

Fiction, Myth, and Reality

Nathan Salmon

I

Among the most difficult, and perennial, of philosophical problems are those arising from sentences involving nondesignating names. Chief among these problems is that of true singular negative existentials. Negative existentials naturally arise in separating fact from fiction and in debunking mistaken theories. Consider, for example,

(~1) Sherlock Holmes is nonexistent

interpreted not as an assertion within the Sherlock Holmes canon but as an assertion about reality. So interpreted, the sentence is evidently true. It seems as if (~1) designates someone (by its subject term) in order to say (by its predicate) that he does not exist. But it also entails that there is no such thing to be designated. How can any sentence with a nondesignating term in subject position be true? I call a mistaken theory that has been believed a *myth*. Myth-smashing sentences like ‘Santa Claus isn’t real’ and ‘There’s no such intra-Mercurial planet as Vulcan’ give rise to the same philosophical conundrum as (~1). G. E. Moore put the problem as follows:

[I]t seems as if purely imaginary things, even though they be absolutely contradictory like a round square, must still have some kind of *being* – must still be in a sense – simply because we can think and talk about them. . . . And now in saying that there is no such thing as a round square, I seem to imply that there *is* such a thing. It seems as if there must be such a thing, merely

I thank Blackwell Publishing Company for permission to incorporate portions of my 1998 *Noûs* article “Nonexistence.” I am grateful to the participants in the Santa Barbarians Discussion Group’s ruminations on fictional objects during fall 1996, especially C. Anthony Anderson. I also thank Alan Berger, Kevin Falvey, Steven Humphrey, David Kaplan, Teresa Robertson, and Scott Soames for discussion or comments. Portions of the paper were also presented at numerous venues. I am grateful to those audiences for their comments.



in order that it may have the property of not-being. It seems, therefore, that to say of anything whatever that we can mention that it absolutely *is not*, were to contradict ourselves: as if everything we can mention must be, must have some kind of being. (*Some Main Problems of Philosophy*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953, at p. 289)

Saul Kripke's insightful and penetrating work on names from fiction and myth, though unpublished, has generated a great deal of discussion. Kripke's account illuminates and yet exacerbates the chestnut of negative existentials. However, the consistency of Kripke's account is questionable.

Russell's celebrated theory of descriptions provides an account of such sentences involving names from fiction and myth as the following:

- (2) Sherlock Holmes used cocaine
- (~2) Sherlock Holmes did not use cocaine.

Russell held that a proper name generally abbreviates some definite description. In the case of 'Sherlock Holmes' the abbreviated description might be something along the lines of: 'the brilliant but eccentric late-19th-century British detective who, inter alia, solved such-and-such mysteries'. Let us abbreviate this characterization by the artificial adjective 'Holmesesque'. Russell analyzes (2) as equivalent to:

- (2') Something that is uniquely Holmesesque used cocaine.

Russell analyzes (~2) as ambiguous between the following two readings:

- (~2'₁) Something that is uniquely Holmesesque didn't use cocaine
- (~2'₂) Nothing that is uniquely Holmesesque used cocaine.

The former is the wide-scope (or *primary occurrence*) reading of (~2). This is false for the same reason as (2'). In reality, there has never been a Holmesesque individual. The latter is the narrow-scope (*secondary occurrence*) reading of (~2). This genuinely contradicts (2') and is therefore true. In *Principia Mathematica*, instead of analyzing

- (1) Sherlock Holmes exists

by replacing 'used cocaine' in (2') with 'exists', Russell and Whitehead analyze it more simply as

- (1') Something is uniquely Holmesesque.

This is equivalent to its analysis in the style of (2'), since the formal symbolization of '*x* exists' is a theorem of *Principia Mathematica*. Although Russell did not distinguish two readings for (~1), he might well have. The narrow-scope reading is equivalent to the following:



($\sim 1'_2$) Nothing is uniquely Holmesesque.

This does not designate anyone in order to say of him that he does not exist. It is not merely consistent; it is true. By contrast, the wide-scope reading, ($\sim 1'_1$) 'There exists something that both is uniquely Holmesesque and doesn't exist', is inconsistent, and hence, presumably, cannot be what would normally be intended by (~ 1).

Frege's celebrated theory of sense (*Sinn*) and designation (*Bedeutung*, reference, denotation) provides an alternative explanation of how sentences like (2) can semantically express propositions (*Gedanken*, thoughts). While Frege's principle of extensionality requires that such sentences lack truth value, the same principle creates a problem for Frege in connection with existential sentences like (1). It would have been natural for Frege to take (1) and (~ 1) to be analyzable respectively as:

($1''$) Something is the Holmesesque individual
 ($\sim 1''_2$) Nothing is the Holmesesque individual.

The intended truth conditions for ($1''$) and ($\sim 1''_2$) are given by ($1'$) and ($\sim 1'_2$). But since the definite description 'the Holmesesque individual' is improper, ($1''$) and ($\sim 1''_2$) must instead for Frege be neither true nor false (assuming the standard interpretation for existential quantification, identity, and negation, as Frege gave them in connection with his own notation, on which each is fully extensional).

By way of a solution to this difficulty, Frege suggested that (1) is properly interpreted not by ($1''$) but as covertly quotational. He wrote:

We must here keep well apart two wholly different cases that are easily confused, because we speak of existence in both cases. In one case the question is whether a proper name designates, names, something; in the other whether a concept takes objects under itself. If we use the words 'there is a ——' we have the latter case. Now a proper name that designates nothing has no logical justification, since in logic we are concerned with truth in the strictest sense of the word; it may on the other hand still be used in fiction and fable. ("A Critical Elucidation of Some Points in E. Schroeder's *Algebra der Logik*," published 1895, translated by Peter Geach in P. Geach and M. Black, eds., *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970, at p. 104)

Elsewhere Frege made similar remarks about singular existentials and their negations: "People certainly say that Odysseus is not an historical person, and mean by this contradictory expression that the name 'Odysseus' designates nothing, has no designatum" (from the section on "Sense and Designation" of Frege's 1906 diary notes, "Introduction to Logic," in H. Hermes, F. Kambartel, and F. Kaulbach, eds., *Posthumous Writings*,

translated by P. Long and R. White,¹ Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, at p. 191). Earlier in his “Dialogue with Pünjer on Existence” (pre-1884, also in Hermes, Kambartel, and Kaulbach), Frege observed: “If ‘Sachse exists’ is supposed to mean ‘The word “Sachse” is not an empty sound, but designates something’, then it is true that the condition ‘Sachse exists’ must be satisfied [in order for ‘There are men’ to be inferred from ‘Sachse is a man’]. But this is not a new premise, but the presupposition of all our words – a presupposition that goes without saying” (p. 60).²

The suggestion is that (1) and (~ 1), at least on one reading (on which the latter is true), are correctly analyzed as:

- (1 \uparrow) ‘Sherlock Holmes’ designates_{English} something
 ($\sim 1\uparrow_2$) ‘Sherlock Holmes’ designates_{English} nothing.

Assuming (as Frege evidently did) both that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is synonymous with ‘the Holmesesque individual’ and that each instance of the following metalinguistic schema is true

- (F) ‘the’+NP designates_{English} something iff that thing is uniquely ϕ ,

where ϕ is a formalization in first-order-logic notation of the English NP, then (1 \uparrow) is true if and only if (1’) is, and ($\sim 1\uparrow_2$) is true if and only if ($\sim 1'\uparrow_2$) is. Frege’s semantic ascent strategy thus attains the same truth conditions for (1) and (~ 1) as Russell.³

Frege’s semantic ascent succeeds in capturing information that is indeed conveyed in the uttering of (1) or (~ 1). But to invoke a distinction I have emphasized in previous work, this concerns what is *pragmatically imparted* in (1) and (2), and not necessarily what is *semantically encoded* or *contained*.⁴ Frege does not attain the same semantic content as Russell or even the same modal intension, that is, the same corresponding function from possible worlds to truth values. Indeed, that the semantic-ascent interpretation of (1) by (1 \uparrow) is incorrect is demonstrated by a variety of considerations. The semantic-ascent theory of existence is analogous to Frege’s account of identity in *Begriffsschrift* (1879). Curiously, Frege evidently failed to see that his objection in “*Über Sinn und Bedeutung*” to the semantic-ascent theory of identity applies with equal force against

¹ Except that I here render ‘*Bedeutung*’ as ‘designatum’.

² Frege also suggests here that there may be an alternative reading for ‘Sachse exists’, on which it is tantamount to ‘Sachse = Sachse’, which Frege says is self-evident. He might well have said the same about ‘ $(\exists x)[\text{Sachse} = x]$ ’.

³ The term ‘semantic ascent’ is due to W. V. O. Quine. See his *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), §56.

⁴ Cf. my *Frege’s Puzzle* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1986.), pp. 58–60 and especially 78–9, 84–5, 100, 114–15, 127–8.

the semantic-ascent theory of existence. Another objection to semantic-ascent analyses has been raised by Frege's most effective apologist and defender, Alonzo Church.⁵ Translating 'The present king of France does not exist' into French, one obtains:

Le roi présent de France n'existe pas.

