



# Referential intentions and ordinary names in fiction

Jeonggyu Lee<sup>1</sup>

Accepted: 15 January 2023 / Published online: 25 February 2023  
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2023

## Abstract

This paper deals with the semantics and meta-semantics for ordinary names in fiction. It has recently been argued by some philosophers that when ordinary names are used in fictional contexts, they change their semantic contents and work as fictional names in general. In this paper, I argue that there is no compelling reason to believe that such reference changes occur and defend the view that whether those names refer to real or fictional objects depends on which semantic intentions speakers have.

**Keywords** Ordinary names in fiction · Fictional names · Fictional surrogates · Referential intentions · Reference

## 1 Exceptionalism about ordinary names in fiction

Authors generally introduce new fictional names when writing fictions. Conan Doyle introduced the name “Sherlock Holmes” while writing *A Study in Scarlet*. Leo Tolstoy introduced the name “Pierre Bezukhov” while writing *War and Peace*.<sup>1</sup> These fictional names have raised complicated semantic and ontological issues that many philosophers of language and philosophers of fiction have focused on and argued about, such as whether there are any fictional objects to which fictional names refer, and if there are any, what the nature of those objects is.

---

<sup>1</sup> Although Tolstoy actually introduced the Russian name “Пьер Безухов,” I will use an English name transliterated from Russian for simplicity.

---

✉ Jeonggyu Lee  
jeonggyulee@skku.edu

<sup>1</sup> Department of Philosophy, Sungkyunkwan University, Sunkyunkwan-ro 25-2, Jongro-gu, Seoul 03063, South Korea

However, authors also sometimes use pre-existing non-fictional names while writing fictions. For example, Conan Doyle inscribed the city name “London” while writing *A Study in Scarlet*, and Leo Tolstoy inscribed the historical figure’s name “Napoleon” while writing *War and Peace*. This paper deals with the semantics and meta-semantics for these non-fictional ordinary names used in fictional contexts, i.e., how the referents of those names are determined and what the semantic contents of those names are.

It first seems natural to think that ordinary names used in fictional contexts simply refer to ordinary real objects: Conan Doyle’s inscriptions of “London” refer to the real city London. Leo Tolstoy’s inscriptions of “Napoleon” refer to the historical figure Napoleon. Indeed, until recently, this natural view has not been seriously challenged. Saul Kripke, for example, seems to take it for granted:

A referent, of course, need not be supplied if the work of fiction or the story is about ordinary entities of the primary kind like, say, people. If this is so, then when one uses the name “Napoleon” in a story about Napoleon or “George Washington” in the story of his chopping down the cherry tree, one need not say that the name here refers to a fictional character; one can say that it refers to Napoleon, or to George Washington, himself (Kripke, 2013: 82).

However, not a few philosophers, so-called *exceptionalists* about ordinary names used in fictional contexts, have begun to question the view that those names refer to ordinary real objects.<sup>2</sup> Their view can be described as follows:

**Exceptionalism** When ordinary names are used in fictional contexts, they *always* change their semantic contents and work the same way as fictional names in general.

For example, according to exceptionalism, the name “Napoleon” appearing in *War and Peace* works the same way as other fictional names such as “Pierre Bezukhov.” That is, “Napoleon” in *War and Peace* refers either to the so-called fictional surrogate of the real Napoleon if “Bezukhov” refers to a fictional character, or to nothing if “Bezukhov” refers to nothing, but in any case not to the real Napoleon.<sup>3</sup>

Although the main arguments for exceptionalism will be presented in detail in Sect. 4, it is worth noting in advance that one primary methodological virtue of exceptionalism is to provide a uniform account of every name used in fictional con-

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Kroon, 1994; Bonomi, 2008; Motoarca, 2014; Predelli, 2017; Garcia-Carpintero, 2019; Voltolini, 2020b. The term “exceptionalism” was introduced by Garcia-Carpintero for the view that ordinary names used in fictional contexts work exceptionally.

<sup>3</sup> More precisely, according to exceptionalism, if anti-realism is correct, then since there is nothing to which fictional names refer, ordinary names used in fictional contexts do not refer to anything; if realism is correct, ordinary names used in fictional contexts refer either to fictional surrogates or to nothing, depending on which meta-semantic theory realists hold. For example, according to Kripke (2013) and Braun (2005: 609–14), there is a case where the occurrences of fictional names fail to refer, especially when authors first started writing their stories (for Braun, whether fictional names refer to fictional objects or to nothing depends on authors’ semantic intentions at that time). Thus, if both exceptionalism and those realists’ view are correct, then in some situations where fictional names fail to refer, ordinary names in fictional contexts fail to refer as well (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out).

texts: other things being equal, a more uniform theory is of course superior to other competing theories, and this is what makes exceptionalism attractive. In this paper, however, I will argue that there is no further compelling reason to admit exceptionalism. I will rather maintain that whether ordinary names used in fictional contexts refer to real or fictional objects depends on which semantic intention speakers have. In the next section, I will introduce my intention-based non-exceptionalism about ordinary names used in fiction.

But before moving on to the next section, I will provide two remarks that help clarify my discussion in this paper. First, for the sake of argument, I will assume referentialism (also called Millianism) about names, the semantic view that the semantic content of a name, if it has any, is simply its referent, and is not given by any associated definite description. Accordingly, I will also assume that sentences containing names semantically express singular propositions (or gappy propositions, or no propositions, if any of the names that appear in the sentences fail to refer).<sup>4</sup> Those who reject referentialism may take this paper as arguing about which theory of ordinary names in fiction would be best for referentialists.

Second, in what follows, for the convenience of discussion, I will use terms such as “fictional character” and “fictional surrogate” in a way that seems to presuppose fictional realism. Fictional realists can regard my uses of these terms as literal, so they can assume that I am literally talking about a particular kind of object.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, anti-realists can assume that I am engaging in a certain kind of extended pretense when I use those terms.<sup>6</sup> But whatever ontological view is taken, it does not affect my key arguments in this paper.

## 2 Referential intentions and non-exceptionalism

In this section, I will introduce my intention-based non-exceptionalism about ordinary names used in fiction. To do so, I first need to briefly explain the so-called causal theory (or picture) of names, first suggested by Donnellan (1970) and Kripke (1980) as an alternative to the description theory about reference-fixing. According to the causal theory, the standard process by which the referent of a name is determined is as follows: a new name “*N*” for an object *o* is introduced by a naming ceremony. After that, “*N*” is transmitted through conversation among speakers, and these name-transmissions comprise communicative causal chains of “*N*” in their linguistic community. Given this situation, a speaker’s particular use of “*N*” succeeds in referring

---

<sup>4</sup> Gappy propositions are propositions that lack constituents of the sort that appear in complete, ungappy propositions. The term “gappy proposition” was first coined by Kaplan and became widely used due to Braun (Cf. Kaplan, 1989: 496; Braun, 1993: 468 n.23, 2005: 599).

