obviously true sentence "Holmes does not exist".

> Once we step out of the world of the stories, it seems clear that Holmes is not a detective: he is not anything at all since it does not exist. The idea that RWR delivers the wrong verdict of truth-value is a hangover from *not distinguishing between truth and fidelity, or from holding in place an implicit "according to the fiction" operator*. (Sainsbury 2005, p. 206. The emphasis is mine.)

The quote reveals the two main interpretative options put forward regarding sentences like S: from his perspective, it is possible to either (i) take them to *be genuinely and strictly false but faithful to a certain fictional story* or (ii) take them to *contain an implicit fiction operator* ("according to the fiction") or *be somehow paraphrasable in terms of a sentence that includes an intensional context, and hence be genuinely and strictly true*. This consideration notwithstanding, he emphasizes that these judgments are consistent with the RWR claim that, "unadorned (implicitly or explicitly)" S is false, and hence $-S$ is true.

In cases like $-M$, he suggests moving away from the default position and allowing for ambiguity. According to this, there are certain conversational contexts in which $-M$ should be construed as semantically equivalent to an affirmative sentence of the likes of "Vulcan is exactly or less than 1000 miles in diameter" and thus as false —along the lines of the general framework above summarized.

Now, in as far as the unexpected fictional truths are concerned, he says:

> It is not as if the falsehoods are failures, and the occasional truth a surprising success. *The aim of the author has nothing to do with truth or falsehood*, so it would not be surprising if these properties were distributed in a random way through her sentences. (Sainsbury 2005, p. 207. The emphasis is mine.)

In general, from Sainsbury's perspective, since fictional names are referring expressions without referents, they can be associated with baptisms of a certain special kind: baptisms that have been successful in creating a name-using practice but failed in the purpose of introducing a particular object. Given the substitution of classical logic with a free logic, this can be accepted without troubles. However, according to the negative free logic endorsed by Sainsbury, any sentence with an empty name comes out false —as well as in a Russellian view taking that sentence to include a non-referring, descriptive expression in (grammatical) subject position. Therefore, if S, K and I are regarded as factual claims about fictional characters, they turn out to be false —which is *prima facie* contrary to our intuitive evaluation. But, on the other hand, Sainsbury suggests that the falsehoods in question can be *paraphrased in terms of other sentences that are strictly and literally true —since, although they contain fictional names, those names occupy non-extensional positions, as it happens when they are under the scope of a fiction operator. Those truths is what we, somehow sloppily, intend to convey while uttering the false sentences at stake, which we take, mistakenly, to be true.*

> We have to say that the problematic truths are really falsehoods, though we can normally without much effort find literal truths which the falsehoods can be regarded as failed attempts to state. (Sainsbury 2005, p. 208)

Accordingly, K is paraphrased in terms of

K': The level of intelligence which Tolstoy portrays Anna Karenina as possessing is greater than the level of intelligence which Flaubert portrays Madame Bovary as possessing

As far as I is concerned, it is replaced with

I': Tony Blair admires some characteristics or actions ascribed to Coriolanus

With regard to S, I assume that in such cases the paraphrase amounts just to the addition of an explicit fiction operator, which provides us with the genuinely true

S': According to the Conan Doyle stories, Holmes is a detective

3. *Some Criticisms*

3.1.

From my perspective, Sainsbury's proposal has the very counterintu-
itive consequence that all sentences of the likes of S, K and I above
turn out to be (genuinely and strictly) false. Given this, we have
to accept the likewise undesirable consequence that sentences such
as $-M$ —"Vulcan is not more than 1000 miles in diameter"— and
$-S$ —"Holmes is not a detective"— are both true, as well as the
isolated character of the truth of sentences such as $-R$ —"Holmes
was not deceived by the man's servile manner". I have found rather
surprising that Sainsbury does not take this main result —which, as
he acknowledges, involves a point of coincidence between his theory
and descriptive ones— to be highly counterintuitive.[3] From my per-
spective, it is precisely the counterintuitive character of this output
of anti-metaphysical theories that has prompted many philosophers
to embrace metaphysically committed ones, such as Meinongianism,
possibilism or abstractism. In contrast with what is claimed at the
end of the chapter, I do not think that those theories share with
Sainsbury's proposal the disadvantage of having to regard the above-
exemplified types of sentences as false. According to Sainsbury,

