



Truth Without Reference: The Use of Fictional Names

María de Ponte¹ · Kepa Korta² · John Perry^{3,4}

Published online: 13 February 2018
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V., part of Springer Nature 2018

Abstract

Singular terms without referents are called *empty* or *vacuous* terms. But not all of them are equally empty. In particular, not all proper names that fail to name an existing object fail in the same way: although they are all empty, they are not all equally vacuous. “Vulcan,” “Jacob Horn,” “Odysseus,” and “Sherlock Holmes,” for instance, are all empty. They have no referents. But they are not entirely vacuous or useless. Sometimes they are used in statements that are true or false. We are basically referentialists about proper names. The ordinary semantic function of a proper name is to refer to an object, and to do it directly, that is, without semantically providing any identifying condition that the object should meet to be the referent. To put it differently, we agree that statements containing proper names express *singular* propositions, i.e., that their truth-conditions involve the referent of the proper name, if it exists, and not any identifying condition of it. Now, since empty names lack a referent, and therefore would not express such a singular proposition, how do we explain that many, if not all, statements containing them have a truth-value? Answering this question for the case of fictional names, in particular, is the aim of this paper.

Keywords Fiction · Empty name · Truth · Reference · Notion

1 Introduction

Singular terms without referents are called *empty* or *vacuous* terms. But not all of them are equally empty. In particular, not all proper names that fail to name an existing object fail in the same way: although they are all empty, they are not all equally vacuous. “Vulcan,” “Jacob Horn,” “Odysseus,” and “Sherlock Holmes,” for instance, are all empty. They have no referents. But they are not entirely vacuous or useless. They convey information. They are empty in different ways, and thus some of them at least are not-so-vacuous. Consider the following statements:

(1) Vulcan causes the perturbations of Mercury’s orbit.

- (2) Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep.
- (3) Zeus was chief of the gods.
- (4) Jacob Horn was an important person in Colonial America.
- (5) Sherlock Holmes lived in 221B Baker Street, London, England.

Any of these might appear on a true/false exam, in the appropriate class. In an Astronomy Class, the right answer for (1) would be “F.” In an American History Class, the right answer for (4) would be “F.” But in Literature or Classics courses, the right answer to (2), (3) and (5) would be “T.” This doesn’t settle the issue of whether statements with empty names have truth-values. But it shows that there are correct and incorrect answers, and that the mere fact that the names contained in them are empty is not enough to decide on this issue.

Let us analyze each statement in a bit more detail. (1) is a scientific hypothesis about a planet called “Vulcan,” which, as it turned out, doesn’t really exist. (1) is nowadays taken to be false, and the discovery of its falsity is a piece of astronomic knowledge. Though empty, “Vulcan” is not so vacuous. One might agree that empty names have no place in science, if by “science” one means “finished science.” But

✉ María de Ponte
mdeponte@us.es

¹ Department of Philosophy, Logic and Philosophy of Science, University of Seville, C/Camilo José Cela s/n, 41018 Seville, Spain

² ILCLI, University of the Basque Country, Carlos Santamaria Zentroa, Elhuyar Plaza 2, 20018 Donostia, Spain

³ CSLI, Stanford University, Cordura Hall, 210 Panama Street, Stanford, CA 94305-4101, USA

⁴ University of California, Riverside, Riverside, CA, USA

they play key roles in scientific practice and they have played important roles in the history of science.

(2) belongs to Homer's poem and is one of Frege's famous examples. He says that "it is a matter of no concern to us whether the name 'Odysseus' ... has a *Bedeutung*, so long as we accept the poem as a work of art." But, if the name is empty, then (2) lacks a truth-value: "...since it is doubtful whether the name 'Odysseus' ... has a *Bedeutung*, it is also doubtful whether the whole sentence does" (Frege 1997 [1892], p. 157). Frege takes (2), and any simple statement containing empty names, to be neither true nor false. Russell takes them to be false.

Things are a bit more complicated. Our intuitions about the truth-value of statements containing empty names diverge. Sometimes, we tend to agree with Frege that they lack a truth-value, but often we tend to take them as true or false, depending on whether the names purport to refer to actual, mythological or fictional "objects." The scare quotes are due, of course, to our resistance to calling the referents of fictional or mythological names "objects." In our view, all these names are empty, i.e., there is no object to which they refer, but from that it does not follow that all statements containing them are false, or that they lack truth-value.

Take (3). We are now fairly confident that "Zeus" does not refer to an existent object, but presumably many ancient Greeks thought it did, and believed that (3) was true. Once we identify Zeus as a myth and "Zeus" as empty, however, we generally keep the intuition that (3) is nonetheless true, because it is an accepted part of the myth. So, in contrast,

(6) Aphrodite was chief of the gods,

is false. In other words, in a Classics class "T" would be the right answer for (3) and "F" for (6). Actually, things can get even more complicated. While in a Classics class "T" might be the right answer for (3), in a Basic Dogma class in a Catholic High School, the right answer would be "F."

That is not what happens with (4). With the publication of *The Horn Papers* by William Horn in 1945 as the diary of Jacob Horn,¹ people came to believe (4) to be true. But, when it was discovered that the diary was a hoax, that Jacob Horn didn't actually exist, everyone took it not only to be untrue—for lack of a truth-value, as Fregeans would conclude—, but false. They realized they had been fooled, and that what they believed to be true was not.

Again, with (5), things are quite different. We all know that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character created by Arthur Conan Doyle, and that there was no actual person to whom the name "Sherlock Holmes" refers. Our intuition, however, is that (5) is true, while (7), for instance, is false:

(7) Sherlock Holmes lived in 221B Boulanger Street, Paris, France.

Fictional names—like "Sherlock Holmes"—seem to have more in common with mythological names—like "Zeus" or "Aphrodite"—, than with hoax names—like "Jacob Horn." At least in the sense indicated here. Finally, all seven statements above differ from,

(8) Ignatius P. Thunderbold had five arms.