<sup>5</sup> I will also use the phrase “creating fictional objects” in a way that seems to presuppose fictional creationism, the view that fictional objects are abstract artifacts literally created by authors (See, for example, Van Inwagen, 1977; Salmon, 1998; Thomasson, 1999; Braun, 2005; Voltolini, 2006; Kripke, 2013; Lee, 2022). The other kinds of realists such as Meinongians or Platonists can assume that my uses of the term “creation” mean something like the process of singling out a Meinongian or Platonic object (See, for example, Parsons, 1980 and Zalta, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Walton, 1990: Chap. 10 and 11; Crimmins, 1998; Brock, 2002; Everett, 2013: Chap. 3.

to *o*, only if she is *properly* connected to these communicative causal chains that originate from the naming ceremony for *o*.

Of course, it is well known that a simple version of the causal theory has difficulty in explaining the phenomena of reference shifts, as Gareth Evan (1973) first pointed out, and that some developed versions of the causal theory for explaining reference shifts had been suggested.<sup>7</sup> However, it is not my goal to explore which version of the causal theory would be most promising; my arguments in this paper are not committed to any specific form of the causal theory. Rather, I will focus primarily on the idea that appears in Kripke's following passage when Kripke introduces his causal picture:

When the name is “passed from link to link”, the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it. If I hear the name “Napoleon” and decide it would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, I do not satisfy this condition (Kripke, 1980: 96).

That is, whether my utterance of “Napoleon” semantically refers to the historical figure or my pet aardvark depends on which semantic referential intention I have in a conversational situation. If I intend to semantically refer to whoever name-givers' uses of “Napoleon” refer to and thereby participate in the linguistic practice about the pre-existing name “Napoleon”, i.e., if I have the *reference borrowing* intention for my use of “Napoleon”, then the semantic referent of my utterance of “Napoleon” will be the historical figure. But if I decide to name my pet aardvark “Napoleon” after the historical figure, then a new naming ceremony is carried out and a new homonymous given name “Napoleon” is introduced for my pet. So, in this situation, if I intend to semantically refer to my pet, the semantic referent of my utterance of “Napoleon” will be my pet.

With this explanation in mind, suppose I utter the following sentence:

(1) Napoleon is my pet.

Is the proposition expressed by my utterance of (1) is true or false? Again, it depends on which semantic intention I have when I use “Napoleon” that serves as disambiguation. Since the semantic referent of “Napoleon” in (1) cannot be determined in the absence of a speaker's semantic intention, it is misleading to ask whether or

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Evans, 1982: Chap. 11; Devitt, 1981; Devitt and Sterenly, 1999.

not sentence (1) itself is true in a context where a speaker's semantic intention is not specified.<sup>8,9</sup>

We can have a better understanding of this situation if we distinguish between a Kaplanian generic name and a specific (or common currency) name (Kaplan, 1990):<sup>10</sup> the historical figure Napoleon and my pet Napoleon share the same generic name "Napoleon," but since their specific names refer to different objects, they have distinct specific names, so to speak, "Napoleon"<sub>h</sub> for the historical figure and "Napoleon"<sub>p</sub> for my pet. Thus, when I utter the generic name "Napoleon" in (1), my semantic intention determines which of two specific names I am uttering, "Napoleon"<sub>h</sub> and "Napoleon"<sub>p</sub>, which refer to different objects and therefore have different semantic contents.<sup>11</sup> In what follows, when I mention names in a context where the referents of names are not yet determined, such as "Napoleon" in (1) in the absence of a speaker's semantic intention, I mean generic names; when I mention names that have their own determined semantic contents, I mean specific names; when it is clear which kinds of names I mean and there is no danger of confusion, I will omit the words "generic" and "specific" for simplicity.

Let us now consider another similar example: suppose I was very impressed by the biography of Napoleon and made a 5-meter statue of Napoleon in my front yard and named the statue "Napoleon" after the historical figure. Now consider the following sentence:

(2) Napoleon is 5 m tall.

In this situation, again, the literal truth of my utterance of (2) depends on which semantic intention I have that disambiguates "Napoleon". If I intend to semantically refer to the historical figure whom other speakers refer to, it is false, whereas if I intend to semantically refer to the statue I made, it is true.

Let us apply this observation to ordinary names used in fictional contexts. Consider the following two scenarios:

<sup>8</sup> Note that the explanation so far does not imply that the semantic referent of a name cannot be distinguished from its speaker's referent. They can surely be different when a speaker has at least two different referential intentions for her uses of a single given name that determine different referents. For example, seeing my pet's imposing steps, if I metaphorically say, "Napoleon is walking!" without any intention to name him "Napoleon", only the speaker's referent of "Napoleon" will be my pet, while its semantic referent remains the historical figure. I do not have any semantic intention for my use of "Napoleon" to refer to my pet. Kripke's (1977: 263-4) Jones/Smith case is another example where a speaker has two divergent referential intentions. The speaker sees Smith in the distance, and mistakes him for Jones and says, "Jones is raking leaves". In this situation, the speaker's *overriding* semantic intention for her use of "Jones" is to refer to the person whom other speakers' uses of "Jones" refer to, not to refer to the person in distance. Therefore, while the speaker's referent of "Jones" is Smith, its semantic referent remains Jones.

<sup>9</sup> Although I assume for convenience that names are often lexically ambiguous, this assumption is not essential for my view that the semantic referent of a name cannot be determined without a speaker's semantic intention. Even if a name is an indexical and so sentence (1) is not lexically ambiguous, the speaker's referential intention is still necessary for determining its semantic content through its character (See Recanati, 1997 and Pelczar & Rainsbury, 1998 for indexicalism about names).

<sup>10</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

<sup>11</sup> So, the generic name "Napoleon" here plays a similar role to the phonological form /nəpəʊliən/ and the orthographic form [N̄ a p̄ o l̄ e o n̄].

**Real person Napoleon** I was very impressed by the biography of Napoleon, and I decided to write a novel about him. While writing the novel, I intend for my uses of “Napoleon” to semantically refer to the historical figure whom other speakers’ uses of “Napoleon” refer to.

**Fictional character Napoleon** I was very impressed by the biography of Napoleon, and I thought that “Napoleon” would be a nice name for a fictional character in my new novel. So, I decided to create a new fictional character and named it “Napoleon” after the historical figure. While writing the novel, I intend for my uses of “Napoleon” to semantically refer not to the historical figure but to the newly created fictional character.

Suppose that in both scenarios, the following sentence appears in my novel:

(3) Napoleon plays basketball.

What is the semantic referent of my inscription of “Napoleon” in each scenario? As in the previous cases about the aardvark Napoleon and the statue Napoleon, I suggest that the answer depends on which semantic intention I have in each case: in *Real Person Napoleon*, the semantic referent of my inscription of “Napoleon” is the historical figure Napoleon: I *de re* pretend about him that he plays basketball. By contrast, in *Fictional Character Napoleon*, a new homonymous specific name “Napoleon” is introduced for my fictional character and the semantic referent of my inscription of “Napoleon” is the fictional character created by me: I *de re* pretend about the fictional character Napoleon that *it* plays basketball.<sup>12</sup>

Sentence (3), which we have considered so far, is a so-called *intra-fictional* sentence. But I suggest that the same explanation applies to the following so-called *internal* and *external metafictional* sentences:

(4) According to my novel, Napoleon plays basketball.

(5) Napoleon is a fictional character.