> No abstract object is a detective, or plays the violin, or flies, so ordinary
> sentences from fiction (like "Holmes is a detective", "Holmes plays the
> violin", "Pegasus flies") will receive the same truth value, false, whether
> on the RWR account or on the account in which these uses are awarded
> robust fictional characters as referents. (Sainsbury 2005, p. 211)

This is not true since, on the metaphysically committed accounts,
the problem is clearly avoided by way of distinguishing between
different kinds of properties and, correspondingly, predications. For
instance, from the standpoint of an abstractist theory, for which fic-
tional entities are abstract entities of a certain kind, there are certain
properties that are *possessed* by fictional entities, namely, those ones
that depend on external predication, whereas other properties are

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[3] It is worth pointing out that descriptive theories of fictional names are based
on the Russellian account of ordinary proper names, according to which any name
is an abbreviation for a definite description or a cluster of them. According to this,
S is semantically equivalent to a sentence along the lines of "The brilliant man
who lives at Baker Street and plays the violin is a detective", which, by means of
the application of Russell's theory of descriptions, turns out false, since there is no
unique brilliant man living at Baker Street and playing the violin that is a detective.

represented or *encoded* by them, namely, those ones that are predicated within the fictional story. Accordingly, the property of being a detective, though not possessed by the abstract entity that is Holmes, is represented or encoded by him in the framework provided by the Conan Doyle's stories, and this suffices to make S true. A similar distinction has been made by Meinongians, for whom fictional entities are non-existent actual things: on the one hand, there are *nuclear* properties, namely, the properties that authors attribute to their characters; on the other, there are *extra-nuclear* ones, that is, properties that are not attributed to them in the fiction. Back to Holmes, the property of being a detective is a nuclear property of his; so, S can be true in this framework. Finally, in possibilist theories, for which fictional entities are merely possible objects, a parallel distinction is made between, on the one hand, the properties that a merely possible object has in the all the possible worlds in which it exists and, on the other hand, the properties it has at the actual world, in which it does not exist. In terms of our example, Holmes has the property of being a detective in all the possible worlds in which he exists, which do not include the actual world: Holmes is thus a detective —even if not an actual one—, which makes S once again true.[4]

3.2.

Moreover, Sainsbury goes on to claim that "the only serious alternative to the categorization of such sentences $[S, K, I]$ as false comes from those theories which, following Frege, deny that they have a truth-value at all" (Sainsbury 2005, p. 204). I confess that I have found this claim rather surprising, as much as his whole evaluation of Fregeanism. According to Sainsbury, the real problem with Fregeanism arises from the fact that it demands that the interpreter should be capable of distinguishing fictional from non-fictional words, since they involve different interpretative axioms, which in turn ask for a different interpretative task. In contrast with Sainsbury's opinion, to me, the main problem with Fregean theories, as much as with his own proposal, is the counterintuitive character of the truth-value ascribed to sentences like the above ones: the intuitive semantic facts

[4] It is fair to point out that Sainsbury has acknowledged this very point in a yet unpublished paper "Do We Need Fictional Characters?" presented at the XXIII Simposio Internacional de Filosofía "Lenguaje, mente y conocimiento, 40 años de *Crítica*", organized by the Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, UNAM, held in Mexico City, on April 2007. On this occasion, I had the opportunity to comment on Sainsbury's paper.

are that *we do know that certain sentences, such as* S, K *and* I *are true rather than false or without truth-value.*

It is fair, though, to concede that they seem to involve *different kinds of truths*: S is true *in* a certain fictional story or true in fiction, whereas K and I are just true statements *about* a certain story —or more than one, as is the case with K. In other words, S is a true *fictive* statement, whereas K and I are true *metafictive* ones —being a fictive statement one that belongs in a fictional story or narrative and a metafictive one, a statement about such a kind of story or narrative that does not belong in it. (Getting a little bit more specific, we could say that, while both K and I are metafictive, K is a special kind of metafictive statement that we may call "*interfictive*", since it states a comparison between characters belonging to two different fictional stories.) Given this classification of the sentences under study, let's treat them separately: I will comment first on what Sainsbury has to say about sentences like S (subsection 3.3), to then move on to consider his analysis of sentences of the likes of K and I (subsection 3.4).