We just made this name up. It isn't part of a myth or a story or a legend or a fraud. It is not even part of a story we are telling. You might suppose that the sentence must be correct, since we made up the name, and we said it. But we didn't assert it. It's just an example of a completely and utterly vacuous name. As such it differs from the ones in the list. There is no standard for correctness, there is no class where an answer to (8) might be correct or incorrect.

We are basically referentialists about proper names. The ordinary semantic function of a proper name is to refer to an object, and to do it directly, that is, without semantically providing any identifying condition that the object should meet to be the referent. To put it differently, we agree that statements containing proper names express *singular* propositions, i.e., that their truth-conditions involve the referent of the proper name, if it exists, and not any identifying condition of it. Now, since empty names lack a referent, and therefore would not express such a singular proposition, how do we explain that some, if not all, the statements (1)–(7) have a truth-value? Answering this question is the aim of this paper.

We begin with a preliminary discussion of fictional and non-fictional names in Sect. 2. Then, in Sect. 3, we present our account of ordinary uses of ordinary (non-fictional, non-mythological, non-empty) names, which is based on *Critical Referentialism* (Perry 2012a, b [2001]), and *Critical Pragmatics* (Korta and Perry 2011). In Sect. 4, we elaborate the explanation to cover the cases of ordinary uses of empty names. In Sect. 5, we present our account of fictional names, and, in Sect. 6, we conclude.

2 Fictional and Non-fictional Names

To repeat, not all empty names are equally empty. For present purposes, we will take fictional names to be those proper names that are initially used in works of fiction to *fictionally refer* to particular people, places, objects and so on, and later to talk, outside fiction, about those fictional people, places, objects and so forth.² Our particular focus

¹ Example of Perry (2012a, b [2001]), after Donnellan (1974).

² Given that we are talking about empty names, it might be more appropriate to avoid "refer" and use "identify" "as a way of picking out the phenomenon of aboutness, or object-directedness, without

will be on the uses of fictional names in statements like (2), (5) and (7) above, which purportedly express *fictional truths* (or *falsities*), addressing mythology, frauds and empty names in ordinary discourse only as important preliminaries.

A fictional truth concerns a fictional story and the facts according to the story. These facts can be explicit or implicit in the story. We call statements about fictional facts made, so to speak, outside fiction *parafictional* statements. They are actual statements made by actual speakers (or writers) about fictional states of affairs, i.e. about states of affairs explicitly or implicitly depicted in a work of fiction; states of affairs that are part of the story told. Parafictional statements are not fictional statements. Neither (5) nor (7) are lines from any of Sherlock Holmes's stories. Watson never uttered (5) or (7), neither as narrator nor as a character. No other character or narrator ever fictionally uttered (5) or (7).

We call the statements (or pseudo-statements, or pretense-statements, if you prefer) made by the author, the narrator or the characters of a work of fiction *fictional* statements. Fictional statements are part of the work of fiction; parafictional statements are not; they designate fictional states of affairs that belong (or not) to the fictional story.

Any ordinary (*full* or *empty*) proper name, say, "Gaius Julius Caesar" or "Vulcan" can become fictional, if it's used in a work of fiction to identify a fictional character or a planet, for instance. That is, if they are used in fictional statements. And then, exploiting what we call a name-notion-network of co-reference, we use those names in statements about the events in the work of fiction, that is to say, in producing parafictional statements.

Consider how the proper names in a very well-known fiction were first introduced. The first mention of "Sherlock Holmes" is in the title of Chapter I ("Mr. Sherlock Holmes") of *A Study in Scarlet*, whose Part I is presented as a non-fictional diary of John H. Watson, M.D., setting the latter as the narrator.

The first mention of Baker Street is part of a *fictional* utterance by Sherlock Holmes in his first conversation with Watson, in their first appearance in a fictional story:

"I have my eye on a suite in Baker Street," he [Holmes] said, "which would suit us down to the ground."
(Conan Doyle 2010 [1887], p. 4)

The narrator—Watson—says a little later

We met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting.

Footnote 2 (continued)

ontological commitment" (Friend 2014, p. 307) to the existence of a reference, but we think it will be enough to keep in mind that, in our account, whatever the speaker's or hearer's intentions and beliefs, if a name is empty then it cannot be successfully used to refer to any object, be it actual, fictional or mythological.

(Conan Doyle 2010 [1887], p. 4)

London appears in the first sentence of Chapter I: "In the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London," (Conan Doyle 2010, p. 1).

This is how the fictional names "Sherlock Holmes" and "[Doctor] John H. Watson" are introduced. As names for fictional characters made up by Arthur Conan Doyle,³ whose adventures will be narrated in a number of novels and short stories from 1887 to 1927.⁴ In our view, this is the beginning of a wide network of what we call "coco-reference" that reaches to the present day.⁵

There are a huge number of novels, movies, and TV series based on these two characters, with the very same names and—roughly—similar features. One might wonder whether the uses of "Sherlock Holmes" related to, for instance, the recent BBC series do co-refer with the uses of the name in statements about Conan Doyle's stories; that is to say, whether we are talking about the same fictional character or not. We are not going to discuss this question in detail, but our intuitions lead us to suspect that, despite their many similarities, in these particular examples the two Sherlock Holmeses are two different fictional characters. For instance, the parafictional statement.

(9) Doctor Watson and Mary Morstan got married in 1889,

is true if the names correspond to the characters in Conan Doyle's stories, but false if they correspond to the characters in the BBC series, which situates the action in the twenty-first century. To be sure, this is not a definite argument for the "two-character" view, but it certainly triggers intuitions in its favor.