Again, in *Real Person Napoleon*, since I intend for my uses of “Napoleon” to semantically refer to the historical figure, the semantic referent of “Napoleon” in my utterances of (4) and (5) is the historical figure, and my utterance of (5) is false. By contrast, in *Fictional Character Napoleon*, since I intend for my uses of “Napoleon” to semantically refer to the fictional character, the semantic referent of “Napoleon” in my utterances of (4) and (5) refer to the fictional character, and my utterance of (5) is true.

<sup>12</sup> If anti-realism is correct, then since there is nothing like a fictional character, it must be the case that in *Fictional Character Napoleon*, my inscription of “Napoleon” in fact refers to nothing: I *de re* pretend about nothing that *it* plays basketball or I *de dicto* pretend that there was some man who was called “Napoleon” and he plays basketball.

I believe that my explanation so far is intuitive and plausible. In what follows, I will characterize the view I will advocate in this paper as follows and name it “intention-based non-exceptionalism” (“*INE*” for short):<sup>13</sup>

**Intention-based non-exceptionalism** The semantic referent of a speaker *S*’s use of an ordinary name “*N*” in a fictional context is a real object, if *S* has the semantic intention for *S*’s use of “*N*” to refer to whatever object that other speakers’ uses of “*N*” refer to, which *S* believes to be real, and that object is in fact a real one.<sup>14,15</sup>

Given the above characterization, exceptionalists, in order to reject *INE*, should argue that even in the *Real Person Napoleon* scenario where I have the reference borrowing intention for my uses of “Napoleon” while writing sentence (3), this referential intention of mine is frustrated for some reason and the semantic referent of my use of “Napoleon” becomes fixed as the fictional surrogate of the real Napoleon.

In the next section, I will first provide two arguments for *INE*. Then, in Sect. 4, I will argue that exceptionalists’ arguments do not succeed in showing that there is a convincing reason to believe that even when a speaker has a reference borrowing intention in a fictional context, that intention always fails to contribute to fixing the semantic referent of a name.

### 3 Arguments for intention-based non-exceptionalism

In this section, I will provide two arguments for *INE*. The purpose of these arguments is not to conclusively refute exceptionalism, but to show that there are compelling reasons in favor of *INE*. So, once it turns out that arguments for exceptionalism are not convincing (as I will argue in the next section), we will be justified in accepting *INE*.

#### 3.1 Argument from a lie and imagination

The first argument I will provide is based on Terence Parsons’s (1980: 57–9) observation that there seems to be no difference concerning reference in the following situations:

- i. Telling a lie about Jimmy Carter.
- ii. Telling a lie about Carter which is very long (e.g., book length).

<sup>13</sup> Philosophers who have explicitly argued for a version of non-exceptionalism beyond simply assuming it include Parsons, 1980 and Friend, 2000, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that in this paper, I use the adjective “real” to mean something like <non-fictional, (non-mythical, and non-imaginary)>, not <existent>, so as not to exclude the fictional realist view that fictional objects are *real* objects in some other strict sense.

<sup>15</sup> This view of mine is significantly similar to Braun’s view on the reference of fictional names in that, according to Braun (2005: 609–14), authors’ semantic intention plays a crucial role in determining the semantic contents of fictional names they use, although my view concerns ordinary names in fiction and Braun’s view concerns fictional names (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for informing me of this).

- iii. Making up a story about Carter which is not intended to deceive anyone, and which contains falsehoods.
- iv. Writing a work of fiction in which Carter is a character.

Let us suppose Parsons uses the following sentence in each situation:

- (6) Carter is 2 m tall.

According to Parsons, when he utters (6) in (i), since he is telling a lie *about* the real person Carter, his utterance of “Carter” refers to the real Carter. The same explanation seems to be applied sequentially to the situations from (ii) to (iv). After all, when he writes sentence (6) in his novel in (iv), since his novel is about the real person Carter, his inscription of “Carter” refers to the person Carter.

I believe that Parsons’s argument goes in the right direction, but it is not yet convincing as it stands. As Ioan-Radu Motoarca (2014) and Garcia-Carpintero (2019) have rightly pointed out, appealing to our ordinary intuition about *aboutness* is not sufficient to strongly support that Parsons’s inscription of “Carter” in (iv) refers to the real Carter. For insofar as our intuition that Parsons’s novel is *about* the real Carter is one about the ordinary malleable notion of aboutness, it can be explained away without difficulty even if his inscription of “Carter” refers to the fictional surrogate of Carter: since the fictional surrogate created by Parsons has a certain intimate relation with the real Carter, whether it is a similarity relation (Bonomi, 2008) or a representation relation (Motoarca, 2014), Parsons’s novel is still in some sense *about* the real Carter, and thus our intuition of aboutness is explained away.

A similar criticism can be applied to Stacie Friend’s argument for non-exceptionalism, which is based on the idea that our attitudes in response to Parsons’s use of (6) in (iv) are directed toward the real Carter, and his novel *invites* us to imagine about the real Carter that he is 2 m tall (Friend, 2000, 2019). Even if it is true that in reading Parsons’s novel we are invited to imagine singular propositions about the real Carter, this does not guarantee that Parsons’s inscriptions of “Carter” semantically refer to the real Carter. To see why, consider the following three sentences:

- (7) Biden is on TV.
- (8) The current U.S. president is on TV.
- (9) I am watching TV.

Suppose Jennie wants to *invite* Lisa to believe the singular proposition that Biden is on TV. Jennie can do this by uttering any of the above three sentences given an appropriate conversational situation: Jennie’s uttering (7) is obviously the most straightforward way to do her job because (7) semantically expresses the singular proposition that Biden is on TV. Jennie’s uttering (8) can also invite Lisa to believe that Biden is on TV in many ordinary conversational contexts where Lisa already knows that Biden is the current U.S. president (and Jennie knows that Lisa knows it). Furthermore, if Lisa knows that Jennie will watch TV when Biden is on (and Jennie also knows that Lisa knows this), by a familiar process of Gricean conversational implicature, Jennie’s uttering (9) can also invite Lisa to believe that Biden is on TV. How-



ever, it is clear that only (7) contains a term whose semantic content is Biden. Being invited to entertain a singular proposition about an object *o* does not show that the invitation is made by a sentence containing a term that directly refers to *o*. Returning to our original example, even if the name “Carter” in (6) appearing in Parson’s novel refers to the fictional surrogate of Carter, it can surely invite us to imagine a singular proposition about the real Carter.

A lesson from the discussion so far, I believe, is that we should directly focus on whether a speaker can have a successful semantic intention to refer to a real object in a given situation: what is missing in Parson’s original argument is the consideration of referential intentions. In what follows, I will provide a revised version of the argument that takes account of a speaker’s referential intention, which is immune to exceptionalists’ criticism we have seen.

Let us first assume that I have a clear reference borrowing intention for my use of “Carter” to semantically refer to the person Carter whom other speakers’ uses of “Carter” refer to in each of the following three situations:

- (a) I utter sentence (6) when I lie about the real Carter.
- (b) I utter sentence (6) to report what I imagine now about the real Carter.
- (c) I inscribe sentence (6) while writing a novel about the real Carter.