Translating its proposed analysis into French, one obtains:

'The present king of France' ne fait référence à rien en anglais.

These two translations, while both true, clearly mean different things in French. So too, therefore, do what they translate.

A theory of singular existence statements that is equally Fregean in spirit but superior to the semantic-ascent account takes the verb 'exist' as used in singular existentials to be an *ungerade* device, so that both (1) and (2) concern not the name 'Sherlock Holmes' but its English sense.⁶ This is analogous to the semantic-ascent theory of existence except that one climbs further up to the level of intension. On an intensional-ascent theory of existence, (1) and (~ 1) may be analyzed respectively thus:

- (1 \wedge) \wedge Sherlock Holmes \wedge is a concept of something
 (~ 1 \wedge_2) \wedge Sherlock Holmes \wedge is not a concept of anything,

where 'is a concept of' is a dyadic predicate for the relation between a Fregean sense and the object that it determines and the caret ' \wedge ' is a device for *indirect quotation*, that is, quotation not of the expression but of its semantic content (in the home language, in this case a standard notation for first-order logic with 'concept of').⁷ Like the semantic-ascent theory, this intensional-ascent account of existence is not disproved by

⁵ See Church's "On Carnap's Analysis of Statements of Assertion and Belief," *Analysis*, 10, 5 (1950), pp. 97–9. For a defense of the Church-Langford translation argument, see my "The Very Possibility of Language: A Sermon on the Consequences of Missing Church," in C. A. Anderson and M. Zeleney, eds., *Logic, Meaning and Computation: Essays in Honor of Alonzo Church* (Boston: Kluwer, 2001), pp. 573–95.

⁶ Church cites 'The present king of France does not exist' as an example of a true sentence containing an *ungerade* occurrence of a singular term ("name"), in *Introduction to Mathematical Logic I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), at p. 27 n.

⁷ Cf. my "Reference and Information Content: Names and Descriptions," in D. Gabbay and F. Guenther, eds., *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, 2nd ed. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), pp. 39–85, at 69 on Fregean indirect quotation. The idea comes from David Kaplan's "Quantifying In," in D. Davidson and J. Hintikka, eds., *Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. O. Quine* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), pp. 178–214; reprinted in L. Linsky, ed., *Reference and Modality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 112–44, at 120–1. In English, the word 'that' attached to a subordinate clause (as in 'Jones believes that φ ' or 'It is necessary that φ ') typically functions in the manner of indirect-quotation marks.

substitution of co-designative terms in existential contexts. On a Fregean philosophy of semantics, indirect-quotation marks create an *ungerade* context – one might even say that they create the paradigm *ungerade* context as Frege understood the concept – so that any expression occurring within them designates in that position its own customary sense. The intensional-ascent theory is not as easily refuted as the semantic-ascent approach by the Church translation argument.⁸ In place of schema (*F*), we invoke the following:

- (C) \wedge the NP \wedge is a concept of something iff that thing, and nothing else, is a NP.

Assuming ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is synonymous with ‘the Holmesesque individual’, one thereby attains the same Russellian truth and falsehood conditions for (1) and (\sim 1). Unlike (*F*), every instance of (*C*) expresses a necessary truth. The intensional-ascent theory of existence thus obtains the correct modal intensions for (1) and (\sim 1).

Let us say that a singular term is *nondesignating* if there does not exist anything that the term designates. A term may be nondesignating by not designating anything at all. But a term may also be nondesignating by designating a nonexistent object, as with names of the dead. Either way, on Millianism, a nondesignating proper name is devoid of existing semantic content. Furthermore, a Millian like myself, and even a less committal direct-reference theorist like Kripke, may not avail him/herself of Russell’s theory of descriptions to solve the problems of sentences with nondesignating names.⁹ If α is a proper name, designating or not, it is not a definite

⁸ On this application of the translation argument, see my “A Problem in the Frege-Church Theory of Sense and Denotation,” *Noûs*, 27, 2 (June 1993), pp. 158–66, and “The Very Possibility of Language: A Sermon on the Consequence of Missing Church.”

⁹ Kripke does not officially endorse or reject Millianism. Informal discussions lead me to believe he is deeply skeptical. (See his repeated insistence in “A Puzzle about Belief” that Pierre does not have inconsistent beliefs – in A. Margalit, ed., *Meaning and Use*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979, pp. 239–83; reprinted in N. Salmon and S. Soames, eds., *Propositions and Attitudes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 102–48.) Nevertheless, Kripke believes that a sentence using a proper name in an ordinary context (not within quotation marks, and so on) expresses a proposition only if the name refers. Similarly, Keith Donnellan, in “Speaking of Nothing,” *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (January 1974), pp. 3–32 (reprinted in S. Schwartz, ed., *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 216–44), says, “when a name is used and there is a failure of designation, then no proposition has been expressed – certainly no true proposition. If a child says, ‘Santa Claus will come tonight,’ he cannot have spoken the truth, although, for various reasons, I think it better to say that he has not even expressed a proposition. [He adds in a footnote:] Given that this is a statement about reality and that proper names have no descriptive content, then how are we to represent the proposition expressed?” (pp. 20–1).

description, nor by the direct-reference theory's lights does it abbreviate any definite description. For similar reasons, the direct-reference theorist is also barred from using Frege's sense/designation distinction to solve the difficulties. How, then, can the theorist ascribe content to (1), (2), or their negations? In particular, how can (\sim 1) express anything at all, let alone something true? The semantic-ascent theory of existence is refuted on the direct-reference theory no less than on Fregean theory by the Church translation argument as well as by modal considerations (among other things). The *ungerade*, intensional-ascent theory hardly fares much better on direct-reference theory in connection with (1) and (\sim 1). On the Millian theory, it fares no better at all. According to Millianism, if α is a proper name, then its indirect quotation designates α 's bearer. If 'Sherlock Holmes' is a nondesignating name, '[^]Sherlock Holmes' is equally nondesignating.

It is a traditional view in philosophy, and indeed it is plain common sense, that (1) is false and (\sim 1) true, when taken as statements about reality. For 'Sherlock Holmes', as a name for the celebrated detective, is evidently a *very strongly* or *thoroughly nondesignating* name, one that does not in reality have any designatum at all – past, present, future, or forever merely possible (or even forever impossible). Bertrand Russell lent an eloquent voice to this common-sense view:

[M]any logicians have been driven to the conclusion that there are unreal objects. . . . In such theories, it seems to me, there is a failure of that feeling for reality which ought to be preserved even in the most abstract studies. Logic, I should maintain, must no more admit a unicorn than zoology can; for logic is concerned with the real world just as truly as zoology, though with its more abstract and general features. To say that unicorns have an existence in heraldry, or in literature, or in imagination, is a most pitiful and paltry evasion. What exists in heraldry is not an animal, made of flesh and blood, moving and breathing of its own initiative. What exists is a picture, or a description in words. Similarly, to maintain that Hamlet, for example, exists in his own world, namely in the world of Shakespeare's imagination, just as truly as (say) Napoleon existed in the ordinary world, is to say something deliberately confusing, or else confused to a degree which is scarcely credible. There is only one world, the "real" world: Shakespeare's imagination is part of it, and the thoughts that he had in writing *Hamlet* are real. So are the thoughts that we have in reading the play. But it is of the very essence of fiction that only the thoughts, feelings, etc., in Shakespeare and his readers are real, and that there is not, in addition to them, an objective Hamlet. When you have taken account of all the feelings roused by Napoleon in writers and readers of history, you have not touched the actual man; but in the case of Hamlet you have come to the end of him. If no one thought about Hamlet, there would be nothing left of him; if no one had thought about Napoleon, he would have soon seen to it that some one did.

The sense of reality is vital in logic, and whoever juggles with it by pretending that Hamlet has another kind of reality is doing a disservice to thought. A robust sense of reality is very necessary in framing a correct analysis of propositions about unicorns, golden mountains, round squares, and other such pseudo-objects.¹⁰

Contemporary philosophy has uncovered that (unlike my example of ‘Noman’) a name from fiction does not even designate a merely possible object. Thus Kripke writes:

The mere discovery that there was indeed a detective with exploits like those of Sherlock Holmes would not show that Conan Doyle was writing *about* this man; it is theoretically possible, though in practice fantastically unlikely, that Conan Doyle was writing pure fiction with only a coincidental resemblance to the actual man. . . . Similarly, I hold the metaphysical view that, granted that there is no Sherlock Holmes, one cannot say of any possible person, that he *would have been* Sherlock Holmes, had he existed. Several distinct possible people, and even actual ones such as Darwin or Jack the Ripper, might have performed the exploits of Holmes, but there is none of whom we can say that he would have *been* Holmes had he performed these exploits. For if so, which one?