Coming back to Conan Doyle's stories, are "221B Baker street" and "London" fictional names? Are they empty, or do they actually refer to actual London, and actual 221B Baker Street? In this respect, we side with Frege (1997 [1897]) and against Kripke (2013): we think they do not refer to actual cities and streets.⁶ And, consequently, "London" and "221B

³ Reportedly, "Arthur Ignatius Conan" was the author's given name and "Doyle" his surname. Sometime after high school he started using "Conan Doyle" as a sort of compound surname. So technically his family name was just "Doyle", but we rather respect his wishes and follow common practice by referring to him as "Conan Doyle."

⁴ We think that "London" and "Baker Street" are also fictional names. We discuss these cases below.

⁵ More about networks and coco-reference below. See Chaps. 8 and 9 of Perry (2012b) [2001] and Chap. 7 of Korta and Perry (2011).

⁶ Frege says:

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 is all play. Even the proper names in the drama, though they correspond to names of historical persons, are mock proper names; they are not meant to be taken seriously in the work. (Frege 1997 [1897], p. 230)

Baker Street,” both in parafictional statements like (5) and in fictional statements uttered by fictional characters, are as fictional as “Sherlock Holmes.” The fact that there was and still is a *real* city called “London”, in a *real* country, and in the *real* world, doesn’t mean that this city is the one referred to by all uses of “London”, and it certainly doesn’t mean that *real* London is the city referred to with the use of “London” in Conan Doyle’s stories or in parafictional statements like (5). Similarly, the existence of a *real* person called “Sherlock Holmes,” if there is one, would not make all uses of “Sherlock Holmes” refer to this *real* person and it wouldn’t mean that all uses of the name in Conan Doyle’s stories refer to this *real* person.

To be sure, at the time when Conan Doyle published the stories, addresses in Baker Street did not go as high as 221, so the name “221B Baker Street, London” in (5), if taken as an ordinary non-fictional name, is empty at the relevant time, so (5) should be deemed false. In any case, even if there was such an address in the *real* world, the idea of a fictional character living in an actual flat in London is nonsense.⁷ In fictional stories and parafictional statements, then, we assume that proper names *are about* fictional people, places, pets, et cetera.⁸ Of course, it remains to explain how this works, what fictional characters are, and what we mean by “aboutness” if the names are empty.

Footnote 6 (continued)

Kripke says:

Just because something occurs in the story, it does not mean that the entity so named is fictional. There are fictional stories, for example, about Napoleon—a real person—and in commenting on those stories one says that Napoleon really existed, but his faithful dog Fido in the story did not—he is from the fictional part. (Kripke 2013, p. 20)

We disagree with Kripke.

⁷ Consider the case of a parent who tells their child “Sherlock Holmes lives in this street” or “Sherlock Holmes lives here.” Of course, these statements make perfect sense, but we think that the demonstratives are used metonymically, that is, that by referring to the real street the speaker is making a parafictional statement involving a fictional place. They would need to make this explicit if, for instance, the child asks “Where exactly?”, and acknowledge that there is no real “here” or “this street”, no 221B Baker Street, where Sherlock Holmes lives. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising the issue.

⁸ We think this is compatible with the Reality Assumption. The Reality Assumption as formulated by Friend (2017) says that “everything that is true or obtains in the real world is storified ... unless it is excluded by the work.” (Friend 2017, p. 31). We are justified to assume that what is really true (false) about the real London of the 1880s is fictionally true (false) about Doyle’s fictional London *unless excluded by the work*. Thus, there is no 221B Baker Street in actual London, but we cannot assume that for fictional London, because it is excluded by the Holmes stories. Anyhow, it may be worth reminding that the reality assumption “is not a mechanism for generating implied story-truths” but just “a starting point for specifying the input into any such mechanism” (Friend 2017, p. 34).

We should distinguish the following kinds of statements:

- (i) *ordinary “literal” statements* containing proper names that are purported to refer to actual objects,⁹ and whose truth concerns actual facts;
- (ii) *fictional statements* by authors, narrators and characters in works of fiction;
- (iii) *parafictional statements* that concern the fictional facts; and
- (iv) *metafictional statements*. These are ordinary statements about actual facts about the fiction. For instance,

(10) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character created by Arthur Conan Doyle.

This is a true statement because it corresponds to actual facts. We have to be careful to make these distinctions appropriately, because sometimes our intuitions about the truth-value of these kinds of statements depends on whether we interpret them as ordinary, fictional, parafictional or metafictional. Take

(11) Sherlock Holmes does not exist.¹⁰

If taken as an ordinary statement, it seems perfectly true, but if considered as a parafictional statement, it is false—Sherlock exists and lives in 221B Baker Street, in the fiction. And perhaps it is also false as a metafictional statement—Sherlock, the fictional character, exists since it was created by Conan Doyle. Actually, things are more complicated, since we can have ordinary/parafictional/metafictional *mixed statements*. Take

(12) Sherlock Holmes does not exist—he’s a fictional character.

In the most charitable interpretation, the first statement should be taken as an ordinary statement while the second should be interpreted as metafictional. But, if taken as parafictional, for instance, they would be both false. Eventually, a full account of fictional names would have to cover all these cases,¹¹ but we’ll concentrate on their use in parafictional statements.

⁹ We don’t like to apply “literal” to ordinary non-fictional discourse, because, as Searle (1975) says, it wrongly suggests that fiction is somehow figurative or non-literal speech.

¹⁰ As is usual in philosophy, negative existential statements like (11) should be taken as tenseless, equivalent to “X didn’t, doesn’t and will not exist.” Thus, people like Socrates and Aristotle exist, even if defunct.

¹¹ The previous list of uses is not meant to be exhaustive. We ignore, for instance, *interfictional* statements such as “Sherlock Holmes is taller than Hercules Poirot” which, by the way, we think is true—Holmes “was rather over 6 feet” while Poirot was 5’4”. Anyhow, as one of the referees observes, in our account, one and the same sentence can be used in more than one way, so the speaker’s intentions are needed to determine which sort of statement she makes.