I believe that there is at least no *prima facie* reason to believe that my semantic referential intention is frustrated in any of three situations. In situation (a), it seems obvious that my use of “Carter” successfully refers to the real Carter. Likewise, in situation (b), given that I imagine about the real Carter and report what I imagine by uttering (6) with the referential intention to semantically refer to the real Carter, it seems clear to me that there is nothing that can frustrate my semantic intention. Situation (c) is essentially the same as (b), except that my act of *de re* pretense about the real Carter is related to the writing activity. So, there also seems to be no reason to believe that my semantic intention is frustrated in (c). Of course, if I decide to create a fictional character and intend for my use of “Carter” to semantically refer to this fictional character I have newly created, as in the *Fictional Character Napoleon* case, I grant that my use of “Carter” semantically refers to the fictional surrogate of Carter. However, *ex hypothesi*, we are only considering cases where I have the semantic intention to refer to the real Carter.

Then, is there any possible case where a speaker, even if she has the semantic intention to refer to a real object, actually refers to a fictional object? Zofia Zvolenszky’s following scenario might be considered as a counter-example to my *INE*:<sup>16</sup>

[I]magine the following (contrary to fact) Scenario *T*: while writing *War and Peace*, Tolstoy was under the mistaken impression that the protagonist, Prince Bolkonsky, like Napoleon (also featured in the novel), was a real person. Introducing the name “Andrei Bolkonsky,” Tolstoy intended to refer to a historical figure he thought existed quite independently of his novel (Zvolenszky, 2016: 319).

<sup>16</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address this issue.

In Scenario *T*, it seems that the fictional character Bolkonsky is inadvertently created, and one might think that Tolstoy in Scenario *T* intends for his uses of “Bolkonsky” to refer to a real object, but he is actually referring to a fictional character.

However, even if it is true that Tolstoy is actually referring to a fictional character in Scenario *T*, this does not counter my *INE*. Note that *INE* only concerns cases where there is a real object in question. *INE* is not committed to any claim about what happens if a speaker mistakenly believes that there is a relevant object she refers to when in fact there is no such object at all. Whatever the best theory about so-called reference failure cases is, there is no problem for me to accept that theory. It is just as a case of reference failure does not pose a threat to the following widely accepted claim (“*IRT*” for short):

**Intention-based reference theory** The semantic referent of a speaker *S*’s use of an ordinary name in an *ordinary context* is a real object, if *S* has the semantic intention for *S*’s use of “*N*” to refer to whatever object that other speakers’ uses of “*N*” refer to, which *S* believes to be real, and that object is in fact a real one.

*IRT* of course does not commit itself to any claim about reference failures. The same goes for *INE*.

To make this clear, consider the following two theories about failure to refer to real objects:<sup>17</sup>

**Theory A** If *S* has the semantic intention for *S*’s uses of “*N*” to refer to a real object, but there is no such real object to which *S*’s uses of “*N*” refer, then *S*’s uses of “*N*” semantically refer to a so-called mythical object.<sup>18</sup>

**Theory B** If *S* has the semantic intention for *S*’s uses of “*N*” to refer to a real object, but there is no such real object to which *S*’s uses of “*N*” refer, then *S*’s uses of “*N*” fail to semantically refer.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of which of the two theories is correct, my *INE* can go with that theory: Tolstoy’s semantic intention to refer to a real object might be frustrated because there is no such real object, but *INE* says nothing about this case. Suppose Theory B, which I prefer, is correct. According to Theory B, Tolstoy in *T* fails to refer and comes to *de re* pretend about nothing that *it* is so-and-so, because he has the semantic intention to

<sup>17</sup> In what follows, I will assume for simplicity that there are so-called mythical objects inadvertently created by false beliefs about existence. Again, anti-realists may regard that I am engaging in a certain kind of extended pretense when I use the term “mythical objects”. For proponents of mythical objects, see Salmon, 1998; Braun, 2005; Kripke, 2013; Zvolenszky, 2016; Lungren, 2017; Voltolini, 2020a. For criticism, see Goodman, 2014, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> For proponents of this view, see Salmon, 1998 and Zvolenszky, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> For proponents of this view, see Braun, 2005; Kripke, 2013; Voltolini, 2020a. According to Braun, our uses of “*N*”, unlike *S*’s uses, semantically refer to a mythical object, if we know that there is no real object referred to by “*N*”. Voltolini’s view is a bit more subtle. He distinguishes two kinds of mythical objects: *legendary objects* like Zeus and *post-empirical posits* like Vulcan. Legendary objects are created and referred to by *S*, whereas post-empirical posits are not. They are created and referred to later by us, who know *S*’s mistake.

refer to a real object, not a mythical or fictional object, and because there is as yet no cognitive connection between Tolstoy and the fictional character Bolkonsky. Only we as readers, who realize that Bolkonsky is not a real person, can refer to the fictional character Bolkonsky.<sup>20</sup> But if Theory A is correct, then Tolstoy himself refers to the mythical (and also fictional) object Bolkonsky.<sup>21</sup> Again, whether Tolstoy's uses of "Bolkonsky" refer to a fictional character or fail to refer, it does not counter *INE* just as it does not counter *IRT*. *INE* is consistent with both theories about reference failures. To refute *INE*, exceptionalists should provide a case where a speaker's semantic intention to refer to a real object is frustrated even if there is a real object in question.

Returning to our Carter example, then, it seems a serious challenge for exceptionalists to explain how my referential intention to refer to the real Carter in situation (c) is frustrated even if there is a real person Carter, and the semantic referent of my use of "Carter" is eventually determined to be the fictional surrogate of Carter. Consequently, if the arguments for exceptionalism that we will consider in Sect. 4 fail to provide any good reason to believe that my referential intention is frustrated, we will finally be justified in accepting *INE*.

### 3.2 Argument from numerals

The second brief argument I will provide notes that *INE* invariably respects our intuition regarding numerals, which seem to function semantically very much like Millian names. Conversely, there is a risk of over-generalization in accepting exceptionalism: exceptionalists seem to commit to the claim that when numerals are used in fictional contexts, they also always change their semantic contents and work the same way as other *fictional numerals*.<sup>22</sup> But this is certainly counter-intuitive at first glance.

For the sake of argument, let us assume for a moment that there are numbers directly referred to by numerals,<sup>23</sup> and suppose the following sentence appears in the Sherlock Holmes stories:

(10) Sherlock Holmes likes the number 3.

When Conan Doyle wrote sentence (10), if he intended for the numeral "3" to semantically refer to the number 3 as other speakers did, it seems clear to me that "3" in (10) simply refers to 3. In this case, I see no prima facie reason to believe that Conan Doyle's referential intention was frustrated and that "3" in (10) refers to the so-called fictional surrogate of the number 3. Of course, I do not deny that an author can create

<sup>20</sup> If Tolstoy later comes to have the referential borrowing intention to refer to the same object we refer to, then he might successfully refer to the fictional character Bolkonsky.

<sup>21</sup> As I have pointed out elsewhere (Lee, 2022: 395), there seems to be no inconsistency in saying that Bolkonsky belongs both to the category of mythical objects and to that of fictional objects: Bolkonsky is a mythical object because it was inadvertently created by a mistaken belief, and at the same time a fictional object because its *raison d'être* is to be depicted so-and-so in fiction.

<sup>22</sup> Although it is not easy to find a real-life example where an author introduces a fictional numeral, we can come up with such a case without difficulty. For example, one might introduce the fictional numeral "LRN" for the largest real number that is supposed to exist in her fiction.

