

ORDINARY REFERRING NAMES IN FICTIONAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract. Ordinary proper names can be taken to be referring expressions in non-fictional contexts. But what happens when such names occur in literary works? Within the realist stance, there are two approaches to the issue. Some say that ordinary proper names retain their real world referents in literary fiction. Others argue for the view that ordinary proper names are related there to surrogate referents. It can be pointed out, however, that both approaches create a conceptual tension within the realist doctrine. Fiction-internal contexts are incompatible with any reference-based interpretation of names. The proposal of this paper is, therefore, a shift in perspective: instead of sticking to the notion of reference, the behaviour of ordinary names should be described in terms of representation.

Keywords: fictional characters • fiction-internal contexts • ordinary proper names • realism • reference • representation

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1. Proper name reference and fiction: a debate among realists

When it comes to interpreting proper names in fiction-internal contexts, fictional realists rely on two fundamental theses.¹ The first is a well-known and popular semantic thesis which says that ordinary proper names are devices of direct reference. The second is an ontological thesis which contends that the comprehensive list of existents (or subsistents) includes fictional entities. Let us suppose that the interpretive task before the realists is to evaluate a fiction-internal declarative sentence containing a token of the ordinary proper name ‘Napoleon’. By combining the above fundamental theses, realists may approach the task in two different ways. One possibility for them is to claim that in fiction-internal contexts ‘Napoleon’ continues to refer directly to its real world referent (i.e. the non-fictional person, Napoleon). So the fiction-internal sentence containing a token of ‘Napoleon’ may be taken to assert something about that real world entity. Another possibility is to argue that although tokens of ‘Napoleon’ remain devices of direct reference in fictional contexts, when the name occurs in a fiction-internal sentence as a constituent, it undergoes a reference shift: instead of referring to a non-fictional person, ‘Napoleon’ refers there to a distinct kind of entity, a fictional Napoleon. Since these different approaches to the interpretive task can be associated with equally credible but incompatible versions of fictional realism, it is worth taking a closer look at each of them.

Defenders of the first approach often appeal to the folk view of fictionality for illustrating why we must be willing to accept the presence of ordinary referring names in fiction. For



example, Kripke (1973 [2013]) alludes to the natural reactions of readers who are engaged in a literary narrative about a historical figure like Napoleon. Literary narratives are obviously not constrained by historical facts. Even historical novels need not describe details about past events quite accurately. On the basis of creative freedom, an author may write a story where, contrary to historical fact, Napoleon lived and died in the time of the French monarchy. Kripke assumes that readers would interpret the fiction-internal sentence ‘Napoleon lived and died in the time of the French monarchy’ as being out-and-out false.² This may be the correct interpretation because it is more natural to read the sentence as making a false statement about the real Napoleon rather than reading it as telling us something true about a fictional character – at least Kripke says so. From this it can be concluded that in such fiction-internal sentences every token of ‘Napoleon’ will retain its public-language semantic properties and, therefore, will continue to refer directly to the historical figure Napoleon.

In her writings on fiction and reference, Thomasson seems also commit herself to the first approach. Like Kripke (1973 [2013]) Thomasson (1999) emphasizes how unnatural it would be to deny that real world entities — persons, places, events, etc. — can be involved in fictional stories.³ Saying that Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* features a purely fictional Napoleon character would likely be antithetical to the literary experiences of average readers. And similarly, many fictionalized biographies and documentary literary works would lose their aesthetic attractiveness if it turned out that the stories they tell us are entirely independent from the lives of famous real people. Thomasson mentions Tom Stoppard’s *Travesties* as an example, which would lose much of its characteristic humor, if it were proclaimed that the story does not in fact involve the real Lenin, Tristan Tzara and James Joyce meeting in Vienna. Although Thomasson does not say it explicitly, it seems pretty clear that she is committed to the view that ordinary proper names like ‘Napoleon’, ‘Lenin’ or ‘Vienna’ are semantically stable enough to save their real world referents even if they are tokened in fiction-internal contexts.