I thus could no longer write, as I once did, that ‘Holmes does not exist, but in other states of affairs, he would have existed.’ (*Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 157–8)

It is not merely true that Sherlock Holmes does not exist; it is necessarily true. On Kripke’s view, the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a rigid *nondesignator*, designating nothing – not even a merely possible thing – with respect to every possible world. In a similar vein, Kaplan says:

The myth [of Pegasus] is possible in the sense that there is a possible world in which it is truthfully *told*. Furthermore, there are such worlds in which the language, with the exception of the proper names in question, is semantically and syntactically identical with our own. Let us call such possible worlds of the myth, ‘*M* worlds’. In each *M* world, the name ‘Pegasus’ will have originated in a dubbing of a winged horse. The Friend of Fiction, who would not have anyone believe the myth . . . , but yet talks of Pegasus, pretends to be in an *M* world and speaks its language.

But beware the confusion of our language with theirs! If *w* is an *M* world, then *their* name ‘Pegasus’ will denote something with respect to *w*, and *our* description ‘the *x* such that *x* is called ‘Pegasus’” will denote the same thing with respect to *w*, but *our* name ‘Pegasus’ will still denote nothing with respect to *w* . . .

¹⁰ *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1919), at pp. 169–70. Cf. Russell’s *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, D. Pears, ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1918, 1972, 1985), at pp. 87–8.

To summarize. It has been thought that proper names like ‘Pegasus’ and ‘Hamlet’ were like ‘Aristotle’ and ‘Newman-1’, except that the individuals denoted by the former were more remote. But regarded as names of *our* language – introduced by successful or unsuccessful dubbings, or just made up – the latter denote and the former do not.¹¹

II

Kripke and Peter van Inwagen have argued independently, and persuasively, that wholly fictional characters should be regarded as real things.¹² Theirs is not a Meinongian view – one of Russell’s targets in the passage quoted earlier – on which any manner of proper name or definite description, including such terms as ‘the golden mountain’ and ‘the round square’, designates some Object, though the Object may not exist in any robust sense and may instead have only a lower-class ontological status (and, as in the case of the round square, may even have inconsistent properties).¹³ To be sure, wholly fictional characters like Sherlock Holmes, though real, are not real people. Neither physical objects nor mental objects, instead they are, in this sense, abstract entities. They are not eternal entities, like numbers; they are human-made artifacts created by fiction writers. But they exist just as robustly as the fictions themselves, the novels, stories, and so on in which they occur. Indeed, fictional characters have the same ontological status as the fictions, which are also abstract entities created by their authors. And certain things are true

¹¹ From appendix XI, “Names from Fiction,” of “Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice,” in K. J. J. Hintikka, J. M. E. Moravcsik, and P. Suppes, eds, *Approaches to Natural Language* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1973), pp. 490–518, at pp. 505–8. Kaplan credits John Bennett in connection with this passage. The same general argument occurs in Donnellan, “Speaking of Nothing,” at pp. 24–5, and in Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), section VIII.4, “Names: Their Function in Fiction,” at pp. 159–63.

¹² Kripke, *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures for 1973* (unpublished); van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14, 4 (October 1977), pp. 299–308, and “Fiction and Metaphysics,” *Philosophy and Literature*, 7, 1 (Spring 1983), pp. 67–77. One possible difference between them is that van Inwagen accepts an ontology of fictional characters whereas Kripke is instead merely unveiling an ontology that he argues is assumed in the way we speak about fiction while remaining neutral on the question of whether this manner of speaking accurately reflects reality. My interpretation of Kripke is based primarily on the manuscript of his 1973 Locke Lectures as well as his seminars, which I attended, on the topic of designation, existence, and fiction at Princeton University during the spring of 1981 and at the University of California, Riverside, in January 1983.

¹³ Cf. Terence Parsons, “A Meinongian Analysis of Fictional Objects,” *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 1 (1975), pp. 73–86, and *Nonexistent Objects* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

of these fictional characters – for example, that the protagonist of the Sherlock Holmes stories was inspired in part by an uncannily perceptive person of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s acquaintance.

On this theory, a negative existential like (~ 1), taken as making an assertion about the fictional character and taken literally, denies real existence of a real fictional character, and is therefore false. In fact, Holmes may well be the most famous of all fictional characters in existence. The same sentence, understood as making an assertion about the fictional character, may be open to a more charitable and plausible interpretation, albeit a nonliteral one. Perhaps one may reinterpret the predicate ‘exists’, for example, to mean *real*, in something like the sense: *not merely a character in the story, but an entity of just the sort depicted*. Then (~ 1) may be understood, quite plausibly, as making an assertion that the character of Sherlock Holmes is a wholly fictional man, not a real one. That is to say, there is a fiction in which Holmes is a man of flesh and blood, but in reality Holmes is merely a fictional character. On this Pickwickian reading, the sentence is indeed true. But it is then not an authentic negative existential, and thus generates no special problem for Millianism, let alone for direct-reference theory.¹⁴

How can this talk about the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes as a real entity be reconciled with the passage from Kripke quoted earlier, in which he appears to agree with Kaplan and Russell that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is nondesignating?

On Kripke’s account, use of the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ to refer to the fictional character is in a certain sense parasitic on a prior, more fundamental use not as a name for the fictional character. Kripke and van Inwagen emphasize that the author of a fiction does not assert anything in writing the fiction. Instead, Kripke, like Kaplan, says that Conan Doyle merely *pretended* to be designating someone in using the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ and to be asserting things, expressing propositions, about him. A fiction purports to be an accurate historical recounting of real events involving real people. Of course, the author typically does not attempt to deceive the audience that the pretense is anything but a pretense; instead the fiction merely goes through the motions (hoaxes like Orson Welles’s radio broadcast of H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* and the

¹⁴ Cf. van Inwagen, “Creatures of Fiction,” at p. 308 n. 11. Kripke argues against any interpretation of (~ 1) on which the name is used as a name of the fictional character but ‘exist’ receives a Pickwickian interpretation on which the sentence is true. I am less skeptical. See below, especially note 29. (Van Inwagen’s suggestion is neutral between this sort of account and the one proposed there.)

legend of Santa Claus being the “exceptions that prove the rule”). Frege expressed the basic idea as follows:

Assertions in fiction are not to be taken seriously: they are only mock assertions. Even the thoughts are not to be taken seriously as in the sciences: they are only mock thoughts. If Schiller’s *Don Carlos* were to be regarded as a piece of history, then to a large extent the drama would be false. But a work of fiction is not meant to be taken seriously in this way at all: it’s all play.¹⁵

According to Kripke, as the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ was originally introduced and used by Conan Doyle, it has no designatum whatsoever. It is a name in the make-believe world of storytelling, part of an elaborate pretense. By Kripke’s lights, our language licenses a certain kind of metaphysical move. It postulates an abstract artifact, the fictional character, as a product of this pretense. But the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ does not thereby refer to the character thereby postulated, nor for that matter to anything else, and the sentences involving the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ that were written in creating the fiction express no propositions, about the fictional character or anything else. They are all part of the pretense, like the actors’ lines in the performance of a play. Names from fiction occurring within the fiction are thoroughly nondesignating. It is only at a later stage when discussing the fictional character from a metastandpoint, speaking about the pretense and not within it, that the language makes a second move, this one semantical rather than metaphysical, giving the name a new, nonpretend use as a name for the fictional character. The language allows a linguistic transformation, says Kripke, of a fictional name for a person into a name of a fictional person. Similarly, van Inwagen writes, “we have embodied in our rules for talking about fiction a convention that says that a creature of fiction *may* be referred to by what is (loosely speaking) ‘the name it has in the story’” (“Creatures of Fiction,” p. 307 n.). On this account, the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is ambiguous. In its original use as a name for a human being – its object-fictional use by Conan Doyle in writing the fiction, and presumably by the reader reading the fiction – it merely pretends to name someone and actually names nothing at all. But in its metafictional, nonpretend use as a name for the fictional character thereby created by Conan Doyle, it genuinely designates that particular artifactual entity. In effect, there are two names. Though spelled the same, they would be better spelled

¹⁵ “Logic,” in Frege’s *Posthumous Writings*, at p. 130. See also Kendall L. Walton, “On Fearing Fictions,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 75 (1978), pp. 5–27; and *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

differently, as ‘Holmes₁’ for the man and ‘Holmes₂’ for the fictional character. Neither names a real man. The latter names an abstract artifact, the former nothing at all. It is the original, thoroughly nondesignating use of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ – its use in the same way as ‘Holmes₁’ – that Kaplan, Kripke, and Russell emphasize in the passages quoted.