<sup>23</sup> Or you may introduce English names for numbers, for example, "Trisha" for 3.

a fictional number and name it “3” after 3. However, *ex hypothesi*, Conan Doyle did not have any such intention.<sup>24</sup>

I think this observation provides additional support for *INE*. At the same time, this shows that exceptionalism is further from our ordinary intuition than we first thought. But, of course, there may be a convincing argument for exceptionalism that strongly suggests that numerals as well as ordinary names always change their semantic contents when used in fictional contexts (given that numerals semantically function in the same way as ordinary names), which I have not yet considered. In the next section, I will argue that exceptionalists’ arguments are not successful in defending their view.

## 4 Against exceptionalism

In this section, I will consider two main arguments for exceptionalism: the argument from substitution failures and the argument from distortion. I will argue that neither of these arguments succeed in motivating exceptionalism.

### 4.1 Against the argument from substitution failures

Let us first consider the following scenario:

**Cicero and Tully** Jennie wrote a fiction about Cicero entitled “Cicero and Tully”. While writing *Cicero and Tully*, Jennie inscribed the name “Cicero” with the semantic intention to refer to a historical figure whom other speakers’ uses of “Cicero” refer to, and so does the name “Tully”. In *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero and Tully are two distinct people: Cicero is an orator, but Tully is not.

Now suppose Jennie utters the following internal metafictional sentences:

(11) According to *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero is an orator.

(12) According to *Cicero and Tully*, Tully is an orator.

<sup>24</sup> Are there any other terms that function semantically in the same way as Millian names? According to Salmon (1986: 42–58; 69–75, 2005), the semantic contents of single-word general terms or predicates (not just natural kind terms) are identified with the designated kinds and therefore they function semantically in the same way as Millian names. If this view is correct, then over-generalization would extend to all single-word general terms. Exceptionalists seem to be committed to the claim that those terms also always change their semantic contents and work the same way as other fictional general terms. Of course, Salmon’s view is controversial, and if, as Castañeda (1989) argues, general terms or predicates in fiction must keep the semantic contents they have outside fiction (and their semantic contents are not simply the designated kinds), then there would be no over-generalization extended to general terms or predicates. In sum, there is a *potential* worry to which exceptionalism is committed: *if* Salmon’s view is correct, then there is a worry of excessive over-generalization in accepting exceptionalism, which is clearly counter-intuitive (I thank both reviewers for pointing these out).

If “Cicero” in (11) and “Tully” in (12) semantically refer to the same historical figure and thus their semantic contents are the same as expected by non-exceptionalism, then it seems that (11) and (12) should express the same proposition and thereby have the same truth-value. However, our ordinary intuition tells us that her utterance of (11) is true, while (12) is false.

Many exceptionalists believe that this observation provides a decisive reason to prefer exceptionalism to non-exceptionalism.<sup>25</sup> If ordinary names used in fictional contexts always directly refer to fictional surrogates, then no problem arises: “Cicero” in (11) and “Tully” in (12) directly refer to different fictional surrogates and their semantic contents are different, so there would be no problem with accepting that Jennie’s utterances of (11) and (12) express different propositions and have different truth-values. Exceptionalism seems to be well motivated.

However, I believe that the *Cicero and Tully* case does not sufficiently motivate exceptionalism. First of all, this seems to be nothing more than a version of the traditional problem of substitution failures within intensional contexts. Therefore, we can expect that referentialists’ usual strategies for solving this problem are equally applied to our case. For example, according to most referentialists’ views, the same proposition can be represented under different modes of presentation (ways of taking, or guises).<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it can be suggested that an internal metafictional sentence pragmatically conveys information about a mode of presentation under which we should imagine or pretend a certain proposition for properly engaging with a given fiction. So, even if Jennie’s utterances of (11) and (12) express the same true proposition, (12) is misleading because it conveys false information about a mode of presentation (concerning the sentence “Tully is an orator”) under which we should imagine

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Motoarca, 2014: 1044–46; Garcia-Carpintero, 2019 152–58; Voltolini, 2020b: 806–11.

<sup>26</sup> Following many referentialists, here I also use the term “modes of presentation” that is functionally defined. For example, Salmon explains modes of presentation as follows: [Modes of presentation] are such that if a fully rational believer adopts conflicting attitudes toward propositions  $p$  and  $q$ , then the believer must take  $p$  and  $q$  in different ways, by means of different [modes of presentation], in harboring the conflicting attitudes toward them—even if  $p$  and  $q$  are in fact the same proposition (Salmon, 1989: 246). By taking this notion of a mode of presentation, we can avoid Wettstein’s (1988, 1989) complaint that even if there are no two distinct modes of presentation which a believer associates a name with, substitution failures can still arise: Jennie, a rational believer, might associate the names “Cicero” and “Tully” with the same information, say, “a famous Roman,” but can still rationally believe that “Cicero is Cicero” is true, while “Cicero is Tully” is false. From this, Wettstein concludes, “The anti-Fregean explanation of the cognitive difference between ‘Cicero’ and ‘Tully’, then, given our own examples, had better not rely upon necessary differences in associated information, that is upon different modes of presentation” (Wettstein, 1988: 25). However, under the notion of a mode of presentation I take, unlike Wettstein’s, Jennie can believe the same proposition that Cicero is Tully under two distinct modes of presentation, because she believes the same proposition *through* two different sentences: “Cicero is Cicero” and “Cicero is Tully”. Modes of presentation can be affected by sentences of one’s language. Of course, this does not mean that modes of presentation are affected *only* by sentences of one’s language; it is possible for a rational believer to believe the same proposition under two distinct modes of presentation even if she believes that proposition through one and the same sentence, as seen in Kripke’s (1979: 265–66) Paderewski case. (See Salmon, 1989: 257. Braun (1998:573–75) is also in favor of the mental sentence view of modes of presentation.) (I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address this issue).

or pretend the proposition that Cicero is an orator when we read *Cicero and Tully*.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, it might be argued that although the semantic contents of Jennie's uses of "Cicero" and "Tully" are the same as the historical figure, since modes of presentation regarding how we should imagine or pretend the proposition that Cicero is an orator affect the truth-conditions of her utterances of (11) and (12), her utterance of (11) is true, while (12) is false.<sup>28</sup>

Here my point is not that referentialists' strategies for solving substitution failures should be sacrosanct, but rather that given that there are sophisticated attempts to explain phenomena regarding substitution failures that can also be applied to the *Cicero and Tully* case, exceptionalism does not seem to be sufficiently motivated. This is especially true for exceptionalists who subscribe to referentialism.

Second, there seems to be no conflicting intentions of Jennie's that can frustrate her referential intentions to semantically refer to the historical figure Cicero in the *Cicero and Tully* scenario. Again, I do not deny that if Jennie intends to create two new fictional characters and name them "Cicero" and "Tully" respectively, her uses of those names will refer to different fictional characters, not the historical figure. However, *ex hypothesi*, Jennie had no such intentions in the *Cicero and Tully* scenario. Then, it seems implausible to postulate that there is another kind of Jennie's intention that might override her intention to refer to the historical figure to whom other speakers refer.