Also, notice that all these distinctions should also apply to mythology, that is, to ordinary vs. mythological vs. *par-mythological* vs. *metamythological* statements. The main difference is that mythological names, at least in many cases, were once thought to name existing objects. But this should not be too relevant for our present purposes. In any case, to introduce our take on fictional names, we have to start discussing the case of ordinary non-empty names.

3 Ordinary Non-empty Names

As referentialists, we assume that an utterance of

(13) Cicero was a Roman Senator,

is true if and only if a certain person, the referent of the use of “Cicero” in (13), had the property of being a member of the Roman Senate. These truth-conditions involve an existing object (a certain person) and a property (we can ignore tense and time issues for present purposes), and, using common philosophical parlance, we can represent it as a singular proposition; a proposition that, if true, would remain true whatever the name of the object, and whether or not (13) was ever produced as an utterance. Philosophers often represent this proposition as

(14) $\langle \textit{Roman-Senator}, \mathbf{c} \rangle$,

and say that (13) expresses it.

Notice, however, that this way of putting things might obscure the fact that different kinds of truth-conditions are in place. For (13) to be true the following conditions must obtain:¹²

E (existential condition). That \mathbf{c} exists.

R (reference condition). That the use of “Cicero” in (13) refers to \mathbf{c} .

S (satisfaction condition). That \mathbf{c} is a Roman senator.

The satisfaction condition S, which is basically equivalent to the proposition (14), requires that “Cicero” refers to \mathbf{c} (R), which, in turn, requires that \mathbf{c} exists (E). Distinguishing among these sorts of truth-conditions is critical, for instance, when we want to distinguish between the truth-conditions of (13) and (15):

(15) Tully was a Roman senator.

As referentialists, we acknowledge that (15) also expresses the proposition (14), with object \mathbf{c} and property *Roman-senator* as constituents. In other words, the same satisfaction condition S applies. The existential condition E is also the

same— \mathbf{c} must exist. But the reference condition is different. R puts conditions on the use of the name “Cicero” but the truth of (15) doesn’t require anything from the name “Cicero.” Rather, what we find in (15) is a condition on the use of the name “Tully”, i.e. that it must refer to \mathbf{c} .

Acknowledging this is not tantamount to the abandonment of referentialism about proper names; we are not assuming that an identifying condition is associated with names as part of their meaning. We are just assuming that proper names are not semantically associated with a single actual object. Following Strawson, we claim that proper names do not refer, people do, by using names and other expressions (indexicals, demonstratives, descriptions), or even with no expressions (with referents as unarticulated constituents).¹³ But of course, people err, and sometimes, even when we intend to refer, we do not do so. So, in our view, the reference condition is not *straightforwardly given* for any use of a name. But then, what are the conditions for reference?

Our complete picture of reference by proper names is Perry’s conception of notion-name-network, which is inspired in turn by Chastain’s (1975), Donnellan’s (1972), Evans’s (1973) and Kripke’s (1980) view of chains of reference. In this paper, however, we skip many details of the proposal, to focus on the most relevant ones for present purposes: the concepts of a *network* and a *notion*.¹⁴

3.1 Networks

Proper names are easy to use. We don’t have to have much information about the referent to be able to refer to it using a name. Except for the few occasions in which we choose a name for a child, a pet or a nickname for a friend, we rely on previous uses of the names we heard. And learning the name is precisely a way to know about it by asking questions or googling.

Imagine María tells you,

(16) Juana is coming,

¹³ It’s become customary to credit Strawson with this view about reference and truth as opposed to Frege’s. Frege’s own words do not exclude speakers as the agents of the acts of designating a referent and expressing a sense; quite the opposite. He says, “A proper name (word, sign, combination of signs, expression) *expresses* its sense, and *stands for* [bedeutet] or *designates* [bezeichnet] its *Bedeutung*.” But he immediately adds, “By employing a sign we express its sense and designate its *Bedeutung*. (Frege 1997 [1892], p. 156, emphasis in the original).

¹⁴ For other proposals about fictional names—and other singular terms used in fiction—inspired by Perry’s critical referentialism (2012b) [2001], see Corazza and Whitsey (2003) and Vallée (2018).

¹² For the sake of simplicity, we ignore the conditions for the predicate “is a Roman Senator” to denote the property it does.

you have no idea who she is referring to, apart from the fact that she's probably referring to a female person.¹⁵ Regardless of this, if you want to get more information and you ask "Who is Juana?," you are referring to the same person that María is referring to, assuming she exists. If María answers "My mum," then you acquire some information about her, for instance, that she is alive. According to Critical Referentialism, your utterances of "Juana" refer, co-refer, and *coco*-refer (that is, *conditionally co-refer*, see Korta and Perry 2011), because with your use of "Juana" you intend to refer to the same person that María's use of "Juana" refers to, assuming again that there is such a referent.¹⁶

These relations of *coco*-reference form a *network* of *coco*-reference for the name, a convention that by *coco*-reference allows one to refer to the *origin* of that network.¹⁷ When her parents decided to name María's mum "Juana," they established a convention that allowed speakers to refer to her with that name, creating a network of *coco*-reference (and co-reference, in this case) with her as origin. But what happens with empty names? That is, how do we account for networks that do not have an object at their origin?

Consider the following scenario. John tells you (4) "Jacob Horn was an important person in Colonial America." You don't want to show your ignorance about US history—while you show, without noticing, your ignorance about Donnellan's 1974 paper—so you just smile and go to Wikipedia. You are re-directed to "Jakob Horn", (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jakob_Horn, accessed August 9, 2017), who is said to be a German mathematician, famous for his *Horn* functions. It rings a bell from your Logic courses. But that's not the guy John is referring to by his use of the name. You somehow arrive at the entry for *The Horn papers*, where you read that

¹⁵ The use of names in natural languages often provides information about the kind of object we are referring to (city, person, pet, river, mountain, valley...) and in the case of names for people, their gender, culture, and the like. See Corazza (2017) for an extensive discussion.