Kripke’s theory involves a complex account of object-fictional sentences like ‘Sherlock Holmes plays the violin’, ‘Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep’, ‘Pegasus has wings’, and (2). By contrast, ‘According to the stories, Sherlock Holmes used cocaine’ is metafictional, and literally true. On Kripke’s view, object-fictional sentences are multiply ambiguous, as a result of the two uses of the names and of differing perspectives from within and without the fiction or myth. Using the name in (2) in the manner of ‘Holmes₁’ as the pretend name of a pretend man, and using the sentence to make a statement not within the pretense and instead about the real world outside the fiction, the sentence expresses nothing and is therefore not literally true. (See note 17.) But object-fictional sentences may also be used from within the fiction, as part of the general pretense of an accurate, factual recounting of real events, not to be mistaken as a “time out” reality check. Interpreted thus, sentence (2) is a correct depiction, part of the storytelling language-game. So used, the sentence may be counted “true” in an extended sense – *truth in the fiction*, as we might call it – conforming to a convention of counting an object-fictional sentence “true” or “false” according as the sentence is true or false with respect (or according) to the fiction. This is the sense in which the sentence should be marked “true” on a true-false test in English Lit 101.¹⁶ Alternatively, the name may be used in the manner of ‘Holmes₂’ as a name for the fictional character. With the name so used, and the sentence used as a statement not about the fiction but about reality, it is false; no abstract entity uses cocaine or even can. On the other hand, according to Kripke, we also have an extended use of predicates, on which ‘uses cocaine’ correctly applies to an abstract entity when it is a character from a fiction according to which the corresponding fictional person uses cocaine. Giving the name its use as a name of

¹⁶ Kripke recognizes that this is generally equivalent, in some sense, to treating an object-fictional sentence φ as implicitly shorthand for the metafictional ‘According to the fiction, φ ’, and evaluating it as true or false accordingly. But he says that he regards it as applying ‘true’ and ‘false’ in conventionally extended senses directly to object-fictional sentences themselves in their original senses. Cf. David Lewis, “Truth in Fiction,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 15 (1978), pp. 37–46; reprinted with postscripts in Lewis’s *Philosophical Papers: Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 261–80.

the fictional character, and understanding the predicate ‘used cocaine’ in this extended sense, sentence (2) is true. According to the stories, Holmes₁ used cocaine. In virtue of that fact we may say that Holmes₂ “used cocaine.” The truth conditions of sentence (2) on this reading are exactly the same as the conventional truth-in-the-fiction conditions of the sentence interpreted as ‘Holmes₁ used cocaine’. But they differ in meaning. The former invokes a new interpretation for both subject and predicate.¹⁷

Viewing the negative existential (~ 1) on this same model, it has various interpretations on which it is false. Interpreted in the sense of ‘Holmes₁ does not exist’, it is like ‘Holmes₁ did not use cocaine’ in pretending to express a proposition, one that is false in the fiction. The sentence should be marked “false” on a true-false quiz about the Sherlock Holmes stories. Interpreted in the sense of ‘Holmes₂ does not exist’, the predicate ‘exist’ may be given its literal sense, or alternatively it may be given its extended sense on which it applies to a fictional character if and only according to the relevant fiction the corresponding person exists. Either way the sentence is false. The fictional character exists, and moreover the corresponding person existed according to the stories. But suppose (1) is read again in the sense of ‘Holmes₁ does not exist’, this time not as a statement within the fiction but as a statement about the real world. Then it is significantly unlike ‘Holmes₁ did not use cocaine’, which expresses nothing about the real world outside the fiction. For according to Kripke, ‘Holmes₁ does not exist’ is in reality quite true. On this interpretation, the sentence is regarded by Kripke, as by traditional philosophy, as an authentic true negative existential with a thoroughly nondesignating subject term.

This was our primary concern. We have attempted to deal with the problem of negative existentials by concentrating on ‘Holmes₂ does not exist’. But it is Holmes₁, not Holmes₂, who literally does not exist. The

¹⁷ Kripke cautions that when one is merely pretending to refer to a human being in using a name from fiction, that pretense does not in and of itself involve naming a fictional character. On the contrary, such a pretense was involved in the very creation of the as-yet-unnamed fictional character. He also remarks that an object-fictional sentence like (2) would be counted true in the conventionally extended “according to the fiction” sense even if the name had only its ‘Holmes₁’ use and the language had not postulated fictional characters as objects. Van Inwagen (“Creatures of Fiction,” pp. 305–6) invokes a notion of a fiction “ascribing” a property to a character, but admits that his terminology is misleading. He does not explain his notion of *ascription* in terms of what sentences within the fiction express, since such sentences on his view (as on Kripke’s) do not express anything. Instead this kind of ascription is an undefined primitive of the theory.

problem requires more work. Kripke says that it is “perhaps the worst problem in the area.”

By way of a possible solution, Kripke proposes that (1) should not be viewed on the model of ‘Holmes₁ used cocaine’, understood as a statement about the real world – and which thereby expresses nothing – but instead as a special kind of speech act. Consider first the object-fictional sentence (~2), in the sense of ‘Holmes₁ did not use cocaine’, construed as a statement about reality. One may utter this sentence even if one is uncertain whether Holmes₁ is a real person, in order to make the cautious claim that either there is no such person as Holmes₁ or there is but he did not use cocaine. In that case, the assertion is tantamount to saying that either there is no proposition that Holmes₁ uses cocaine, or there is such a proposition but it is not true. In short, the sentence is interpreted as meaning *there is no true proposition that Holmes₁ uses cocaine*. A similar cautious interpretation is available whenever negation is employed.

Kripke extends this same interpretation to singular negative existentials. He proposes that in uttering a sentence of the form ‘ α does not exist’ from the standpoint of the real world, what one really means is better expressed by ‘There is no true proposition that α exists’. What is meant may be true on either of two entirely different grounds: (i) the mentioned proposition is not true; alternatively (ii) there is no such proposition. If α is ‘the present king of France’, then one’s assertion is true for the former reason. If α is ‘Sherlock Holmes’ in its ‘Holmes₁’ use, then one’s assertion is true for the latter reason. Kripke’s is not a theory that takes (~1) to express that (1) is not true_{English}. Semantic-ascent theories are notoriously vulnerable to refutation (as by the Church translation argument). Instead, Kripke takes (~1) to express that there is no true proposition of a certain sort even if only because there is no proposition of that sort at all. This is closer to the intensional-ascent theory of existence – with a wink and a nod in the direction of Millianism.

Kripke extends this account to mistaken theories that have been believed – what I call *myths*. He explicitly mentions the case of the fictitious intra-Mercurial planet Vulcan, hypothesized and named by Jacques Babinet in 1846 and later thought by Urbain Le Verrier to explain an irregularity in the orbit of Mercury. The irregularity was eventually explained by the general theory of relativity.¹⁸ Though the Vulcan

¹⁸ Babinet hypothesized Vulcan for reasons different from Le Verrier’s. See Warren Zachary Watson, *An Historical Analysis of the Theoretical Solutions to the Problem of the Perihelion of Mercury* (doctoral dissertation, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1969), pp. viii, 92–4; and N. T. Roseveare, *Mercury’s Perihelion: From Le Verrier to Einstein* (Oxford: Oxford

hypothesis turned out to be a myth, it nevertheless bore fruit – not a massive physical object, but in the form of a mythical object, an artifactual abstract entity of the same ontological status as Holmes₂. Vulcan even has explanatory value. It accounts not for Mercury’s perihelion, but for the truth in English of ‘A hypothetical planet was postulated to explain Mercury’s irregular orbit’. In introducing the name ‘Vulcan’, Babinet meant to introduce a name for a planet, not an abstract artifact. His intentions were thwarted on both counts. Kripke holds that the dubbing ultimately resulted in two distinct uses of the name – in effect two names, ‘Vulcan₁’ and ‘Vulcan₂’ – the first as a name for an intra-Mercurial planet (and consequently thoroughly nondesignating), the second as a name of a mythical object, Babinet’s accidental creation. (Presumably these two uses are supposed to be different from two other pairs of uses, corresponding to the fire god of Roman mythology and Mr. Spock’s native planet in *Star Trek*.) When it is said that Vulcan₁ does not influence Mercury’s orbit, and that Vulcan₁ does not exist, what is meant is that there are no true propositions that Vulcan₁ influences Mercury or that Vulcan₁ exists.