With respect to this issue, Alberto Voltolini (2020b: 808–11) argues that in the *Cicero and Tully* scenario, if Jennie's uses of "Cicero" and "Tully" do not refer to different surrogates but to the same historical figure and are thus substitutable, an inadvertent contradiction in the story whose form is "according to story *S*, *p* &  $\sim$ *p*" arises. Consider the following true internal metafictional sentence:

(13) According to *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero is an orator, but Tully is not.

If we substitute "Tully" in (13) with "Cicero", we get the following sentence:

(14) According to *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero is an orator, but Cicero is not.

But allowing this fictional contradiction runs counter to Jennie's intention to write a coherent story, given that she did not intend to write a kind of postmodern novel that blatantly contains overt contradictions. Therefore, Jennie seems to have two conflicting intentions, and her intention to write a coherent story might override her intention to refer to the historical figure.

<sup>27</sup> See Salmon, 1986, 1989 and Soames, 1987 for referentialists' orthodox pragmatic explanation for substitution failures and Braun, 1998 for a psychological explanation that does not rely on pragmatics. According to Braun, believing the proposition that according to *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero is an orator under one mode of presentation may dispose us to think that (11) is true, but not dispose us to think that (12) is true. Conversely, believing the same proposition under another different mode of presentation may dispose us to think that (12) is true, but not dispose us to think that (11) is true.

<sup>28</sup> See Crimmins & Perry, 1989 and Richard, 1990 for this type of referentialist strategy. According to this strategy, "according to *Cicero and Tully*" is a hyper-intentional operator in that (11) and (12) differ in truth-value, even though "Cicero is an orator" and "Tully is an orator" express the same proposition.

However, given how referentialists understand a rational believer,<sup>29</sup> an explanation that respects such an understanding rather shows that none of Jennie's intentions are frustrated. For example, suppose Lisa mistakenly believes that "Cicero" and "Tully" refer to two distinct people, and that Cicero is an orator but Tully is not. In this case, we might naturally report her belief by uttering the following true sentence:

(15) Lisa believes that Cicero is an orator, but Tully is not.

But no referentialist will argue that, to save Lisa from irrationality, we should conclude that our uses of "Cicero" and "Tully" when uttering (15) fail to refer to the same historical figure, but rather directly refer to some kinds of different (imaginary) surrogates of Cicero. Although uttering (15) ascribes a contradictory belief to Lisa, it does not imply or convey that Lisa believes the proposition and its negation under the same mode of presentation. And that is why she should not be accused of irrationality or incoherence.

Likewise, Jennie wrote a coherent story, unless it invites us to imagine or pretend a proposition and its negation under the same mode of presentation. Therefore, (14) is true,<sup>30</sup> but just misleading in that it pragmatically conveys the false information that we should imagine or pretend the proposition that Cicero is an orator and its negation under the same mode of presentation for properly engaging with *Cicero and Tully*. Alternatively, if we assume that while the semantic content of "Cicero" remains the historical figure, modes of presentation regarding how we should imagine or pretend the proposition that Cicero is an orator and Tully is not an orator affect the truth-condition of (14), then (14) would simply be false.

Lastly, exceptionalists' argument from substitution failures threatens to overgeneralize badly and results in the following consequence: an author cannot import even a pre-existing fictional character into her fiction, just as she cannot import an ordinary real object.<sup>31</sup> Consider the following scenario:

**Cent and Kenk** Mark wrote a fan fiction about Clark Kent entitled "Cent and Kenk". While writing *Cent and Kenk*, Mark intended to import the pre-existing fictional character Clark Kent (aka Superman) into his story and introduced "Klark Cent" and "Clart Kenk" as distinct names with the semantic intention to refer to the fictional character Clark Kent created by Jerry Siegel. In *Cent and Kenk*, Cent and Kenk are two distinct people: Cent is a superhero, but Kenk is a reporter, not a superhero.

Now suppose Mark utters the following internal metafictional sentences:

(16) According to *Cent and Kenk*, Cent is a superhero.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Perry, 1977; Salmon, 1989, 2006; Braun, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> In fact, according to referentialists such as Salmon (1986, 1989), Soames (1987), and Braun (1998), all the following sentences are also true: "According to *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero is Tully", "According to *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero is not Tully", "According to *Cicero and Tully*, Cicero is not Cicero", and "According to *Cicero and Tully*, Tully is not Tully".

<sup>31</sup> I thank Daewhi Jung for the helpful discussion on this issue.

(17) According to *Cent and Kenk*, Kenk is a superhero.

Applying the argument from substitution failures we saw with the *Cent and Kenk* scenario to this case, since our intuition tells us that (16) is true while (17) is false, exceptionalists are forced to draw the counter-intuitive conclusion that we have a decisive reason for believing that a pre-existing fictional character always fails to be imported into another new fiction: Mark's uses of "Cent" and "Kenk" would refer to different fictional surrogates of the fictional character Clark Kent.

Exceptionalists may bite the bullet and accept that no fictional character can be imported into another new fiction. In doing so, however, they commit themselves to a further counter-intuitive consequence: it seems to follow from this that even when an author writes a sequel to her original novel, she cannot import her original fictional characters into the sequel. Any character she attempts to import becomes a fictional surrogate of the original character. *INE*, by contrast, does not face any of these counter-intuitive results.<sup>32,33</sup>

In this section, I have argued that the argument from substitution failures does not motivate exceptionalism. First, we can apply referentialists' usual strategies for solving substitution failures to our case such as *Cicero and Tully* as well. Second, there seems to be no reason to believe that a speaker's referential intention to refer to a real object is frustrated. Lastly, the argument from substitution failures threatens to overgeneralize badly.

## 4.2 Against the argument from distortion

Let us begin this section by considering a novel that distorts Napoleon suggested by Motoarca (2014: 1038–42), in which Napoleon is a logarithmic function. Suppose

<sup>32</sup> Although I believe that no further substantial constraint is required for importing a pre-existing fictional character into a new fiction except an author's having semantic intention for her uses of a name to refer to that character, for some other attempts to provide the criteria of importing a pre-existing fictional character, see Thomasson 1999: 67–69 for a fictional creationist explanation and Everett 2013: 88–102 for a pretense theorist explanation.

<sup>33</sup> According to Meinongians or Platonists, fictional objects are, roughly speaking, individuated by their properties described in fiction (See, for example, Parsons, 1980; Zalta, 1983; Castañeda, 1989; Voltolini, 2006). Then it follows from this that even if *two* fictional objects do not share a single property described in fiction, they cannot be numerically one and the same object. Those philosophers might thus be willing to admit, as an expected consequence of their view, that it is impossible to import pre-existing characters into a new fiction unless there is no change of properties. I believe that this is theoretically unattractive at first glance, as it is radically far from our ordinary intuitions about the importation and the identity about fictional objects (Cf. Everett, 2013: Chap. 7.5). But even so, my argument for over-generalization will at least not make their view *more* unattractive. Moreover, there might be a plausible error-theoretic explanation for Meinongians and Platonists, which I will not discuss due to the limits of space. (For them, however, a problem remains, for if my argument is sound, exceptionalists should admit that even if a fictional character in a new fiction has exactly the same properties as the original fictional character, importation is still impossible.) So, let us accept for a while that my argument is not effective for Meinongians and Platonists. Still, given that many philosophers of fiction are creationists or anti-realists who take for granted that importation is possible in some sense, my argument poses a problem for exceptionalists who subscribe to creationism or anti-realism, and in that sense I believe my criticism remains substantive (I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this issue).



