

## Referring to Fictional Characters\*

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Recently<sup>1</sup> some philosophers have proposed axiomatic theories of non-

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was written in 1984, and an abridged version was read at the Pacific Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association in March 1985. It was translated into German by Arnold Günther and published in the *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 9/1-2 (1987): 85-95. The version that appears here is, for the most part, unaltered from the manuscript used for the 1987 translation. However, I would like to emphasize that the ‘Meinongian’ interpretation of the formal theory adopted in this paper here is not essential. On this Meinongian interpretation, we (a) read the quantifier ‘ $\exists$ ’ as ‘there is’, (b) read the predicate ‘*E!*’ as ‘exists’, and (c) interpret the theory as asserting that there *are* abstract objects, where ‘abstract’ means ‘necessarily nonexistent’. Thus, the single domain of objects, which includes all the objects there are, includes (1) contingently existing objects (objects which exist at the actual world but not at all other worlds), (2) objects which fail to exist but which might have existed (like my possible sisters, possible talking donkeys, etc.) and (3) abstract objects (which necessarily fail to exist). (Necessarily existing objects would also fall in this domain, if there are such.) But it is important to realize that one can adopt a ‘Platonic’ interpretation of the formal theory, by using the Quinean reading of the quantifier. On this interpretation, we (a) read the quantifier ‘ $\exists$ ’ as ‘there exists’, (b) read the predicate ‘*E!*’ as ‘concrete’ and (c) interpret the theory presented here as asserting that there exist abstract objects, where ‘abstract’ means ‘necessarily nonconcrete’. On this interpretation, everything in the single domain of objects exists (and necessarily so). This domain includes (1) contingently concrete objects like table, stars, etc. (these are concrete at the actual world but not at all other worlds), (2) objects which are contingently nonconcrete (like my possible sisters, etc.), and (3) the abstract objects (which exist but are necessarily nonconcrete). (Again, this picture allows for necessarily concrete objects, if there are such.) When I wrote this paper, I employed the Meinongian interpretation—the abstract objects used to analyze fictional objects were defined as necessarily nonexistent objects. But, both the criticism of Meinongianism by Hunter discussed in the paper and the main ideas of the paper developed in response to the criticism, apply to the Platonic interpretation as well. That is, both the problem of reference to fictional characters that Hunter raises and the idea of treating a storytelling as an extended baptism apply even if the abstract objects used to analyze fictional objects are de-

existent objects and necessarily nonexistent objects.<sup>2</sup> One, but by no means the only, application of such theories is the uniform analysis of proper names such as ‘Ronald Reagan’, ‘Sherlock Holmes’, and ‘Zeus’. The idea is that proper names name things, and whereas ‘Ronald Reagan’ names an existing object, ‘Sherlock Holmes’ and ‘Zeus’ name nonexistent objects. While *a posteriori* investigation is required to discover the facts about Reagan, *a priori* and *a posteriori* investigation is required to discover the facts about Holmes and Zeus (*a priori* metaphysics yields facts about their being and identity conditions, while such facts as that Holmes is more famous than real detectives, that some Greeks worshipped Zeus, etc., are discovered *a posteriori*). The metaphysical theory of objects proves to be an important foundation for constructing compositional semantic analyses of sentences expressing such facts. Once we are able to see that all significant proper names are names of objects, we may simplify the Tarski-style definition of truth for languages in which names of nonexistents appear along with names of existents. The truth conditions may be specified more systematically, since no special precautions need to be taken to distinguish the two kinds of names.