¹⁶ In Perry's words:

A later utterance *co-refers* with an earlier one, if both utterances refer, and refer to the same thing. A later utterance *conditionally co-refers*, or *coco-refers*, with an earlier one, if conditions are such that the later utterance will refer if the earlier one does, and refer to the same thing. So there are cases of *coco*-reference that are not cases of reference, and so not cases of co-reference. (Perry 2012b [2001], p. 172)

¹⁷ In Perry's (2012b) [2001] terminology "origin" refers to the object that is at the beginning of the name-notion-network in virtue of which an utterance of the name refers to that object. If there is no object, there is no origin, the name-notion-networks ends in a block. It is important not to confuse it with other uses of the term "origin" meant to talk about the creation by baptism, for instance, of a certain name convention.

The Horn Papers were a genealogical hoax consisting of forged historical records pertaining to the northeastern United States for the period from 1765 to 1795. They were published by William F. Horn of Topeka, Kansas between 1933 and 1936, and presented as a transcription of documents of his great-great-grandfather, Jacob Horn (died 1778), and other members of the Horn family. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horn_Papers, accessed August 9, 2017)

This is the Jacob Horn John is talking about or, rather, the one he is not talking about, given that this Jacob Horn never existed. So perhaps John is teasing you, or wants to discuss Donnellan's paper, or both.

This case illustrates two things. First, that we have many networks associated to the same name. There are many Juanas in the world. We can use "Juana" exploiting the particular network of *coco*-reference that has María's mother as origin, or a different one, picking a different referent for our utterance. In other words, proper names are *nambiguous*, and it is a matter of a speaker's intentions which network she is trying to exploit. Consequently, we can use "Jacob/Jakob Horn" exploiting a network of *coco*-reference with the German mathematician as origin and, thus, refer to him; or we can exploit another network, *coco*-referring with John's use in (4), and fail to refer to anyone. And this is the second point. The second network, exploited by John, has no origin or, as Donnellan (1974) puts it, ends in a block. In other words, it is an empty name. In this case we have a network of *coco*-reference, with utterances that do not co-refer, because they don't refer. And this leads us to the main theme of the paper. Before elaborating our account of empty names, though, let us briefly present our account for the name "Cicero", as used in (13) above.

Simplifying a bit, we can assume that there is a wide network of *coco*-reference of the name "Cicero," with the Roman citizen Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BCE–43 BCE) as its origin. Call it N_C . There is a smaller network for the name "Tullius" (sometimes anglicized as "Tully"), with the same individual as its origin. Call it N_T . They are not the only networks associated to these names, however. Both "Cicero" and "Tullius" are *nambiguous*. The speaker may intend to refer to his brother Quintus Tullius Cicero, for instance, via smaller networks with Quintus as its origin. Leaving this complication aside, we can elaborate the reference condition R of (13), making explicit the conditions on reference via networks, as follows:

RN (reference-network condition). (i) That there is a network N_C such that the use of "Cicero" in (13) exploits N_C ; and (ii) has *c* as its origin.

The E and S conditions are the same as before. In the case of (11), we have a different name, "Tully" and a different

network, N_T , which explains why, even if (13) and (15) are true if and only if *Roman-senator*, c is a fact, a competent speaker/hearer of English might believe that one is true and not the other. They share the same E and S conditions but they have different R conditions that, though true, might be unknown to such a speaker/hearer. To complete our picture of reference and cognitive significance, we need to invoke another important concept of Perry's (2012b [2001]) critical referentialism: *notions*.

3.2 Notions

Notions are mental files that store information (and misinformation) about the individuals we think and talk about. The three of us have our own separate notions of Cicero, which were born when each of us was separately—at different times on different continents—reading Ancient Roman history. Notions include ideas, and our notions of Cicero probably include similar ones, that is, ideas of being a powerful senator and brilliant orator. Those of us who took Latin courses would have richer notions, and might have later included in the notion the famous lines “*Quo usque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra...*” that reportedly open his speech against Catiline.¹⁸ But not all of us had included them in our Cicero notion, not until now, at least. Anyway, for one of us to utter (11), *s/he* doesn't need to have a rich notion of Cicero; proper names are especially apt tools to refer to individuals with whom we do not have any opportunity to interact directly, because they are dead, like Cicero, or because they are remote in space, like Venus.

Other singular terms are particularly apt for referring to individuals, when we have a specific kind of notion that involves particular *cognitive fixes* of them: demonstratives, for instance, are suited to exploit perceptual information; indexicals to exploit utterance-bound fixes. Proper names are paradigmatically associated to standing notions that participate in intersubjective notion-networks.¹⁹ Notion-networks provide a natural account of the cognitive significance of statements containing proper names. They explain a speaker's particular choice of a singular term (a demonstrative over a proper name, e.g. “she” instead of “Livia”; a proper name over another, “Tully” instead of “Cicero”), and they explain also why a hearer can get different information from utterances of different co-referential terms. Notion-networks also offer an account of how the reference, if any, of a proper name is determined: it is the origin of the notion-network. Typically, however, it is just the origin of

the notion-network, if there is any, which counts for the truth of what the speaker says.

As we said above, what a speaker says when she utters (13) is the same as what she says when she utters (15), and what she says involves the origin of the name-notion-network, c , and the property predicated of it—the S condition—but not the names and the notion-networks associated to them. This is the typical case. But things are different with empty names.

An empty name is a name whose notion-network ends in a block. Perry (2012b [2001], p. 205–208) distinguishes three kinds of blocks:²⁰

- (E-1) blocks that are created by perceptual experiences wrongly taken as being caused by an object;
- (E-3) blocks that are created by utterance comprehension processes that interpret a referring act when there is none; and
- (E-5) blocks that are freely created.