Peter is the author of this novel, which I will call *Logarithmic Napoleon*, and wrote the following sentence in his novel:

(18) Napoleon is a logarithmic function.

Motoarca believes that Peter's use of "Napoleon" in (18) does not semantically refer to the real Napoleon. For, according to Motoarca, *Logarithmic Napoleon* is clearly not *about* the real Napoleon, and if the novel is not about the real Napoleon, it follows that no name appearing in that novel refers to him.

Based on this observation, Motoarca argues that all occurrences of the name "Napoleon" in fictions do not refer to the real Napoleon. Consider a soritical series of fictions in which the name "Napoleon" occurs, beginning with a fiction clearly about the real Napoleon, such as *War and Peace*, and ending with a fiction that blatantly distorts Napoleon, such as *Logarithmic Napoleon*. Then there would be an intermediate area in the soritical series where our intuition of aboutness is unclear.<sup>34</sup> Motoarca argues that since it is not plausible that in that area, the referent of "Napoleon" is indeterminate, nor that there is a definite unknowable cut-off point at which the referent of "Napoleon" changes from a real person to a fictional character, the only available option is to admit that every occurrence of the name "Napoleon" in every fiction in the series does not refer to the real Napoleon. Our intuition that some fictions in the series are about the real Napoleon can be explained away by employing the concept of similarity or representation relation between a fictional surrogate and a real person, as we saw in Sect. 3.1.

However, as Garcia-Carpintero (2019: 165-6) points out, I see no prima facie problem in admitting the semantic indeterminacy of "Napoleon" in an intermediate area or in arguing that there is a definite, unknowable cut-off point. I further believe that one could even argue—though I do not advocate this strategy—that there is a knowable cut-off point by suggesting that "Napoleon" in a story refers to the real Napoleon only if the story describes Napoleon as a person, i.e., the kind to which Napoleon belongs in reality.<sup>35</sup>

But it is important to note that those strategies at least admit that "Napoleon" in *Logarithmic Napoleon* does not refer to the real Napoleon, which, I believe, is mistaken. In contrast, my reply to the argument from distortion is rather to reject that very shared assumption. Let us consider the following question again: "Does Peter's use of 'Napoleon' in (18) semantically refer to the real Napoleon?" I think that the question is tricky if it is asked in a situation where Peter's semantic intention for his use of "Napoleon" is unspecified. When we try to answer this question, we seem to implicitly presume that Peter has the semantic intention that he most likely has in that situation. Perhaps, in a situation where authors write fictions in which Napoleon is described as a logarithmic function, it may be true that most authors *will* not have the

<sup>34</sup> Garcia-Carpintero (2019: 164) suggests that Stephen Vincent Benét's *The Curfew Tolls* is a real-life example of a fiction that is unclear whether it is about the real Napoleon.

<sup>35</sup> This strategy may be inspired by Devitt and Sterenly's (1999: 79–81) view that for successful name use, a name introducer should be correctly aware of the general category of an object she intends to refer to. Thomasson (2007: Chap. 2) endorses Devitt and Sterenly's view.

semantic intention for their uses of “Napoleon” to refer to the historical figure, and that is why we come to have the intuition that “Napoleon” in *Logarithmic Napoleon* does not refer to the historical figure.

However, that does not mean that Peter *cannot* have the semantic intention to refer to the historical figure when he writes sentence (18). In other words, we should distinguish the factual issue of which semantic intention authors will naturally have when they write fictions like *Logarithmic Napoleon* from the theoretical issue of whether it is possible for authors to have the semantic intention to refer to the real Napoleon in that situation. And it seems clear to me that it is at least possible, just as someone who sees a 5-meter statue of Napoleon can have the semantic intention for her use of “Napoleon” to refer to the real Napoleon, so that her utterance of (2)—that “Napoleon is 5 meters tall”—semantically expresses the false proposition about the real Napoleon that he is 5 m tall.

In Sect. 2, I argued that it is misleading to ask about what the semantic content of “Napoleon” in (1), (2), and (3) is without specifying the speaker’s semantic intention. Likewise, I believe that it is misleading to ask about what the semantic content of “Napoleon” in (18) is without specifying Peter’s semantic intention. If Peter intends for his use of “Napoleon” to semantically refer to a fictional character when he writes sentence (18), I grant that his use of “Napoleon” refers to a fictional surrogate. Then what if Peter has the intention to refer to the historical figure? In what follows, I will argue that there is no reason to believe that Peter’s semantic intention to refer to the historical figure is frustrated.

Let us first note that there is a false atomic singular proposition about the real Napoleon whose constituents are Napoleon and the property of being a logarithmic function,<sup>36</sup> and name this proposition “NL”. One can certainly use sentence (18) to semantically express NL if she has the semantic intention for her use of “Napoleon” to refer to the real Napoleon, even though she knows that NL is blatantly false and so disbelieves it. In fact, our very disbelief towards NL entails that we can at least entertain NL that is about the real Napoleon.

Once it is given that we can entertain a blatantly false proposition, NL, it seems that we can also *propositionally* imagine or pretend it.<sup>37</sup> Of course, NL is impossible, but as Tamar Szabó Gendler (2000: 66–72) points out, this does not mean that we cannot imagine or pretend NL under every mode of presentation. We can imagine or pretend an impossible proposition under a proper mode of presentation that disguises its blatant inconsistency, and that is why we can imaginatively engage with fictions that contain something logically or conceptually impossible.<sup>38</sup> For example, even if it is impossible that something is a banana and a pistol at the same time, we can *de re* pretend about a particular banana that it is a pistol by focusing on their similarities, such as shape, while ignoring others, such as internal complexity, when we engage

<sup>36</sup> For convenience, I assume that a sentence expresses a structured Russellian proposition.

<sup>37</sup> “Imagination” is also used to mean mental imagery, not propositional imagination. But this usage is not relevant to our issue.

<sup>38</sup> Everett (2013: 219–21) also endorses this view.

in a certain prop-oriented game of make-belief (Gendler, 2000: 69–70).<sup>39</sup> Likewise, one can *de re* pretend about the real Napoleon that he is a logarithmic function under a proper mode of presentation that the novel *Logarithmic Napoleon* prescribes. Suppose that in *Logarithmic Napoleon*, Napoleon becomes a logarithmic function under a curse and undergoes mathematical integration. Indeed, we can follow and enjoy this story and understand, at least to some extent, what happens and why Napoleon is subject to integration.

Furthermore, the fact that we can pretend an impossible proposition might become more evident if we consider that, according to referentialism, one can even *believe* an impossible proposition, such as the proposition that Cicero is not Tully, under a certain mode of presentation. For those who believe an impossible proposition, there will certainly be no psychological difficulty in imagining or pretending the same proposition.