Apparently, however, these results are not yet persuasive to ‘actualist’ philosophers who believe that the only things there are are existent things. Some of these philosophers are unwilling to accept either the metaphysical theory or semantic analyses offered by Meinongians, at least until certain further questions have been answered to their satisfaction. In this paper, we shall address questions posed in Hunter [1981]. Hunter is mystified by how it is we refer to nonexistent objects, and in particular, to fictional characters whose full identity is revealed only after a series of novels. He is willing to suppose for the sake of argument that the names of fictional and mythical characters denote the objects Meinongians say they do. But he wants to understand clearly how such names acquire these denotations and how those who use the names succeed in referring to the characters denoted. The example on which Hunter focuses is the main character common to the series of detective stories written by Sir Arthur Conan

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finned as (existing, but) necessarily nonconcrete objects. Today, I tend to prefer the Quinean reading of the quantifiers and the Platonic interpretation of the theory. But as I noted in my [1983] (50-52), the Meinongian interpretation is a more natural way of systematizing the distinction between ‘there is’ and ‘there exists’ in natural language.

<sup>2</sup>The two theories I plan to defend are described in Parsons [1980] and Zalta [1983]. These seem to me to be the two clearest formalizations of Meinongian metaphysics. However, see also, Routley [1979], Castañeda [1979], and Rapaport [1976].

Doyle, namely, Sherlock Holmes.

Hunter's questions begin once he specifies the notion of reference in which he is interested. His understanding is that "if  $x$  refers to  $y$  by means of name  $N$ , then  $x$  has  $y$  in mind and  $y$  is the thing that  $x$  intends to be saying something about."<sup>3</sup> He then points out that since Holmes is a nonexistent object and cannot causally interact with existents, we cannot appeal to the causal chain theory of Kripke and Donnellan to trace a chain of reference back to Holmes. "What then," Hunter asks, "is the initial starting point of the chain?"<sup>4</sup> If some such causal connection is required for Conan Doyle to have Holmes in mind, then Conan Doyle could neither have Holmes in mind nor ostensibly 'baptize' him in order to get the chain going. And this puzzling question is apparently further complicated by the fact that Holmes's full identity is not revealed until the last of the stories in the series has been completed. It becomes a mystery how Doyle referred to Holmes in the early stories. Toward the end of his article, Hunter goes to some trouble to spell out possible ways in which Doyle could have attempted to establish a reference for 'Holmes', and though we are going to suppose that our readers have some familiarity with his argument, we shall briefly summarize the claims in the last section of his paper.

Hunter argues that Conan Doyle could not establish reference to Holmes by using any of the following four definite descriptions. Description (1) is 'the thing that has  $P_1, \dots, P_n$ ', where  $P_1, \dots, P_n$  are the properties which jointly individuate Holmes in the context of the novels. The reason (1) cannot be used to refer to Holmes is that there are an infinite number of Meinongian objects which have identities defined in part by this finite number of properties. Description (2) is 'the thing which has exactly  $Q_1, \dots, Q_n$ ', where  $Q_1, \dots, Q_n$  are the properties Doyle knows he will attribute to Holmes in the first story. The reason (2) cannot be used to refer to Holmes is that Holmes has properties from the later stories bound up with his identity as well and so (2) refers to some other Meinongian object. Description (3) is 'the object having exactly the properties in the set  $S$  of properties eventually to be attributed to Holmes in the course of the novels'. Hunter claims that since there is no way for Conan Doyle to determine *securely* what set  $S$  is without presupposing a prior reference to Holmes, description (3) cannot without circularity be used to refer to

Holmes. Description (4) is 'the completion of  $h_1$ ', where ' $h_1$ ' denotes the Holmes of the first story  $S_1$  and where this description denotes the last object in a series of objects which begins with  $h_1$  and in which each successive object  $h_{n+l}$  extends the previous  $h_n$  by adding to  $h_n$  all of the properties attributed to Holmes in the new story  $S_{n+1}$ . Hunter argues that the fact that it was within Conan Doyle's power at the time of writing  $S_1$  to make the completion of  $h_1$  be some object other than Holmes shows that Conan Doyle could not have used (4) to refer to Holmes.<sup>5</sup>