The notion-networks associated to fictional names are of the last kind. So are hoaxes like Jacob Horn. There is no wrong perception or any other kind of mistake, rather, there was an act of (free) creation of notions without origins. The case of myths is a bit more problematic. They can be taken to be cases of E-5 too, but most likely they should be taken as E-1 blocks; as cases in which perceptual experiences of events were wrongly interpreted to have “supernatural” individuals as their causes. Finally, it seems there are also cases of (E-3) blocks with myths too.²¹ The important point, however, is that when using fictional (and mythical) proper names in parafictional (and paramythical) statements, notions become exceptionally (and, perhaps, exclusively) important for their truth. Unlike ordinary proper names, fictional names are not purported to refer to their origin. They are not purported to refer to a notion either; they are not purported to refer at all.²² But a particular notion is involved in the truth-conditions of the parafictional statement such that the statement

²⁰ His numbering.

²¹ According to Kripke (2013, pp. 70–71) there are various theories that take “Moloch”—the name of a pagan god—to be created out of linguistic misinterpretations of various kinds. The word “Moloch” might have been interpreted as a proper name when it was really the noun “melech”, Hebrew for “king”; or it was a name but for a kind of sacrifice, not a god.

²² Let us emphasize that we *do not* claim that fictional names in parafictional statements refer to notions. Take the parafictional statement “Batman is Bruce Wayne.” We do not claim that the statement is true because it expresses a singular proposition containing a single Batman/Wayne notion and the identity relation. In our view, there is no singular proposition expressed here. The statement is true because there are two name-networks that end in a single notion, which contains the idea of being a superhero called Batman and the idea of being a businessman called Bruce Wayne. See below. Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising the issue.

¹⁸ There is no way to know whether these particular lines of the written version correspond word-to-word to the opening of the spoken version. See (Beard 2015, pp. 41–44).

¹⁹ See Korta and Perry (2011).

can be true or false, even if the notion has no origin, and, hence, the name is empty.

We call *fictional* notions those notions that are freely created by authors without an origin in a work of fiction. In this sense, what Conan Doyle did by writing the Holmes stories was to create a fictional notion associated to the proper name “Sherlock Holmes,” filling it with many explicit and implicit ideas. Once created, and because it is a fictional notion, it gets more ideas from the application of the Reality Principle, which assumes that everything that is true in reality is also fictionally true unless it is excluded (explicitly or implicitly) by the work. That is why it is fictionally true that Sherlock Holmes has a great-grandfather, even if he is never mentioned in the Holmes stories (as far as we can remember).

Fictional names are importantly different from other empty names like “Jacob Horn” and “Vulcan,” which once were taken to have a referent, but didn’t. We will start by discussing the latter before turning to fictional names.

4 Ordinary Empty Names

Le Verrier explained the perturbations of Uranus’s orbit by the presence of a planet that was unknown at the time, Neptune. The success of his hypothesis gave much credit to the hypothesis expressed by (1) “Vulcan causes the perturbations of Mercury’s orbit.” According to our previous account,²³ this hypothesis has the following truth-conditions:

E. That v exists.

RN. (i) That there is a network N_v such that the use of “Vulcan” in (1) exploits N_v ; and (ii) has v as its origin.

S. That v causes the perturbations of Mercury’s orbit.

Now, the hypothesis turned out to be false. There is no such planet. There is no v , so all conditions turn out to fail.²⁴ This also means that there is no proposition $\langle \textit{Cause-the-perturbations-of-Mercury's-orbit}, v \rangle$, but at most an incomplete or gappy proposition like $\langle \textit{Cause-the-perturbations-of-Mercury's-orbit}, [\textit{empty slot}] \rangle$. Referentialists that assume a unique proposition—the proposition expressed—to encode the truth-conditions of statements containing proper names, have a problem with this, for various reasons. But we won’t press the issue here. Let us just note here that that’s no problem for our account. The truth-conditions of (1) are complete, but, because E is not met, R and S are not met

either. In our account then (1) is clearly not true, but: is it false, as Russell would conclude? Or does it lack a truth-value, as claimed by Frege?

Both options are available to our account. If we side with Frege and Strawson, we could take condition E to be a presupposition of (1), so that when the utterance fails to meet this condition, the proposition would be neither true nor false. This would accord with the idea that actually there is no proposition expressed. We would have to explain away, however, the strong intuition that (1) is false, and its negation is true. We would also need to explain away the intuition that (17) is true, and its negation false:

(17) Vulcan does not exist.

So we rather align with Russell, without needing to treat proper names as definite descriptions in disguise. (1) is false because if we take the negation of (1) as taking wide scope, it would amount to denying that the conditions E, RN and S are met; which is obviously true. With narrow scope, it would amount to asserting that E, R are met but not S, which is obviously false.

The truth conditions of negative existentials like (17) are a bit special, of course. They don’t include anything like the E condition or the S condition but just the RN. The affirmative counterpart of (17) has the following ones:

RN. (i) That there is a network N_v such that the use of “Vulcan” in (17) exploits N_v ; and (ii) has v as its origin.

Now (17) denies RN, which is false, so (17) is true, its positive counterpart false. But arguably RN(i) is left intact, since the speaker of (17) is exploiting the name network of coco-reference N_v created with Le Verrier’s hypothesis, and not any other network associated to that name (like the one that is associated to a planet in the BBC series *Doctor Who* or in the American series *Star Trek*). In uttering (1) (“Vulcan causes the perturbations of Mercury’s orbit.”) or its negation, (17) or its negation, the speaker does not suspend her commitment to RN(i), the existence of a network N_v associated with the name “Vulcan” that she is exploiting.²⁵

We suggest that this commitment to the existence of a particular network of coco-reference associated to the name is generalized to all uses of proper names in statements, except perhaps in the quite extraordinary cases of initial baptism, which constitute the very creation of the network for a name.