After all, while writing *Logarithmic Napoleon*, if Peter intends for his uses of “Napoleon” to refer to the real Napoleon, not any fictional character, when Peter inscribes sentence (18), he *de re* pretends about the real Napoleon that he is a logarithmic function: his inscription of (18) semantically expresses NL, and Peter pretends NL to be true. Peter can distort the real Napoleon, that very historical figure, in his novel, by inscribing sentences that express impossible singular propositions about the real Napoleon. Then it also follows that the novel is *about* the real Napoleon, in the *technical* sense that his inscriptions of sentences express singular propositions about the real Napoleon. Given this explanation, there seems to be nothing that frustrates Peter’s semantic intention to refer to the real Napoleon.<sup>40</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that there are compelling reasons in favor of *INE*, while there is no reason to believe that an author’s semantic intention to refer to a real object is always frustrated. I think we are now justified in accepting *INE*. As our natural intuition tells us, the semantic content of an ordinary name used in a fictional context can be a real object.

**Acknowledgements** For their helpful suggestions and comments on earlier versions of this paper, I am very grateful to Sungil Han, Mark Hinchliff, Yoorim In, Daehwi Jeong, Hyejin Kim, Byeong D. Lee, Junhyo Lee, Poong-Shil Lee, Wooram Lee, and especially two anonymous reviewers for *Philosophical Studies*. I have also benefited greatly from discussions with the audience of my talk at the Invitational Lecture Series at Seoul National University, the 16th SKKU Philosophy Institute Conference, and the 2022 APA Pacific Meeting, as well as with the students of my graduate seminar in Fall 2020. My special thanks to Myung-Jun Kim and Seong Soo Park for their detailed comments and unbreakable heart.

<sup>39</sup> In fact, the pair of sentences (13) and (14) we have seen also provides an example of how we can pretend an impossible proposition under a proper mode of presentation for engaging with a fiction.

<sup>40</sup> Note that even if we were unable to propositionally imagine impossible propositions, there would be no problem in admitting that Peter’s uses of “Napoleon” in *Logarithmic Napoleon* can refer to the real Napoleon. As Walton (1990: 64) points out, while inscribing sentence (18), Peter might be able to intend to prescribe imagining about something unimaginable. To the extent that Peter has such an intention, his uses of “Napoleon” will refer to the real Napoleon.

## References

- Bonomi, A. (2008). Fictional Contexts. In P. Bouquet, L. Serafini, & R. Thomason (Eds.), *Perspectives on Context*. Stanford: CSLI Publications: 213–48.
- Braun, D. (1993). Empty names. *Noûs*, 27, 449–469.
- Braun, D. (1998). Understanding belief reports. *The Philosophical Review*, 107, 555–595.
- Braun, D. (2005). Empty names, fictional names, mythical names. *Noûs*, 39, 596–631.
- Braun, D. (2006). Illogical but Rational. *Noûs* 40: 376 – 79.
- Brock, S. (2002). Fictionalism about fictional characters. *Noûs*, 36, 1–21.
- Castañeda, H. (1989). *Thinking, Language, and experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Crimmins, M. (1998). Hesperus and Phosphorus: sense, pretense, and reference. *The Philosophical Review*, 107, 1–47.
- Crimmins, M., & Perry, J. (1989). The Prince and the phone Booth: reporting puzzling beliefs. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86, 685–711.
- Devitt, M. (1981). *Designation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Devitt, M., & Sterelny, K. (1999). *Language and reality. 2nd Edition: an introduction to the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Donnellan, K. (1970). Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions, *Synthese* 21: 335 – 58.
- Evans, G. (1973). The Causal Theory of Names, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 47*: 187–208.
- Evans, G. (1982). *The varieties of reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Everett, A. (2005). Against Fictional Realism, *The Journal of Philosophy* 102: 624 – 49.
- Everett, A. (2013). *The nonexistent*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Friend, S. (2000). Real people in unreal contexts: or is there a spy among us?. In A. Everett, & T. Hofweber (Eds.), *Empty names, fiction and the puzzle of non-existence* (pp. 183–203). Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Friend, S. (2019). Reference in fiction. *Disputatio*, 11(54), 179–206.
- Garcia-Carpintero, M. (2019). Singular reference in fictional discourse? *Disputatio*, 11(54), 143–177.
- Gendler, T. (2000). The puzzle of Imaginative Resistance. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 97, 55–81.
- Goodman, J. (2014). Creatures of fiction, objects of myth. *Analysis*, 74, 35–40.
- Goodman, J. (2017). On inadvertently created Abstracta, fictional storytelling, and scientific hypothesizing. *Res Philosophica*, 94, 177–188.
- Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives, in Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*, New York: Oxford University Press: 481–563.
- Kaplan, D. (1990). Words. *Proceeding of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 64: 93–119.
- Kripke, S. (1977). Speaker Reference and Semantic Reference, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2: 255 – 76.
- Kripke, S. (1979). A puzzle about Belief. In A. Margalit (Ed.), *Meaning and use* (pp. 239–283). Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Kripke, S. (1980). *Naming and necessity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kripke, S. (2013). *Reference and existence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kroon, F. (1994). A problem about make-believe. *Philosophical Studies*, 75, 201–229.
- Lee, J. (2022). Authorial intention, readers creation, and reference shift. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 72, 381–401.
- Lungren, B. (2017). Mistake is to myth what pretense is to Fiction: a reply to Goodman. *Philosophia*, 45, 1275–1282.
- Motoarca, I. (2014). Fictional surrogates. *Philosophia*, 42, 1033–1053.
- Parsons, T. (1980). *Nonexistent objects*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Pelczar, M., & Rainsbury, J. (1998). The Indexical Character of Names. *Synthese*, 114, 293–317.
- Perry, J. (1977). Frege on Demonstratives. *Philosophical Review*, 86, 474–497.
- Predelli, S. (2017). *Proper names: a Millian Account*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richard, M. (1990). *Propositional attitudes: an essay on thoughts and how we ascribe them*. Cambridge University Press.
- Recanati, F. (1997). *Direct reference: from Language to Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Salmon, N. (1981). *Reference and essence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Salmon, N. (1986). *Frege's Puzzle*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Salmon, N. (1989). Illogical belief. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 3, 243–285.

- Salmon, N. (1998). Nonexistence, *Noûs* 32: 277–319.
- Salmon, N. (2005). Are general terms rigid? *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 28, 117–134.
- Soames, S. (1987). Direct reference, propositional attitudes, and semantic content. *Philosophical Topics*, 15, 47–87.
- Thomasson, A. (1999). *Fiction and Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Thomasson, A. (2007). *Ordinary objects*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Van Inwagen, P. (1977). Creature of fiction. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14, 299–308.
- Voltolini, A. (2006). *How Ficta Follow Fiction. A syncretistic account of fictional entities*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Voltolini, A. (2020a). Against Mythical Backward-looking Creationism, *Inquiry*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1767198>.
- Voltolini, A. (2020b). Real individuals in fictions, fictional surrogates in stories. *Philosophia*, 48, 803–820.
- Walton, K. (1990). *Mimesis and make-believe*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wettstein, H. (1988). Cognitive significance without cognitive content. *Mind*, 97, 1–28.
- Wettstein, H. (1989). Turning the tables on Frege or how is it that Hesperus is Hesperus is Trivial?. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 3, 317–339.
- Zalta, E. (1983). *Abstract Objects: an introduction to axiomatic metaphysics*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- Zvolenszky, Z. (2016). Fictional characters, mythical objects, and the Phenomenon of Inadvertent Creation. *Res Philosophica*, 91, 311–333.

**Publisher's note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.