Although Hunter directs these claims and arguments against Terence Parsons' formalization of Meinongian theory, they require few alterations to apply to my alternative formalization as well. They succeed in raising important questions and Meinongians should welcome the opportunity to articulate further their picture of reference. Hunter has apparently raised two basic problems: (i) the problem of resolving the causal chain theory of reference with the Meinongian identification of non-causal objects as the reference of names of fictional characters (within the context of a single story), and (ii) the problem of referring to a character developed over a series of stories while the stories are being developed. However, in this paper, we plan to focus primarily on problem (i) and leave a more detailed consideration of (ii) to some other occasion. Part of the reason for doing this is that we accept the *prima facie* case for thinking that (ii) may be subsumed under or reduced to (i) by regarding a series of related stories as a single, lengthy story.<sup>6</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that when authors present a new story in a series of stories, they expect their readers to regard the events and characters as part of an overall story which includes material from the previous stories. This allows them to omit repetitious background information from the later stories, just as they omit material in earlier chapters from later chapters of a single story. Readers are supposed to assimilate the material from story to story, just as they assimilate material from chapter to chapter within the context of a single story.

Moreover, the considerations raised with respect to problem (ii) do not yield puzzles which are unique to a series of stories as opposed to a single, lengthy story. That is, the referential problems Hunter develops for a series of stories can all be reconstructed as problems within the context of a single, long story. He says, for example, "it is not credible

<sup>3</sup>Hunter [1981], p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid*, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup>For the details of this argument, see Hunter [1981], pp. 32-33.

<sup>6</sup>Parsons makes this suggestion in [1980], p. 189.

to think that when Doyle wrote the first Holmes' story, he knew what ... properties he would attribute to Holmes in future stories."<sup>7</sup> But by the same token, it doesn't seem credible to think that when Doyle began to write the first chapter of the first story, he knew exactly which properties he would attribute to Holmes in the final chapters of the story. It seems more reasonable to suppose that at some stage in the course of writing the story, he attributed to Holmes properties of which he did not conceive at the outset. Thus, the situation with respect to a single story seems no different than that with respect to a series of stories.

In addition, the particular descriptions discussed above, which Hunter claims cannot be used to establish reference to Holmes, do not fail in this regard simply because a series of stories is involved. Hunter's arguments could be reconstructed to show that such descriptions would fail to refer to Holmes even in the course of a single story. To see this more clearly, consider descriptions (2) and (4) above, and suppose that instead of composing a series of stories, Doyle had composed a single story which included all of the material we now have in the series. Also, let the properties  $Q_1, \dots, Q_n$  involved in description (2) be the properties Doyle knew he would attribute to Holmes in the first chapter (' $c_1$ ') of this story (' $S$ '). It should be easy to see that a version of Hunter's argument that the Meinongian object described would not be Holmes would still be applicable. Holmes' identity would include properties attributed to him in the later, further removed chapters, as well as those attributed to him in the first chapter. And similar considerations apply to description (4), 'the completion of  $h_1$ ', where this time we let ' $h_1$ ' denote the Holmes of the first chapter of  $S$ . By reasoning analogous to that Hunter uses, Doyle could not use this description to refer to Holmes. For if  $c_1, \dots, c_n$  were the chapters of the story  $S$ , we could view each chapter as involving different Meinongian objects playing the role of Holmes, each one more complete than the ones playing the role in previous chapters.<sup>8</sup> It also seems within Doyle's power when he first began to write chapter  $c_1$  to make the completion of  $h_1$  be some object other than Holmes. And this is supposed to show, according to Hunter, that Conan Doyle could not refer to Holmes using description (4).

These remarks, many of which parallel Hunter's, show that he in-

<sup>7</sup>Hunter [1981], p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Compare this with the claim in the opening lines of Hunter [1981], p. 31, paragraph two.

roduces no special complications by considering a series of stories that wouldn't already complicate the consideration of a single, lengthy story. Of course, more detailed analysis of the issues may reveal that there are essential differences between the two cases. But this is a topic for some other occasion. As far as our present reply to Hunter is concerned, it will serve us well to simplify matters and address only the problem of reconciling the causal chain theory of reference with the Meinongian identification of fictional characters within the context of a single story.