III

Kripke’s intensional ascent fails to solve the problem. The ‘that’ clauses ‘that Holmes₁ uses cocaine’ and ‘that Holmes₁ exists’ are no less problematic than ‘Holmes₁’ itself. Kripke concedes, in effect, that if α is a thoroughly nondesignating name, then propositional terms like ‘the proposition that α used cocaine’ are also thoroughly nondesignating. The account thus analyzes a negative existential by means of another negative existential, generating an infinite regress with the same problem arising at each stage: If α is a thoroughly nondesignating name, how can ‘There is no proposition that α used cocaine’ express anything at all, let alone something true (let alone a necessary truth)? To give an analogy, a proposal to analyze ‘ α does not exist’ as ‘Either $\{\alpha\}$ is the empty set or it does not exist’ yields no solution to the problem of how (~ 1) can express anything true. Even if the analysis has the right truth conditions, it also invokes a disjunct that is itself a negative existential, and it

University Press, 1982), at pp. 24–7. (Thanks to Alan Berger and the late Sidney Morgenbesser for bibliographical assistance. I also researched the Vulcan hypothesis on the Internet. When I moved to save material to a new file to be named ‘Vulcan’, the program responded as usual, only this time signaling a momentous occasion: **Vulcan doesn’t exist. Create? Y or N.**)

leaves unsolved the mystery of how either disjunct can express anything if α is a thoroughly nondesignating name.¹⁹

There is more. On the accounts proposed by Kaplan, Kripke, and van Inwagen, object-fictional sentences, like ‘Sherlock Holmes uses cocaine’, have no genuine semantic content in their original use. This renders the meaningfulness of true metafictional sentences like ‘According to the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes used cocaine’ problematic and mysterious. (See note 18.) On Kripke’s account, it is true that according to the stories Holmes₁ used cocaine, and that on Le Verrier’s theory Vulcan₁ influences Mercury’s orbit. How can these things be true if there is no proposition that Holmes₁ used cocaine and no proposition that Vulcan₁ influences Mercury? What is it that is the case according to the stories or the theory? How can Le Verrier have believed something that is nothing at all? If object-fictional sentences like ‘Holmes₁ used cocaine’ express nothing, and we merely pretend that they express things, how can they be true with respect (according) to the fiction, and how can metafictional sentences involving object-fictional subordinate clauses express something, let alone something true?

More puzzling still are such cross-realm statements as ‘Sherlock Holmes was cleverer than Bertrand Russell’, and even worse, ‘Sherlock Holmes was cleverer than Hercule Poirot’. The account as it stands seems to invoke some sort of intensional use of ‘Sherlock Holmes’, whereby not only is the name ambiguous between ‘Holmes₁’ and ‘Holmes₂’, but also accompanying the former use is something like an *ungerade* use, arising in constructions like ‘According to the stories, Holmes₁ used cocaine’, on which the name designates a particular concept – presumably something of the form *the brilliant detective who performed such and such exploits*. Kripke acknowledges this, calling it a “special sort of quasi-intensional use.” The account thus ultimately involves an intensional apparatus.

¹⁹ As Kripke intends the construction ‘There is no such thing as α ’, it seems close in meaning to ‘ α is not a concept of anything’. In our problem case, α is ‘the proposition that Holmes₁ exists’. Since the ‘that’ prefix is itself a device for indirect quotation (see n. 7), ‘Holmes₁’ would thus occur in a doubly *ungerade* context. It may be, therefore, that Kripke’s intensional-ascent theory presupposes (or otherwise requires) a thesis that proper names have a Fregean *ungerade Sinn*, or indirect sense, which typically determines the name’s designatum, the latter functioning as both customary content and customary designatum, but which in the case of a thoroughly nondesignating name determines nothing. This would provide a reason for intensional ascent; one hits pay dirt by climbing above customary content. Kripke’s theory would then involve Fregean intensional machinery that direct designation scrupulously avoids and Millianism altogether prohibits.

Indeed, it appears to involve industrial-strength intensional machinery of a sort that is spurned by direct-reference theory, and worse yet, by the very account itself. Further, the intensionality seems to get matters wrong. First, it seems to give us after all a proposition that Holmes₁ used cocaine, a proposition that Vulcan₁ influences Mercury, etc. – those things that are the case (or not) according to stories or believed by the theorist. Furthermore, depending on how the *ungerade* use of ‘Holmes₁’ is explained, it could turn out that if there were someone with many of the attributes described in the Sherlock Holmes stories, including various exploits much like those recounted, then there would be *true* propositions that Holmes₁ existed, that he used cocaine, and so on. It could even turn out that if by an extraordinary coincidence there was *in fact* some detective who was very Holmesesque, then even though Holmes₂ was purely fictional and not based in any way on this real person, there *are* nevertheless true propositions that Holmes₁ existed, used cocaine, and so on. The theory threatens to entail that the question of Holmes’s authenticity (in the intended sense) would be settled affirmatively by the discovery of someone who was significantly Holmesesque, even if this person was otherwise unconnected to Conan Doyle. If the theory has consequences like these, then it directly contradicts the compelling passage of Kripke’s quoted earlier, if not also itself. Kripke expresses misgivings about the theory, acknowledging that the required “quasi-intensional” use of a name from fiction needs explanation.²⁰

²⁰ Cf. Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Designation*, J. McDowell, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), at pp. 349–52. The kind of intensionality required on Kripke’s account is not merely pragmatic in nature. Taking account of the preceding note, the account may be steeped in intensionality. The danger of entailing such consequences as those noted is very real. The theory of fiction in Lewis, “Truth in Fiction,” is similar to Kripke’s in requiring something like an *ungerade* use for thoroughly nondesignating names from fiction. Lewis embraces the conclusion that “the sense of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ as we use it is such that, for any world *w* where the Holmes stories are told as known fact rather than fiction, the name denotes at *w* whichever inhabitant of *w* it is who there plays the role of Holmes” (p. 267 of the version in his *Philosophical Papers: Volume I*). A similar conclusion is also reached in Robert Stalnaker, “Assertion,” P. Cole, ed., *Syntax and Semantics, 9: Semantics* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 315–32, at 329–31. These conclusions directly contradict Kripke’s account of proper names as rigid designators. In the first of the Locke Lectures, Kripke argues that uniquely being Holmesesque is not sufficient to be Holmes. Further, Kripke also argues there that the phenomenon of fiction cannot yield considerations against this or that particular philosophico-semantic theory of names, since it is part of the fiction’s pretense, for the theorist, that the theory’s “criteria for naming, whatever they are, are satisfied.” Why should this not extend to the thesis, from direct-reference theory, that names lack Kripke’s hypothesized “quasi-intensional use”? Donnellan, “Speaking of Nothing,” regards negative existentials as unlike other object-fictional sentences, though his solution differs

IV

Kripke's contention that names like 'Sherlock Holmes' are ambiguous is almost certainly mistaken. In particular, there is no obvious necessity to posit a use of the name by Conan Doyle and his readers that is nondesignating (in any sense) and somehow prior to its use as a name for the fictional character and upon which the latter use is parasitic.²¹

The alleged use of 'Sherlock Holmes' on which it is thoroughly nondesignating was supposed to be a pretend use, not a real one. In writing the Sherlock Holmes stories, Conan Doyle did not genuinely use the name at all, at least not as a name for a man. He merely pretended to. Of course, Conan Doyle wrote the name down as part of sentences

significantly from Kripke's and is designed to avoid intensionality. Donnellan provides a criterion whereby if α and β are distinct names from fiction, then (in effect) the corresponding true negative existentials, taken in the sense of ' α_1 does not exist' and ' β_1 does not exist' as literally true statements about reality, express the same proposition if and only if α_2 and β_2 name the same fictional character. (I have taken enormous liberties in formulating Donnellan's criterion in terms of Kripke's apparatus, but I believe I do not do it any serious injustice.) This proposal fails to provide the proposition expressed. In fact, Donnellan concedes that "we cannot... preserve a clear notion of what proposition is expressed for existence statements involving proper names" (p. 29; see note 9 above). This fails to solve the original problem, which is even more pressing for Donnellan. How can such sentences be said to "express the same proposition" when by his lights neither sentence clearly expresses any proposition at all? Cf. my "Nonexistence," *Noûs*, 32, 3 (1998), pp. 277–319, at 313–14 n. 29.

²¹ I first presented my alternative account of negative existentials, fiction, and myth in "Nonexistence." Amie Thomasson, in *Fiction and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), defends an account similar to mine on broadly similar grounds. See also F. Adams, G. Fuller, and R. Stecker, "The Semantics of Fictional Names," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 78 (1997), pp. 128–48; David Braun, "Empty Names," *Noûs*, 27 (1993), pp. 449–69, and "Empty Names, Fictional Names, Mythical Names," *Noûs* (forthcoming); Ben Caplan, "Empty Names: An Essay on the Semantics, Pragmatics, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Empty Names and Other Directly Referential Expressions," UCLA doctoral dissertation (2000), and "Creatures of Fiction, Myth, and Imagination," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 41, 4 (October 2004), pp. 331–7; Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Anthony Everett, "Empty Names and 'Gappy' Propositions," *Philosophical Studies*, 116 (October 2003), pp. 1–36; Kit Fine, "The Problem of Non-Existence: I. Internalism," *Topoi*, 1 (1982), pp. 97–140; Stacie Friend, review of Amie Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, in *Mind*, 2000, pp. 997–1000; Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Amie Thomasson, "Fiction, Modality and Dependent Abstracta," *Philosophical Studies*, 84 (1996), pp. 295–320; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). Three collections of articles on the philosophy and logic of fiction are: *Poetics*, 8, 1/2 (April 1979); A. Everett and T. Hofweber, eds., *Empty Names, Fiction and the Puzzles of Non-Existence* (Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 2000); and P. McCormick, ed., *Reasons of Art* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985).

in the course of writing the Holmes stories. In that sense he used the name. This is like the use that stage or film actors make of sentences when reciting their lines during the performance of a play or the filming of a movie. It is not a use whereby the one speaking commits him/herself to the propositions expressed. Even when writing 'London' or 'Scotland Yard' in a Holmes story, Conan Doyle was not in any robust sense using these names to designate. As J. O. Urmson notes, when Jane Austen, in writing a novel, writes a sentence beginning with a fictional character's name,

it is not that there is a reference to a fictional object, nor is there the use of a referring expression which fails to secure reference (as when one says "That man over there is tall" when there is no man over there). Jane Austen writes a sentence which has the form of an assertion beginning with a reference, but is in fact neither asserting nor referring; therefore she is not referring to any character, fictional or otherwise, nor does she fail to secure reference, except in the jejune sense in which if I sneeze or open a door I fail to secure reference. Nothing would have counted on this occasion as securing reference, and to suppose it could is to be under the impression that Miss Austen was writing history. . . . I do not say that one cannot refer to a fictional character, but that Miss Austen did not on the occasion under discussion.