3.3.

The above-mentioned distinction between fictive sentences and other kinds of discourse involving fictional names serves to justify Sainsbury's contention to the effect that sentences like S should be taken to be, though strictly not true, faithful to a certain story. However, he gives no explanation of what this faithfulness amounts to, namely, of the concept of *truth in fiction*.

On the other hand, something he does say is, as we've seen before, that S should be understood in terms of S′

> S′: According to the fiction, Holmes is a detective,

namely, a statement that contains an explicit fiction operator. First of all, the kind of relationship between S and S′ —in general, between any sentence containing a fictional name and (what may be called) *its Sainsbury's paraphrase*— is not clear enough. According to Sainsbury, a paraphrase says in a strict way the same thing that the original sentence said in a sloppy, loose and inappropriate way —that is why the former is true whereas the latter was false. Now, let us suppose that this can be construed in Gricean terms, namely, as a thesis involving that the act of uttering the original sentence, S in our example, can be thought to have, aside from the content expressed (namely, the semantic content of S), *a content meant or*

implicated (namely, the *pragmatic content* of S) which is in turn what is strictly expressed by its paraphrase, namely, S' (the *semantic content* of S').

There are two main problems with this interpretation, though: one is that the mechanism of conversational implicature cannot be applied to that kind of case, since we cannot say that the paraphrase can be derived from the original sentence and the knowledge of the contextual background by means of the process of violating a conversational maxim. (This is no surprise because, if it were possible, there would be, contrary to what has been explicitly claimed by Sainsbury, a general mechanism to generate the required paraphrase.) But there is also a second problem that I find more pressing: it is not at all possible to take the semantic content of the paraphrase to be the content meant in uttering the original sentence, because most fictive uses, such as S, are not intuitively understood as involving self-reference or reference to the fact that they belong in a fictive framework. To put it in other terms, it is certainly not the case that any utterance of a fictive sentence like S can be taken to pragmatically implicate a parafictive one, such as S', namely, a use describing the facts of the story from an external point of view, which might be either the very author's or the readers' perspective.[5] Sainsbury's position in this regard does not seem to be faithful to the characters' standpoint.

Secondly, since the fiction operator is an intensional one, it is supposed to create an intensional context. Its intensional character can be made manifest by suggesting that S' is somehow semantically equivalent to

S'': Conan Doyle says/believes that Holmes is a detective

where "Holmes" clearly belongs in the intensional context generated by the presence of an attitude verb, such as "say" or "believe". Now, what does this imply regarding the semantics of the fictional name in question? As we have seen, according to Sainsbury, "Holmes" is a referring expression that has no referent: its meaning is given by its reference condition, which is obviously not satisfied given that Holmes does not exist. Moreover, according to the axioms of the preferred negative free logic, its occurrence in a sentence makes it false. But this is supposed to account for its semantic behavior *in extensional contexts:* it is not at all clear what the specific contribution of "Holmes" to the truth conditions of both S' and S'', involving

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[5] I have taken the concept of a parafictive use from Manuel García-Carpintero, who mentioned it in a talk on fictionalism, given in Buenos Aires, November 2007.

an intensional context, is supposed to be. If it is thought to be the same as before, namely, nothing, it is not clear why the sentences should be considered to be true. Does Sainsbury hold instead to a Fregean account of intensional contexts, according to which in any such context a term must be taken to refer to its usual sense? He does not say anything specific on this point; however, he is not committed, at least not in the book at stake, to the thesis that names, fictional or otherwise, have Fregean senses: he rather subscribes to a Krip-kean view of names. Therefore, his specific proposal concerning the interpretation and truth-value of the intensional contexts contained in both S' and S'' remains obscure to me.

3.4.