We may uncover a response to this problem by first challenging Hunter's use of two important notions and by then denying some important claims involving these notions which are central to his argument. It is necessary to challenge the use Hunter makes of the notion of reference and of the derivative notion of an author's establishing or determining the reference of a name of a character. Hunter appeals to certain 'facts' concerning these notions as data to be explained, and we are not sure that he is justified in doing so. Is it clear that while storytelling, an author uses words in exactly the same manner that you or I do when we assert things about real objects? When Conan Doyle uses the words 'Sherlock Holmes' while authoring his story, was he referring at that point to Holmes? Were the sentences he used assertions about Holmes? Is it data to be explained that he was referring to the same object throughout the course of the storytelling and to the same object I refer to when I use the name? And is it clear that when we trace our use of 'Holmes' back through the causal chain, we must suppose that at some point, Doyle specifically established or determined the reference of the name to be Holmes and not something else? These seem to be interesting and open questions. And some are questions the answers to which might involve an appeal to theory.

These are not open questions for Hunter, however. He says,

... the chain traces back to the author's reference to the fictional entity in the story in which entity was created. In using the name 'Sherlock Holmes' we refer to whatever fictional entity Doyle was referring to when he wrote the stories creating that character... . Some have denied that authors refer to fictional entities in the stories they write. It seems to me difficult for the Meinongian to deny that such reference occurs. For one thing, we do talk as if authors make reference to fictional entities in their stories. We can ask, for example, 'To whom was Doyle referring when he wrote "He heard someone

coming up the stairs”? Was is to Holmes or to Watson?’ It is quite natural to say that Doyle wrote about Sherlock Holmes, referred to him, said things about him, etc., and furthermore that he did all these things in the stories themselves. . . . It is hard to see how the Meinongian could take at face value the ordinary belief that readers of the Holmes stories refer to Holmes without also taking at face value the ordinary belief that Doyle himself was referring to a certain fictional character when he wrote these stories. ([1981], p. 28)

I think that much of what Hunter says here is not true. It seems to me that much of what Hunter calls ‘data’ are instead propositions the truth of which should be decided in part by theory.

In order to cast doubt on the views advanced here, we must deny claims that Hunter makes in the passages just before this. He says,

We cannot trace our reference to Holmes to an ostensive baptizing of Holmes because no one could have pointed at Holmes and said, “I dub thee Holmes.” One might say that the creator of Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle, could have baptized him, but to do so he would have to be able to refer to Holmes already (perhaps as ‘that character’). But the explanation of how Doyle was able to have Holmes in mind could not involve some kind of causal connection between Holmes and Doyle. ([1981], pp. 27-28)

Now the main idea that we proffer in this paper as an insight is this: the traditional philosophical notion of a baptism, upon which Hunter is relying in the above passage, is too narrow, and that if we broaden our philosophical perspective, we can understand this notion in such a way that it applies to nonexistent objects as well as existing ones. We shall argue not only that Conan Doyle baptized Holmes, but also that authors baptize their characters in general. Ostensive baptizings of existing objects do take place in the manner Hunter suggests. For the idealized case, all that is required is that in the presence of the object being baptized, the person doing the baptizing point or gesture appropriately and say “I dub thee . . .”, where the ellipsis is filled in by the relevant name. Note that this is a rather special use of language; it is a speech act more like proposing a definition than asserting something about the object being

baptized. Typically, in such cases, the name need be mentioned only once for the baptism to be successful.