What I am saying is that making up fiction is not a case of stating, or asserting, or propounding a proposition and includes no acts such as referring ("Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 13, 2 (April 1976), pp. 153–57 at p. 155).

The pretend use of 'Sherlock Holmes' by Conan Doyle does not have to be regarded as generating a use of the name on which it is nondesignating. *Pace* Kaplan, Kripke, Russell, and traditional philosophy, it *should* not be so regarded. A name semantically designates this or that individual only relative to a particular kind of use, a particular purpose for which the name was introduced. One might go so far as to say that a pretend use by itself does not even give rise to a real name at all, any more than it gives birth to a real detective. This may be somewhat overstated, but its spirit and flavor are not.²² Even if one regards a name as something that exists independently of its introduction into language (as is my inclination), it is confused to think of a name as designating, or not designating, other than as doing so *on* a particular use. On this view, a common

²² C. J. F. Williams, in *What Is Existence?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), argues that 'Sherlock Holmes' is not a proper name (pp. 251–5). This is what Kaplan ought to have said, but he did not. See his "Words," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 64 (1990), pp. 93–119, especially section II, "What are Names?" at pp. 110–19.

name like ‘Adam Smith’ designates different individuals on different uses. The problem with saying that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is nondesignating on Conan Doyle’s use is that in merely pretending that the name had a particular use, Conan Doyle did not yet attach a real use to the name on which it may be said to designate or not.

I heartily applaud Russell’s eloquent plea for philosophical sobriety. But his attitude toward “unreal” objects is fundamentally confused. On the other hand, Kripke’s account of fiction and myth is implausibly baroque and of dubious consistency.

The matter should be viewed instead as follows: Arthur Conan Doyle one fine day set about to tell a story. In the process he created a fictional character as the protagonist and other fictional characters, each playing a certain role in the story. These characters are not flesh-and-blood human beings. Rather they, like the story itself, are abstract artifacts, born of Conan Doyle’s fertile imagination. The name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ was originally coined by Conan Doyle in writing the story (and subsequently understood by those who have read the Holmes stories) as the fictional name for the protagonist. That thing – in fact merely an abstract artifact – is, *according to the story*, a man by the name of ‘Sherlock Holmes’. In telling the story, Conan Doyle pretends to use the name to designate its fictional designatum (and to use ‘Scotland Yard’ to designate Scotland Yard) – or rather, he pretends to be Dr. Watson using ‘Sherlock Holmes’, much like an actor portraying Dr. Watson on stage. But he does not really so use the name; ‘Sherlock Holmes’ so far does not really have any such use, or even any related use (ignoring unrelated uses it coincidentally might have had). At a later stage, use of the name is imported from the fiction into reality, to name *the very same thing* that it is the name of according to the story. That thing – now the real as well as the fictional bearer of the name – is according to the story a human being who is a brilliant detective, but in reality an artifactual abstract entity.

The use of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ represented by ‘Holmes₂’, as the name for what is in reality an abstract artifact, is the same use it has according to the Holmes stories, except that according to the stories, that use is one on which it designates a man. The alleged thoroughly nondesignating use of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ by Conan Doyle, as a pretend name for a man, is a myth. Contrary to Kaplan, Kripke, and the rest, there is no literal use of ‘Sherlock Holmes’ that corresponds to ‘Holmes₁’. One might say (in the spirit of the Kripke–van Inwagen theory) that there is a mythical use represented by ‘Holmes₁’, an allegedly thoroughly nondesignating

use that pretends to name a brilliant detective who performed such-and-such exploits. This kind of use is fictitious in the same way that Sherlock Holmes himself is, no more a genuine use than a fictional detective is a genuine detective. Instead there is at first only the pretense of a use, including the pretense that the name designates a brilliant detective, a human being, on that use. Later the name is given a genuine use, on which it names the very same entity that it named according to the pretense, though the pretense that this entity is a human being has been dropped.

Literary scholars discussing the Holmes stories with all seriousness may utter the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ as if to import its pretend use as the name of a man into genuine discourse – as when a Holmes “biographer” says, “Based on the evidence, Holmes was not completely asexual.” Even then, the scholars are merely pretending to use the name as a name for a man. There is no flesh-and-blood man for the name to name, and the scholars know that.²³ If they are genuinely using the name, they are using it as a name for the fictional character. The only genuine, non-pretend use that we ever give the name – of which I feel confident – is as a name for the character. And that use, as a name for that very thing, is the very use it has in the story – though according to the story, that very thing is a human being and not an abstract entity. Conan Doyle may have used the name for a period even before the character was fully developed. Even so, this would not clearly be a genuine use of the name on which it was altogether nondesignating. There would soon exist a fictional character that *that* use of the name already designated.²⁴ Once the anticipated designatum arrived, to use the name exactly as before was to use it to designate that thing. At that point, to use the name in a way that it fails to designate would have been to give it a new use.

²³ What about a foggy-headed literary theorist who maintains, as a sophomoric antirealist or Meinongian philosophical view (or quasi-philosophical view), that Sherlock Holmes is in some sense no less flesh-and-blood than Conan Doyle? The more bizarre someone’s philosophical perspective is, the more difficult it is to interpret his/her discourse correctly. Such a case might be assimilated to that of myths.

²⁴ On the view I am proposing, there is a sense in which a fictional character is prior to the fiction in which the character occurs. By contrast, Kripke believes that a fictional character does not come into existence until the final draft of the fiction is published. This severe restriction almost certainly does not accord with the way fiction writers see themselves or their characters. Even if it is correct, it does not follow that while writing a fiction, the author is using the name in such a way that it is thoroughly nondesignating. It is arguable that the name already designates the fledgling abstract artifact that does not yet exist. There is not already, nor will there ever be, any genuine use of the name as the name of a human being; that kind of use is make-believe.

Once the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’ has been imported into genuine discourse, Conan Doyle’s sentences involving the name express singular propositions about his character. One might even identify the fiction with a sequence of propositions, about both fictional and nonfictional things (for example, London’s Baker Street). To say this is not to say that Conan Doyle asserted those propositions. He did not – at least not in any sense of ‘assert’ that involves a commitment to one’s assertions. He merely pretended to be Dr. Watson asserting those propositions. In so doing, Conan Doyle pretended (and his readers pretend) that the propositions are true propositions about a real man, not untrue propositions about an abstract artifact. That is exactly what it *is* to pretend to assert those propositions. To assert a proposition, in this sense, is in part to commit oneself to its truth; so to pretend to assert a proposition is to pretend to commit oneself to its truth. And the propositions in question entail that Holmes was not an abstract entity but a flesh-and-blood detective. Taken literally, they are untrue.²⁵

Many have reacted to this proposal with a vague feeling – or a definite feeling – that I have conscripted fictional characters to perform a service for which they were not postulated and are not suited. Do I mean to say that *The Hound of the Baskervilles* consists entirely of a sequence of mostly false propositions about mostly abstract entities? Is it of the very essence of fiction to pretend that abstract entities are living, breathing people?

These misgivings stem from a misunderstanding of the nature of fiction and its population. The characters that populate fiction are created precisely to perform the service of being depicted as people by the fictions in which they occur. Do not fixate on the fact that fictional characters are abstract entities. Think instead of the various *roles* that a director might cast in a stage or screen production of a particular piece of fiction. Now think of the corresponding characters as the components of the fiction that *play* or *occupy* those roles in the fiction. It is no accident that one says of an actor in a dramatic production that he/she is playing a “part.” The characters of a fiction – the occupants of roles in the fiction – are in some real sense *parts* of the fiction itself. Sometimes, as in historical fiction, what fictionally plays a particular role is a real person or thing. In other cases, what plays a particular role is the brainchild of the storyteller. In such cases, the role player is a *wholly* fictional character, or what

²⁵ See note 17. If my view is correct, then van Inwagen’s use of the word ‘ascribe’ in saying that a fiction ascribes a particular property to a particular fictional character may be understood (apparently contrary to van Inwagen’s intent) quite literally, in its standard English meaning.