What about Sainsbury's proposal concerning metafictive sentences such as K or I? In contrast with sentences like S, those cannot be paraphrased in terms of parafictive sentences, containing an explicit fiction operator. It is clear that neither K can be understood in terms of

> K'': According to a certain fiction, Anna Karenina is more in-telligent than Emma Bovary

nor I in terms of

> I'': According to a certain fiction, Tony Blair admires Cori-olanus

In these cases, the sought true paraphrases must be something else, and, as Sainsbury himself acknowledges, "there is no general seman-tic mechanism" that we can think of as generating them. This seems to imply that, in order to come up with an adequate paraphrase, we have to proceed on a case-by-case basis. This is how he must be taken to have arrived at the above-mentioned

> K': The level of intelligence which Tolstoy portrays Anna Ka-renina as possessing is greater than the level of intelligence which Flaubert portrays Madame Bovary as possessing

> I': Tony Blair admires some characteristics or actions ascribed to Coriolanus

namely, a pair of adequate paraphrases for K and I, respectively. The alternative proposed way of paraphrasing is thus substituting the original sentence with a paraphrase in which the respective fictional

name belongs in an intensional context generated by the presence of certain verbs, such as "portray" and "ascribe".

My next comments on this point will mirror the ones made regarding the pair $S - S'$. First of all, the kind of relationship between K and K', I and I' —namely, a certain sentence containing a fictional name and *its respective Sainsbury's paraphrase*— is not clear enough. The above-mentioned Gricean interpretation, according to which the semantic content of the paraphrase should be identified with what was meant or pragmatically implicated in uttering the original sentence, does not seem to work —more specifically, it seems even less plausible for it to be applied to the present cases. As must be conceded, a competent utterer of K may be completely ignorant of the fact that Tolstoy wrote *Anna Karenina*, and Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*; likewise, someone may utter I with no knowledge whatsoever of the main features ascribed to Coriolanus by Shakespeare. So, there is no sense in which K'/I' can be taken to be what we are trying to convey in uttering K/I, unless it made sense to say that we may not know the information that we are trying to convey by means of a sentence when we utter it.

An alternative interpretation may be to construe paraphrases as pieces of a rational reconstruction, from an ideal observer point of view, of what is going on in our ordinary discourse about fictional characters. In a similar spirit, Quine proposed the regimentation of different fragments of natural language. However, in contrast with the present one, Quine's proposals were always concerned with logical forms, which made them general enough and, at the same time, not related to anything that is supposed to be known or somehow grasped by the competent speaker —as is the case with the content of the paraphrase in as far as it is thought to illuminate what we mean in uttering the corresponding original sentence.

Summarizing my first point, paraphrases are neither co-extensional nor semantically equivalent to their corresponding original sentences (since they can have different truth-values, as is the case with S, K and I, on the one hand, and S', K' and I', on the other). Likewise, they cannot be thought to express the content pragmatically implicated or somehow meant in uttering the original sentences. The only alternative is to regard them as rational reconstructions, but it is hard to think of a rational reconstruction without a general pattern —like the one afforded when providing the logical form of a certain kind of sentence.

Secondly, and now mirroring my other previous comment regarding S', Sainsbury claims that the proposed paraphrases K' and I'

involve an intensional context, but he does not provide us with any specific explanation of how those contexts are supposed to be semantically accounted for. In other terms, since the fictional names appearing in those contexts ("Anna Karenina", "Emma Bovary", "Coriolanus") do not occupy extensional or referential positions, how is their semantic contribution to the sentences in which they occur supposed to be cashed out? In particular, how should we understand the semantic contribution of "Anna Karenina" and "Madame Bovary" in K' and "Coriolanus" in I'? As usually thought, we need more finely grained semantic values than extensions and possible worlds intensions to deal with such contexts. Should we think that the fictional names appearing in them contribute with their Fregean senses? To put it slightly differently, we may wonder, in a Fregean spirit, whether the proposal has it that a verb, such as "portray" or "ascribe", is supposed to systematically change the usual referent of its syntactic object.[6] In any case, there is no sign of a Fregean account of the likes in $RWR;$ as pointed out before, the general semantic framework set forth is non-Fregean since it reveals no commitment to senses. But then we need an alternative explanation of the semantic functioning of names occurring in intensional contexts.[7]

Moreover, with regards to I —"Tony Blair admires Coriolanus"—, there seems to be no point in suggesting the proposed paraphrase I'' —"Tony Blair admires some characteristics or actions ascribed to Coriolanus"—: if the purpose is saying that "Coriolanus" does not have a referential role in it, this could be blamed on the presence of the intensional verb "admire". In other words, to get an intensional context, it is not at all necessary to introduce a paraphrase containing the verb "ascribe": the context in question can be thought to be generated in the very original sentence by the verb "admire".