However, this procedure is not followed when an author baptizes a fictional character. Instead of pointing and mentioning the relevant name, the author *tells a story*. I suggest that the act of storytelling is a kind of extended baptism, and is a speech act more similar to definition than to assertion. A story is required to baptize a nonexistent object as a fictional character. The author doesn’t really establish or determine the reference of the name or names used, except in a derivative sense. Rather, it is the metaphysical theory of objects which establishes that a certain object is being referred to in the context of a completed storytelling. If the theory is supplied with data of the form “According to the story, *p*”, it predicts facts about the stories and the characters therein and yields principles governing their identity.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike baptisms of existing objects, in which the name being introduced is used once, baptisms of nonexistent objects frequently involve many uses of the name throughout the course of the baptism. However, as in definitions in which a single word is being introduced into the language, all of the words in the definiens have their ordinary meanings. This reveals that baptisms of characters, like definitions, can be considered special uses of language. It seems preferable to suppose that reference doesn’t take place until the baptism is complete, just as in baptisms of ordinary, existing objects, one does not use the name to refer to the object in question until successful completion of the baptism. It seems illegitimate therefore, in the case of storytelling, to ask whether the author is referring when he or she uses the name of a character before the storytelling is complete.

To further this idea that certain questions may be illegitimate, note that in Parsons’ development of the theory of fiction in his book, the discussion of stories precedes the discussion of characters.<sup>10</sup> If one supposes that the ideas contained in his discussion were unfolded in a conceptually coherent fashion, this may be an indication that the notion of a character is logically connected somehow to the notion of a story. Any such logical connection could prove to be independent of the controversy between Meinongians and actualists on the status of nonexistent objects. The series of definitions proposed in my recent book confirms the connection

<sup>9</sup>See the discussion in Zalta [1983], Chapter IV, Section 4.

<sup>10</sup>See Parsons [1980], pp. 175-182.

between the two notions.<sup>11</sup> The notion of a story is first defined as an abstract object which encodes just propositional properties and which has an author. Propositional properties are ones constructed out of propositions  $p$  and are of the form: being such that  $p$  ( $[\lambda x p]$ ). The notion of a character is then defined relative to a story:  $x$  is a character of story  $s$  iff  $x$  exemplifies some property according to  $s$ . Thus, anyone who tries to refer to a character without supplying or referring to the story in which the character is involved is going to run into difficulty.

This, I suggest, is another key to the problem Hunter poses about reference to fictional characters. Part of the puzzle about how it is we refer to such characters may be due to a desire to refer to them before we even have a story to refer to, or due to a desire to refer to them independently of any story. It is a corollary to the above however that one cannot establish the identity of a fictional character without establishing the identity of the story in which the character is involved. The solution to this part of the puzzle, then, is that, strictly speaking, an author simultaneously baptizes both a story and its characters through a storytelling. The proper names which denote stories or characters may be traced back to such storytellings. Meinongians not only have a theory of nonexistents and fictional characters, but also a theory of stories and of the relationships between stories and characters. The definitions and axioms which forge these relationships have a certain logical order, and I think that the coherence of the logical structure of these notions should be the real focal point of criticism.

The correct response to Hunter should therefore be as follows. Meinongians should deny that for Conan Doyle to baptize Holmes, “he would already have to have Holmes in mind”. In order to baptize Holmes, Conan Doyle needs to author a story, and in the process of storytelling, he simultaneously baptizes the story and the characters therein. The character Sherlock Holmes has so many properties that it may be unreasonable to think that Doyle ever has him completely in mind, though we will discuss shortly what it is that Doyle does have in mind. We must also deny that to baptize Holmes, “Doyle would have had to refer to Holmes already”. It seems plausible to suggest that Doyle doesn’t actually refer to Holmes until the storytelling process is over, just as one doesn’t refer to an existing object using the name involved in the baptism until the baptism is complete. Consequently, we deny that “the causal chain of reference

traces back to the author’s reference to the fictional entity”. Instead, we suggest that the causal chain of reference traces back to a storytelling, and that *a priori* metaphysical principles, which include definitions and axioms governing the identity of stories and characters, then ‘establish’ or ‘determine’ the reference of the names involved.

We may even rely on testimony from one of the originators of the causal chain theory for partial support of the above view. Consider, in particular, the last sentence in the following excerpt from Donnellan [1974]:

Our account is that he has learned that when in the past he believed something, for example, which he would have expressed by saying, ‘Santa Claus comes tonight’, and would have thought himself in saying this to be referring to someone, the historical explanation of this belief does not involve any individual who could count as the reference of ‘Santa Claus’; rather it ends in a story given to him by his parents, a story told to him as factual.