I (following Kripke) have been calling simply a “fictional character.” Whether a real person or wholly fictional, the character is that which according to the fiction takes part in certain events, performs certain actions, undergoes certain changes, says certain things, thinks certain thoughts. An actor performing in the role of Sherlock Holmes portrays Holmes₂; it is incorrect, indeed it is literally nonsense, to say that he portrays Holmes₁, if ‘Holmes₁’ is thoroughly nondesignating.

It is of the very essence of a fictional character to be depicted in the fiction as the person who takes part in such-and-such events, performs such-and-such actions, thinks such-and-such thoughts. Being so depicted is the character’s *raison d’être*. As Clark Gable was born to play Rhett Butler in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, that character was born to be the romantic leading man of that fiction. Mario Puzo’s character of Don Corleone is as well suited to be the charismatic patriarch of *The Godfather* as Marlon Brando was to portray the character on film. Except even more so. The character was also portrayed completely convincingly by Robert De Niro. But only that character, and no other, is appropriate to the patriarch role in Puzo’s crime saga. Likewise, the butler in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* would have been completely inappropriate, in more ways than one, as the protagonist of Ian Fleming’s James Bond novels. It is of the essence of Fleming’s character precisely to be the character depicted in the dashing and debonair 007 role in the James Bond stories – and not merely in the sense that being depicted thus is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for being the character of Bond in any metaphysically possible world. Rather, this is the condition that defines the character; being the thing so depicted in those stories characterizes exactly *what* the character of James Bond *is*.

In a sense, my view is the exact opposite of the traditional view expressed in Russell’s pronouncement that “it is of the very essence of fiction that only the thoughts, feelings, etc., in Shakespeare and his readers are real, and that there is not, in addition to them, an objective Hamlet.” To Russell’s pronouncement there is Hamlet’s own fictional retort: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” It is of the very essence of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* that there is indeed an object that is Hamlet. I am not urging that we countenance a person who is Hamlet₁, and who contemplated suicide according to the classic play but who does not exist. There is no sense in which there is any such person. The objective Hamlet is Hamlet₂ – what plays the title role in the Bard’s drama – and hence not a human being at all but a part of fiction, merely depicted there as

anguished and suicidal. It is with the most robust sense of reality prescribed by the philosopher/lord that I should urge recognition of this fictionally troubled soul.²⁶

It is an offer one shouldn't refuse lightly. Unlike Kripke's theory, a treatment of the sentences of the Sherlock Holmes stories on which they literally designate (although their author may not) the fictional character, and literally express things (mostly false) about that character, yields a straightforward account – what I believe is the correct account – of the meaningfulness and apparent truth of object-fictional sentences like 'Sherlock Holmes uses cocaine', and thereby also of the meaning and truth of metafictional sentences like 'According to the Holmes stories, Holmes used cocaine'. Following Kripke's lead in the possible-world semantics for modality, we say that 'Sherlock Holmes' is a rigid designator, designating the fictional character both *with respect to the real world* and *with respect to the fiction*. The object-fictional sentence is not true with respect to the real world, since abstract entities do not use hard drugs. But it is true with respect to the fiction – or true "in the world of the fiction" – by virtue of being entailed by the propositions, themselves about fictional characters, that comprise the fiction, taken together with supplementary propositions concerning such things as the ordinary physical-causal structure of the world, usual societal customs, and so on, that are assumed as the background against which the fiction unfolds.²⁷ When we speak within the fiction, we pretend that truth with respect to the fiction is truth simpliciter, hence that Holmes (= Holmes₂) was a human being, a brilliant detective who played the violin, and so on. Or what is virtually functionally equivalent, we use object-fictional sentences as shorthand for metafictional variants. The metafictional 'According to fiction f , ϕ ' is true with respect to the real world if and only if ϕ is

²⁶ In reading a piece of fiction, do we pretend that an abstract entity is a prince of Denmark (or a brilliant detective, and so on)? The question is legitimate. But it plays on the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re*. Taken *de dicto*, of course not; taken *de re*, exactly. That abstract entities are human beings is not something we pretend, but there are abstract entities that we pretend are human beings. Seen in the proper light, this is no stranger than pretending that Marlon Brando is Don Corleone. (It is not nearly as strange as Brando portraying a character in *The Freshman* who, in the story, is the real person on whom the character Marlon Brando portrayed in *The Godfather* was modelled.)

²⁷ Cf. John Heinz, "Reference and Inference in Fiction," *Poetics*, 8, 1/2 (April 1979), pp. 85–99. Where the fiction is inconsistent, the relevant notion of entailment may have to be nonstandard. Also, the notion may have to be restricted to a *trivial* sort of entailment – on pain of counting arcane and even as yet unproved mathematical theorems true with respect to fiction. Cf. Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," at pp. 274–8 of his *Philosophical Papers*, I.

true with respect to the mentioned fiction. In effect, the metafictional receives a Fregean treatment on which the object-fictional subordinate clause ϕ is in *ungerade* mode, designating a (typically false) proposition about a fictional character. In all our genuine discourse about Holmes, we use the name in the ‘Holmes₂’ way. One may feign using ‘Sherlock Holmes’ as the name of a man, but this is only a pretend use. To say that according to the stories, Holmes used cocaine is to say nothing; what is true according to the stories is that Holmes₂ used cocaine.²⁸

Consider again sentence (~ 1), or better yet,

- (3) Sherlock Holmes does not really exist; he is only a fictional character.

Taken literally, (3) expresses the near contradiction that Holmes₂ is a fictional character that does not exist. It was suggested earlier that the existence predicate may be given a Pickwickian interpretation on which it means something like: *an entity of the very sort depicted*. In many cases, however, Russell’s analysis by means of ($\sim 1'$ ₂) seems closer to the facts. In uttering (~ 1) or (3), the speaker may intend not merely to characterize Holmes, but to deny the *existence* of Holmes *as the eccentric detective*. It may have been this sort of consideration that led Kripke to posit an ambiguity, and in particular a use of the name in the alleged manner of ‘Holmes₁’, a pretend-designating nondesignating use on which the ‘Holmes₂’ use is parasitic (and which generates an intensional *ungerade* use). Kripke’s posit is also off target. There is a reasonable alternative. We sometimes use

²⁸ Very capable philosophers have sometimes neglected to distinguish among different possible readings of an object-fictional sentence – or equivalently, between literal and extended (fictional) senses of ‘true’. See, for example, Richard L. Cartwright in “Negative Existentials,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 57 (1960), pp. 629–39; and Jaakko Hintikka, “*Cogito Ergo Sum*: Inference or Performance,” *The Philosophical Review*, 71 (January 1962), pp. 3–32.

When we use an object-fictional sentence ϕ as shorthand for something metafictional, what is the longhand form? Perhaps ‘There is a fiction according to which ϕ ’, perhaps ‘According to *that* fiction, ϕ ’ with designation of a particular fiction, perhaps something else. Recognizing that we speak of fictional characters in these ways may to some extent obviate the need to posit a nonliteral, extended sense for all predicates. On the other hand, something like Kripke’s theory of extended senses may lie behind the use of gendered pronouns (‘he’) to designate fictional people even in discourse about reality.

Perhaps the most difficult sentences to accommodate are those that assert cross-realm relations. Following Russell’s analysis of thinking someone’s yacht larger than it is, ‘Bertrand Russell was cleverer than Sherlock Holmes’ may be taken to mean that the cleverness that Russell had is greater than the cleverness that, according to the stories, Holmes₂ had. Cf. my *Reference and Essence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981; Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), at pp. 116–35, and especially 147 n.

ordinary names, especially names of famous people, in various descriptive ways, as when it is said that so-and-so is a Napoleon, or another Nixon, a Hitler, no Jack Kennedy, or even (to segue into the fictional realm) a Romeo, an Uncle Tom, quixotic, Pickwickian, and so on. I submit that, especially in singular existential statements, we sometimes use the name of a fictional character in a similar way. We may use 'Sherlock Holmes', for example, to mean something like: *Holmes more or less as he is actually depicted in the stories*, or *Holmes replete with these attributes* (the principally salient attributes ascribed to Holmes in the stories), or best, *the person who is both Holmes and Holmesesque*. In uttering (~1), one means that the Holmes of fiction, Holmes as depicted, does not exist in reality, that there is in reality no such person – no *such* person, no person who is both Holmes and sufficiently like *that*, sufficiently as he is depicted.