²³ For the sake of simplicity, we leave notions aside for the moment. They don’t play a decisive role for the truth of ordinary statements, as they do for the truth of parafictional statements, as we’ll see below.

²⁴ Actually, the condition RN(i) about the existence of the network N_v is met. See below.

²⁵ Our knowledgeable readers can recognize here Perry’s (2012a, b [2001]) view about existential statements, according to which they lack referential truth-conditions and their network truth-conditions are promoted to the category of what is said.

The application of this account to the case of Jacob Horn and statement (4) above is left as an exercise for the reader. We turn now to fictional names.

5 Fictional Names

We turn back to Sherlock Holmes now. How can we take (5) to be true and (7) to be false, if Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character, i.e., if *he* doesn't exist?

- (5) Sherlock Holmes lived in 221B Baker Street, London, England.
- (7) Sherlock Holmes lived in 221B Boulanger Street, Paris, France.

If we apply our account taking them as ordinary statements, we would render the truth conditions of (5) as follows:

- E. that **sh** exists.
- RN. (i) that there is a network N_{SH} such that the use of "Sherlock Holmes" in (5) exploits N_{SH} ; and (ii) has **sh** as its origin.
- S. that **sh** lived in 221B Baker Street, London, England.

There is no **sh**, so (5) is false, just as (1) is. This seems favored by the fact that (11) seems as true as (17) ("Vulcan does not exist"), for the same reasons:

- (11) Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

(11) lacks S conditions, and it asserts that that RN(ii) condition is not met—which is true.

If we interpret (5) as an ordinary statement as above, this would be an appropriate account. (5) would be false, as false as (7)—if this is also interpreted as an ordinary statement—as long as condition E is not met, and, consequently, conditions RN(ii) and S are not met.

It is only if (5) and (7) are taken as parafictional statements that we take them to be true and false, respectively. The question now is, how does the fact that a statement is parafictional affect its truth-conditions?

A first immediate answer comes from the notions of mimesis, pretense or make-believe. According to such a view, in making a parafictional statement we wouldn't be making an actual statement, but only pretending or acting *as if* we were making it. We would know that conditions E, RN(ii) and S do not obtain, but we would pretend they do. Perhaps this makes sense for fictional statements (except for the fact that we are not the authors, narrators or characters in a work of fiction). As Searle (1975) puts it, "the author of a work of fiction pretends to perform a series of illocutionary acts" (p. 325) such as statements, assertions, descriptions, and so on. But it's not clear that it is the right approach for parafictional statements, which, to repeat, are

real statements by real speakers. Do speakers of parafictional statements pretend that they refer to a person, even if they are not doing so?

It seems clear that the sincere speaker of the parafictional statement (5) is not committed to conditions E, RN(ii) and S: she does not believe that **sh** exists, so she doesn't believe that it is the origin of any network, or that **sh** lives anywhere. She is committed to RN(i)—the existence of the network N_{SH} associated to her use of "Sherlock Holmes"—, that's quite clear. But what do we do with the other conditions? That is where fictional notions enter forcefully into the picture.

In our view, fictional names are not purported to refer to any individual. Any speaker or hearer who believes that the uses of "Sherlock Holmes" in (5), (7), (9), (10) and (11) are purported to refer to a real person—in other words, who takes them to be ordinary statements—is not getting at the right truth-conditions of those utterances.

Take (5). The informed speaker does not intend to refer to a nonexistent individual **sh**; but she is assuming the existence of a network N_{SH} and a notion n_{sh} at the end of the network (just before the block), associated to the name "Sherlock Holmes", such that the notion includes the idea expressed by the predicate "lived in 221B Baker Street, London, England." Or, to put it differently, the truth-conditions for (5) are the following ones:

- E. That a notion n_{sh} exists
- RN. (i) That there is a network N_{SH} such that the use of "Sherlock Holmes" in (5) exploits N_{SH} ; and (ii) has no origin, but ends in the notion n_{sh} .²⁶
- S. That the notion n_{sh} includes the idea "lived in 221B Baker Street, London, England."

As we saw, the fictional notion n_{sh} includes the idea "lived in 221B Baker Street, London, England." The information is given by Doctor Watson himself playing the role of the (fictional) narrator.²⁷ That's why we take the parafictional statement (5) to be true. And this is why we take (7) to be a false statement: the S condition for (7) is not met, n_{sh} does not include "lived in 221B Boulanger Street, Paris, France." It does not include it, not because Conan Doyle

²⁶ The abbreviation "RN" (for "reference-network condition") can be misleading here, since, as we argue, this is not a case of reference and, besides, we have a notion along with a network. So, something like FNN ("fiction-network-notion condition") might be more correct, but we suspect this would be even more misleading.

²⁷ Of course, this idea includes the proper name "Baker Street, London, England", which, if we are right, is also fictional and, thus, empty, with no origin. It would involve the same kind of analysis as "Sherlock Holmes". The fact that it is clearly connected to an ordinary proper name makes it possible to transport information from the notion corresponding to the real city to the fictional notion. But we leave these issues for another occasion.

or anyone in the works tells us otherwise, but because it contradicts what is explicitly true in the stories, that is to say, (5).

Take now the case of (10), “Sherlock Holmes does not exist.” If we interpret it as an ordinary statement, its truth-conditions are just the RN-conditions.

RN. (i) That there is a network N_{sh} such that the use of “Sherlock Holmes” in (10) exploits N_{sh} ; and (ii) N_{sh} has no origin.

which is obviously true, since the name is empty. If we interpret it as a parafictional statement, however, the name is still empty, but the fictional notion n_{sh} comes to the fore, and so for (10) to be true, the following truth-conditions must obtain:

RN. (i) That there is a network N_{SH} such that the use of “Sherlock Holmes” in (5) exploits N_{SH} ; and (ii) has no origin, and doesn’t end in the notion n_{sh} .