While Meinongians would disagree with Donnellan about the reference of the name ‘Santa Claus’, we should agree that the historical explanation ends with the storytelling, though this is only the beginning of the metaphysical explanation.

Officially, this completes the reply to Hunter, and it is tempting to end the matter here. We’ve resolved the apparent differences between the Meinongian theory of fictional characters and the theory of direct reference within the context of a single story. And the resolution can be extended to the referential problems which are supposed to infect a series of stories by treating such series as a single story. Reference may not take place until the series is complete, for the identities of the characters and the story itself are not fixed until then. However, I think it is important to fine tune this picture of reference somewhat, because Hunter may have put his finger on some deeper issues regarding fiction. The real question Hunter may be posing for Meinongians is: what does the author have in mind and how does language work when he or she conceives, utters, or writes the first sentences of a story? Suppose that Conan Doyle has just begun his first story, and has just written “Sherlock Holmes is a detective who lives at 221B Baker St. in London.” Since this is only the first step of many in the baptism process, it is not correct to say that Doyle has

<sup>11</sup>See Zalta [1983], Chapter IV, Section 4, Definitions D34 – D38.

just referred to Holmes. Maybe by uttering such a sentence in a context in which the storytelling has been finished, Doyle would have referred to Holmes. But not when he writes the first sentence of the story, and this leaves us with the question, how does language express what the author has in mind when beginning the story. Such a question does not presuppose that we are dealing with the semantic notion of reference. I suggest that, in fact, we should appeal to Frege's semantic notion of sense.

The sentence in question may express a *de dicto* thought, even if the name 'Holmes' does not yet have a denotation. The thought expressed involves the Fregean sense rather than the denotation of the name. And it is the sense of the name, and the sense of the sentence as a whole, which Doyle has 'in mind' when he begins to write the story; they are the semantic content of the name and sentence, respectively, at this stage. By relying on the model of Fregean senses as Meinongian objects that I've developed elsewhere, we can say that the sense of the name 'Holmes' with respect to Doyle at this point in time is also an abstract, Meinongian object which encodes certain properties.<sup>12</sup> This object encodes the properties attributed to Holmes in the 'core story'. The core story is the undeveloped story line the author has brought to mind just prior to the storytelling. And as one might suspect, the core story may also be regarded as an abstract object; it encodes the propositional properties constructed out of the thoughts that constitute the basic plot or argument. If the author has introduced a name to baptize the story he or she plans to complete, the core story, construed as an abstract, Meinongian object, could serve as the sense of that name. It is generally the core story that the author has in mind when he or she uses the name.

Our abstract, Meinongian objects are like files of information which store the possibilities. The objects which encode only ordinary properties like being a detective, living in London, etc., store the possible characters, while the ones which encode propositional properties constructed out of propositions like "A powerful god lives on Mt. Olympus" or "A detective lives in Victorian London and solves a murder mystery", etc., store the possible stories. These files, while abstract, are nevertheless public, and individual minds are the kinds of things which have access to them. In a sense, when an author brings a core story to mind, he or she is accessing a file which contains the thoughts underlying a possible story. The author

<sup>12</sup>See Zalta [1983], Chapters V and VI, for the theory and model of Fregean senses within the theory of abstract objects.

will sometimes access a 'core' character file as well—this is simply an object that encodes properties like being a detective, living in London, brilliant deductive mind, wears a deerstalker hat, etc. If relations to other characters in the fiction are involved, the thoughts would have the senses of the names of those characters as constituents.