Since this interpretation requires a reinterpretation of the name, it might be more correct to say that the speaker expresses this proposition than to say that (~1) or (3) himself does. This is not a use of 'Holmes' as a thoroughly nondesignating name, but as a kind of description that invokes the name of the fictional character. In short, the name is used à la Russell as a disguised improper definite description. It is very probably a nonliteral, Pickwickian use of the name. It is certainly a nonstandard use, one that is parasitic on the name's more fundamental use as a name for the fictional character, not the other way around. It need not trouble the direct-reference theorist. The disguised-description use is directly based upon, and makes its first appearance in the language only after, the standard use in the manner of 'Holmes₂' as (in Russell's words) a "genuine name in the strict logical sense." If an artificial expression is wanted as a synonym for this descriptive use, something clearly distinguished from both 'Holmes₂' (which I claim represents the standard, literal use of the name) and 'Holmes₁' (which represents a mythical use, no genuine use at all) is needed. Let us say that someone is a *Holmesesque-Holmes* if he is Holmes and sufficiently like he is depicted, in the sense that he has relevantly many of the noteworthy attributes that Holmes has according to the stories. Perhaps the most significant of these is the attribute of being a person (or at least person-like) and not an abstract artifact. Following Russell, to say that *the Holmesesque-Holmes* does not exist is to say that nothing is uniquely both Holmes and Holmesesque – equivalently (not synonymously), that Holmes is not Holmesesque. It is an empirical question whether Holmes – the character of which Conan Doyle wrote – was in reality like *that*, such-and-such a person, to any degree. The question of Holmes's existence *in this sense* is answered not by seeking whether

someone or other was Holmesesque but by investigating the literary activities of Conan Doyle.²⁹

These considerations, and related ones, weigh heavily in favor of an account of names from fiction as unambiguous names for artifactual entities.³⁰ In its fundamental use that arises in connection with the fiction – its only literal use – ‘Sherlock Holmes’ univocally names a man-made artifact, the handiwork of Conan Doyle. Contra Russell and his sympathizers, names from fiction do not have a prior, more fundamental use. They do not yield true negative existentials with thoroughly nondesignating names.

The account suggested here is extendable to the debunking of myths. A mythical object is a hypothetical entity erroneously postulated by a theory. Like a fictional object, a mythical object is an abstract (nonphysical, nonmental) entity created by the theory’s inventor. The principal difference between myth and fiction is that a myth is believed whereas with fiction there is typically only a pretense.³¹ An accidental storyteller,

²⁹ The notion of something being sufficiently as Holmes is depicted may be to some extent interest-relative. Consequently, in some cases the truth value of an assertion made using ‘ α exists’, with α a name from fiction, may vary with operative interests. Some scholars tell us, without believing in vampires, that Bram Stoker’s character of Count Dracula really existed. (This aspect of the theory I am suggesting raises a complex hornets’ nest of difficult issues. Far from disproving the theory, however, some of these issues may tend to provide confirmation of sorts.)

Kripke argues that (3), properly interpreted, involves an equivocation whereby the name has its original nondesignating use and ‘he’ is a “pronoun of laziness” (Peter Geach) designating the fictional character – so that (3) means that the man Holmes₁ does not exist whereas the fictional character Holmes₂ is just that. Kripke also says that one should be able to assert what is meant in the first clause of (3) without mentioning Holmes₂ at all. This is precisely what I believe cannot be done. The original may even be paraphrased into the nearly inconsistent ‘Sherlock Holmes does not really exist and is only a fictional character’. On my alternative hypothesis, the speaker may mean something like: *The Holmesesque-Holmes does not really exist; Holmes is only a fictional character.* This is equivalent to: Holmes is not really Holmesesque, but a fictional character. Besides avoiding the putative ‘Holmes₁’ use, my hypothesis preserves an anaphoric-like relation between the pronoun and antecedent. (Other possibilities arise if Kripke’s theory of extended senses for predicates is applied to ‘Holmesesque’.)

³⁰ In later work, and even in the same work cited in note 12, Kripke argued persuasively against positing ambiguities when an univocality hypothesis that equally well explains the phenomena is available. Cf. his “Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference,” in P. French, T. Uehling, and H. Wettstein, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 6–27, especially 19.

³¹ Donnellan, “Speaking of Nothing” at pp. 6–8, says that myth is not analogous to fiction. I am convinced that he is mistaken, and that this myth about myths has led many other philosophers astray. When storytellers tell stories and theorists hypothesize, fictional and mythical creatures abound. (An interesting possibility: Perhaps the myth invented by Babinet no longer exists, now that no one believes it. Can a myth, once it is disproved,

Le Verrier attempted in all sincerity to use ‘Vulcan’ to designate a real planet. The attempt failed, but not for lack of a designatum. Here as before, there is ample reason to doubt that ‘Vulcan₁’ represents a genuine use of the original name. Le Verrier held a theory according to which there is such a use, and he intended and believed himself to be so using the name. Had the theory been correct, there would have been such a use for the name. However, the theory is false; it was all a mistake. Kripke says that in attempting to use the name, 19th-century astronomers failed to designate anything. But this verdict seems to ignore their unintended relationship to the mythical planet. One might just as well judge that the ancients who introduced ‘Hesperus’ as a name for the first star visible in the dusk sky, unaware that the “star” was in fact a planet, failed to name that planet. Nor had they inadvertently introduced two names, one for the planet and one thoroughly nondesignating. Plausibly, as the ancients unwittingly referred to a planet believing it to be a star, so Le Verrier may have unknowingly referred to Babinet’s mythical planet, saying and believing so many false things about it (that it is a real planet,

continue to exist as merely an unbelieved theory? If not, then perhaps ‘Vulcan’ is non-designating after all – though only by designating a nonexistent.)

Kripke extends his account in the natural way also to terms for objects in the world of appearance (for example, a distant speck or dot), and to species names and other biological-kind terms from fiction and myth, like ‘unicorn’ and ‘dragon’. The theory should be extended also to general terms like ‘witch’, ‘wizard’, and so on. There is a mythical species designated by ‘dragon’, an abstract artifact, not a real species. Presumably, if *K* is the mythical species (or higher-level taxonomic kind) of dragons, then there is a corresponding concept or property of being a beast of kind *K*, thus providing semantic content for the predicate ‘is a dragon’. Kripke believes there is a prior use of the term, in the sense of ‘dragon₁’, which has no semantic content. But as before, on this point I find no persuasive reason to follow his lead.

Are there dragons? There are myths and fictions according to which there are dragons, for example the legend of Puff. Puff is a fictional character – an abstract artifact and not a beast. Fictional dragons like Puff are not real dragons – though they may be said to be “dragons,” if by saying that we mean that they are dragons in the story. (Cf. Kripke’s hypothesized extended sense of ‘plays the violin’.) Is it metaphysically possible for there to have been dragons in the literal (unextended) sense of the word? No; the mythical species *K* is not a real species, any more than Puff is a real beast, and the mythical species could not have been a species any more than Puff could have been a beast. It is essential to *K* that it not be a species. A fortiori there could not have been such beasts. The reasoning here is very different from that of Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity*, at pp. 156–7, which emphasizes the alleged ‘dragon₁’ use (disputed here), on which ‘There are dragons’ allegedly expresses nothing (hence nothing that is possibly true). In “Mythical Objects,” in J. Campbell, M. O’Rourke, and D. Shier, eds., *Meaning and Truth* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), pp. 105–23, I apply my account to Peter Geach’s famous problem about Hob’s and Nob’s hypothesized witch, from “Intentional Identity,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 74, 20 (1967).

that it affects Mercury's orbit, and so on). There may have been a period during which 'Vulcan' was misapplied to the mythical planet before such application became enshrined as the official, correct use. It does not follow that there is a prior, genuine use of the name on which it is thoroughly nondesignating. I know of no compelling reason to deny that Babinet introduced a single name 'Vulcan' ultimately with a univocal use as a name for his mythical planet.³² One might say that 'Vulcan,' represents a mythical use of the name. As with 'Holmes,' this kind of use is no more a genuine use than a mythical planet is a genuine planet.

It is unclear whether there are significant limitations here, and if so, what they might be. Even Meinong's golden mountain and round square should probably be seen as real mythical objects. Meinong's golden mountain is an abstract entity that is neither golden nor a mountain but as real as Babinet's Vulcan. Real but neither round nor square, Meinong's round square is both round and square according to Meinong's erroneous theory. Perhaps we should also recognize such things as fabrications, figments of one's imagination, and flights of fancy as real abstract entities.

³² In introducing 'Vulcan', Babinet presumably presupposed the existence of an intra-Mercurial planet to be so named, while making no provisions concerning what the name would designate if there is no such planet. In that case, he failed to endow the name 'Vulcan' with a new type of use on which it designates anything (or even nothing at all). Believing himself to refer by the name 'Vulcan' to a planet, he began referring instead to the mythical planet. Le Verrier thereby inadvertently established a new type of use for the name on which it designates Vulcan. (Thanks to David Braun for pressuring me to clarify this point.) In some cases of "reference fixing," the description employed may have what I call a *bad mock referential*, or *ugly*, use – that is, designation is fixed by an implicit description not codesignative with the description explicitly used. See my "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," in M. Reimer and A. Bezuidenhout, eds., *Descriptions and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 230–60. Cf. Kripke on 'Hesperus', in *Naming and Necessity*, at p. 80 n. 34.