The network N_{SH} does end in the notion n_{sh} , so (10) is false in this interpretation.

6 Conclusions

To recapitulate, our account of fictional proper names in parafictional statements takes them to be really *empty*: that is, names whose uses don’t refer to anything, and, in particular, they don’t refer to *ficta* or any other individual entity of dubious metaphysical status.

We want to emphasize that, in our view, they don’t refer to (fictional) notions either. Notions are a critical element of the truth-conditions of parafictional statements, but that doesn’t make them the referents of fictional proper names. Are we saying that what we call fictional characters are notions? Yes, we are. Writing a novel, after all, seems to basically consist in creating a bunch of characters with their properties and relations among them, in imagined places and times with imagined events happening to them. All of these are freely created notions with no origins. The work of fiction consists in those notions, but it is not about them.

Speakers using a proper name are not talking about notions or networks, but make (implicit) use of them. Knowing how to use ordinary proper names shows (implicit) knowledge of networks, notions and origins in a play of coco-referring (conditional co-referring). Using fictional proper names in parafictional statements properly is similar except that the existential condition, along with reference, is dropped and notions come to play a role in its truth.

To be sure, there is an important difference between truth in fiction (or the truth of parafictional statements) and truth *tout court*. Perry says that in fiction

...we drop realism and completeness—the principle of excluded middle. No one supposes there is a truth to the matter of how many hairs Sherlock Holmes had on the back of his neck on his forty-fifth birthday, or whether Holmes’s great-grandfather had more grandchildren than Professor Moriarty’s great-grandfather did. (Perry 2012b [2001], p. 231.)

That’s why he proposes to distinguish between *truth*, which is a matter of correspondence with (actual) facts, and *accuracy* or *fit*, which would be a matter of “agreement with the contents of canonical representations” (Perry 2012b [2001], p. 231). In the terminology we use here, we would say that the truth of parafictional statements is a matter of correspondence with *fictional* facts, that is, facts as established by the author of the (canonical) work explicitly or implicitly via the creation of notions without origins, which are also fed by the reality assumption. Realism is dropped, that’s quite clear. That completeness is also dropped is not so clear. Arguably, Sherlock Holmes either had 10,000 hairs on the back of his neck on his 45th birthday or he hadn’t; and either Holmes’s great-grandfather had more grandchildren than Moriarty’s or he hadn’t. As parafictional statements, it is pretty obvious that the disjunctions are true; but it seems to us that the truth (or falsity) of any of the disjuncts is not only epistemically undetermined but also metaphysically so. What the consequences of these facts are is a matter we are not going to pursue in this paper.

Acknowledgements The authors are particularly grateful to Tadeusz Ciecierski and Pawel Grabarczyk for their encouragement and patience. They also want to thank the Spanish Government (FFI2015-63719-P (MINECO/FEDER)) and the Basque Government (IT1032-16) for their Grants, and the Institute for Logic, Cognition, Language and Information (ILCLI) of the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU), the Department of Philosophy and the Center for the Study of Language and Information (CSLI) at Stanford, and the Diamond XX Philosophy Institute in Copperopolis, CA, for the many direct and indirect benefits the three of them have had through their involvement with the activities of these institutions. We also thank *Topoi*’s two anonymous referees for their helpful comments and suggestions.

References

- Beard M (2015) SPQR: a history of ancient Rome. Liveright, New York
- Chastain C (1975) Reference and context. In: Gunderson K (ed) Minnesota studies in the philosophy of science, language, mind and knowledge. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, pp 194–269
- Corazza E (2017) Proper names: gender, context-sensitivity, and conversational implicatures. In: de Ponte M, Korta K (eds) Reference and representation in thought and language. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 20–45
- Corazza E, Whitsey M (2003) Indexicals, fictions and ficta. *Dialectica* 57(2):121–136

- Donnellan K (1972) Proper names and identifying descriptions. In: Davidson D, Harman G (eds) *The semantics of natural language*. Reidel, Dordrecht
- Donnellan K (1974) Speaking of nothing. *Philos Rev* 83(1):3–31
- Doyle AC (2010 [1887]) A study in scarlet. In: *The complete Sherlock Holmes*. The Sherlock Holmes Collection, Lexington, pp 1–54
- Evans G (1973) The causal theory of names. In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume 47*, pp 187–208
- Frege G (1997 [1892]) Über Sinn und Bedeutung. *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Philosophische Kritik* 100:25–50. On Sinn and Bedeutung. Translated by Black M. In: Geach P, Black M (eds) (1970) *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford. In: Beaney M (1997) *The Frege reader*. Blackwell, Oxford, pp 151–171
- Frege G (1997 [1897]) Logic. Translated by Long P, White R. In: Hermes H, Kambartel F and Kaulbach F (eds) (1979) *Posthumous writings*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago. In: Beaney M (1997) *The Frege reader*. Blackwell, Oxford, 225–254
- Friend S (2014) Notions of nothing. In: García-Carpintero M, Martí G (eds) *Empty representations: reference and non-existence*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 307–332
- Friend S (2017) The real foundation of fictional worlds. *Australas J Philos* 95(1):29–42
- Korta K, Perry J (2011) *Critical pragmatics: an inquiry into reference and communication*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Kripke S (1980) *Naming and necessity*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
- Kripke S (2013) *Reference and existence: the John Locke lectures*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Perry J (2012a) Donnellan's blocks. In: Almog J, Leonardi P (eds) *Having in mind: the philosophy of Keith Donnellan*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 30–52
- Perry J (2012b [2001]) *Reference and reflexivity*, 2nd edn. CSLI Publications, Stanford
- Searle J (1975) The logical status of fictional discourse. *New Lit Hist* 6(2):319–332
- Vallée R (2018) Fictional names and truth. *Organon F*, 25 (1).