As far as the other example is concerned, it is not clear to me that the verb "portray" serves to create an intensional context, as supposed. A statement such as

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[6] These verbs can be thought to be instances of the so-called "intensional transitives", namely, verbs that give rise to an ambiguity, similar to the *de dicto-de re* ambiguity, according to which the sentences containing them can be interpreted either on a D-reading in which they do not imply an existential statement or on an R-reading in which they do. See Richard 2001.

[7] Richard 2001 provides us with a non-Fregean account of such contexts. He appeals to an intensional semantics and to the notion of a minimal reinterpretation. However, I think that the account is no without problems —if we intend to present it as an example of an anti-metaphysical conception.

K''': The level of intelligence that Tolstoy portrays Mr. Karenin's wife as possessing is greater than the level of intelligence that Flaubert portrays Mr. Bovary's wife as possessing

resulting from K'' by substituting its fictional names, "Anna Karenina" and "Emma Bovary" respectively, with —what may be intuitively thought to be— a pair of co-referential descriptions, preserves the original truth-value.

3.5.

Sainsbury claims that the metaphysically committed conceptions not only have the same problems as his own concerning the truth-value of sentences such as S, K and I, but also have a problem his own proposal does not have, namely, they involve the ascription of some implausible intentions to both authors and readers. In 3.1 above, I have argued against the first point; now, I will be concerned with the second one. According to Sainsbury:

> As opposed to RWR, an account which exploits robust fictional objects has problems fitting them into a plausible account of novelist's intentions or of the states of mind of readers. (Sainsbury 2005, p. 211)

The problem is based on the alleged implausibility of construing intentions and other mental states in terms of relations to, to take one of the ontologically committed positions, abstract objects. The same holds for the readers' states of mind: it is claimed to be implausible to attribute to them, for instance, the pretension that an abstract entity is solving a mysterious murder. Sainsbury then mentions a way of answering to this objection, proposed by Salmon: according to this, ascriptions of pretence have to be interpreted not *de dicto* but *de re* —so that when both Doyle and his readers pretend Holmes to be a detective, they do not pretend that an abstract entity is a detective but there is an abstract entity that they pretend is a detective (Salmon 1998). However, in Sainsbury's opinion, this does not solve the problem:

> But if Salmon's theory were true, an author who was fully aware of it should be happy to accept a description of his pretence as that there is such a person as an abstract object. Salmon should regard himself as pretending precisely this in reading the Holmes stories. (Sainsbury 2005, p. 212)

This is obscure to me. Saying that ascriptions of pretence have to be interpreted *de re* amounts to saying that the way the subject of the ascription relates to the object of pretension is not specified in the ascription sentence. Moreover, saying that pretences concerning fictional characters are *relational* attitudes involves saying that when a person pretends that a certain object is such and such she has a certain epistemic and/or semantic relation to the object in question —which may be construed in different ways; on Kaplan's view, for instance, it requires that the person should have a *vivid* name for the object. As should be clear, there is no need to interpret the relation in question in terms of the subject's ability to classify the object, according to a certain theoretical point of view. Now, let's suppose that abstractism is the right semantic conception of fictional discourse, namely, that fictional names refer to abstract entities, as suggested by Salmon: on this assumption, even if someone knows that Holmes is an abstract object, this piece of theoretical knowledge does not have to be part of her relation to Holmes when she pretends, regarding him, that he exists and is a detective. Why should we think that a piece of theoretical knowledge about the semantic functioning of fictional names should be part of the content of our relational attitudes concerning fiction? Likewise, there are no reasons to think that, for someone endorsing the Fregean conception of numbers, any relational attitude concerning numbers should involve the concept of an abstract entity.[8]

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