To make this more vivid, consider the proposition that a brilliant detective with keen powers of observation and an extremely logical mind lives in Victorian London and solves a convoluted, perplexing murder mystery. The abstract object which encodes the propositional property constructed out of this proposition could form the core story for the story Doyle is about to write. If he already decided to name the story 'S', then this object serves as the sense of the name 'S'. Moreover, the core story involves properties which the author may use to bring a character to mind. Once the name 'Holmes' is decided upon, it becomes imbued with a certain sense. The sense of this name with respect to Doyle at this point may encode the properties of being a detective, having keen powers of observation, having an extremely logical mind, etc. This is what is brought to mind when Doyle uses the name in writing the first sentence of the story. Since the thought expressed by the sentence involves the sense of the name instead of its denotation, we have the classic markings of a *de dicto* context.<sup>13</sup>

This tells us a little bit about the relationship between mind and language at the outset of storytelling. In the course of writing the story, the author brings new details to mind and new thoughts which become essential to the plot may be added to the core story, while others may drop out. The sense of the name 'S' will *change* as the story progresses. In addition, the sense of the name 'Holmes' will change as well, as character development continues. As Doyle approaches the limit of his cognitive capacity for picturing the events of the story and the characters, a series of abstract objects may come, over time, to serve as the sense of the name 'S' and another series of abstract objects may come, over time, to serve as the sense of the name 'Holmes'. Which *de dicto* thoughts Doyle has expressed by using the name 'Holmes' at any given time during the

<sup>13</sup>The thought expressed can be constructed by taking the sense of the name and using the logical operation **PLUG** to 'plug' it into the sense of the predicate 'is a detective who lives at 221B Baker St. in London'. The result of plugging the sense of a name into the sense of a predicate is a thought. For the definition of **PLUG**, see Zalta [1983], Chapters II and V.

storytelling process depend on the cognitive picture that he has in mind at that time, and this is something which we can represent using Meinongian objects. However, none of this implies that Holmes himself is a different character at each stage of the storytelling, since we have not been talking about the denotation of the name, but rather its sense. At this point, we are still in the process of baptizing Holmes.

This picture allows us to explain some of what Hunter takes to be data. Recall the previous quotation where he says,

We do talk as if authors make references to fictional entities in their stories. We can ask, for example, ‘To whom was Doyle referring when he wrote “He heard someone coming up the stairs”? Was it to Holmes or to Watson?’ It is quite natural to say that Doyle wrote about Holmes, referred to him, said things about him, etc., and furthermore that he did all these things in the stories themselves.

If these things we supposedly say are construed in a non-technical way, where ‘refers’ means ‘to have in mind’ (pretheoretically), then I think that we can explain why they seem to be true. We can answer the question posed in this quotation by saying that Doyle was ‘referring’ to Holmes and not Watson, for on this construal of what it is to refer in the course of storytelling, the facts are that it was the sense of ‘Holmes’ and not the sense of ‘Watson’ which Doyle had in mind when he wrote the sentence. The abstract objects which serve as the senses of the proper nouns and pronouns are the subject of Doyle’s cognitive manipulations while authoring the story.

In conclusion, the key to understanding some of the deeper issues Hunter raised regarding the relationship between language and thought during a storytelling lies not only in Meinongian metaphysics, but in a Fregean philosophy of language as well. I think that it is a mistake to think that the theory of direct reference invalidates all of Frege’s ideas about the senses of names. Fregeans should argue, however, that senses are not the entities which determine or secure the denotation of the names with which they are associated. Nevertheless, an appeal to Fregean senses remains part of the simplest explanation of how language works in *de dicto* contexts.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>The reader may be interested in two works containing material on fiction published after the present paper, namely, Zalta 1988 and 2000. As I think more about

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the problems that arise in connection with reference to fictional characters, I become increasingly impressed by the fact that when an author writes a new story and introduces names of new characters, she alters the expressive power of natural language. Prior to the Conan Doyle novels, the property of *tracking Dr. Moriarity* was not expressible, at least not if ‘Dr. Moriarty’ denotes the fictional nemesis of Holmes. This makes it very difficult to separate the question of the existence of the property of *tracking Dr. Moriarity* from its expressibility. This problem also extends to the fictional names involved in the predicates denoting these properties. The present picture suggests that when an author writes another in a series of novels, she is in part changing the significance of the names of the characters. This is important to remember when thinking about the semantics of these names.