Folde (2017) presents an argument which starts also from the naturalness assumption that we have seen to lie behind Kripke’s position. It is a wide-spread, commonsensical view, says Folde, that fictional stories can be both about purely fictional entities and real world entities.⁴ According to him, in theories of fiction ‘aboutness’ should be understood in terms of content: a story is about a particular entity, *e*, if *e* exists according to the content of that story. This story-internal relation can be made explicit by applying an intensional fiction operator either in the form of ‘According to fiction *F*, ...’ or in the form of ‘In fiction *F*, ...’. We can confidently say on the basis of our acquaintance with Tolstoy’s story that ‘In *War and Peace*, Napoleon meets Andrei Bolkonsky’. We are entitled to make such statements because, among other things, we know that both Napoleon and Bolkonsky exist according to the content of that story, or in other words, because we know, among other things, that *War and Peace* is both about Napoleon and Bolkonsky. If the above aboutness conception is correct, it may provide sufficient support for the commonsensical view, which sees the fiction-internal presence of real world entities as entirely unproblematic. Following this train of thought, Folde comes to the conclusion, albeit with some hesitation and qualification, that in Tolstoy’s story ‘Napoleon’ can be taken as referring to the historical Napoleon.⁵

It may strike one as a methodological weakness that all of the above arguments for the first approach to the interpretive task have been based, at least partly, on natural or commonsensical assumptions regarding the process of literary text comprehension. I do not think this is a serious concern. Theory construction in this field, as elsewhere, should be open for any

suitable type of data, and it is beyond doubt that alluding to competent readers' natural and commonsensical assumptions meets the criteria of datahood in our present case. One prominent way of collecting relevant data is to rely on personal reading experiences: scholars can take their own intuitive judgements about the referential behaviour of ordinary names and other nominals in fiction as pieces of information that have a certain degree of initial reliability. Or, alternatively, scholars can directly observe how other readers understand textual material where such reference-apt expressions are present. Of course, pieces of information originating from such empirical sources are always fallible and revisable but there is little reason to deny that they are reliable enough to serve as data for theory construction.⁶

Thus, instead of entering into a detailed discussion of research methodology, it seems more useful to concentrate on the shared element of the previous arguments. I think it is not difficult to recognize that this shared element consists in positing a referential continuity for proper names between common currency contexts and fiction-internal contexts, which may be captured by the following schema:

Reference Continuity in Fiction (RCF): If a non-fictional ordinary proper name, *N*, has real world reference, *e*, in common currency contexts, *N* will retain *e* as its referent in fiction-internal contexts, too.

(RCF) presupposes that there is also a type-continuity in the occurrences of *N* across these two kinds of context. This is so because an ordinary *N* may possess the same phonetic and orthographic form as a fictional *N* even if the latter is nothing else than a product of a creative authorial act. In order to exclude such disparate cases, instances of (RCF) must involve proper name identity in the sense that the same name type *N*, or, to use Kaplan's term⁷, the same continuant name *N* must occur in both sides of the conditional. If this extra presupposition is satisfied, then (RCF) can be safely employed for solving our current interpretive task. That is, one can claim that '... Napoleon ...' in a fiction-internal context tells us something true or false about the real Napoleon.

Defenders of the second approach contend that ordinary proper names undergo a referential shift when they occur in literary artworks. They argue against (RCF) typically on the grounds that referential relations are established under quite different conditions in common currency contexts than in fiction-internal contexts. The most apparent difference is thought to lie in the manner in which names are introduced into the language as grammatically and semantically significant expressions. Direct reference theory contends, in its most powerful manifestation, that for an ordinary proper name to become a device of direct reference an original introductory act must be performed which establishes a constant relation between the name and its intended unique referent. This 'baptismal act' has several aspects or dimensions — epistemic, semantic, pragmatic, etc. — that sometimes vary independently from each other. But one thing is relatively clear: the introduction of a new name can be regarded as successful only in those cases where the baptismal act manages to secure an appropriate name/referent relation unambiguously. Of course, fiction-internal contexts function also as baptism-friendly environments, and most of the success criteria that are operative in real world cases are operative in merely fictional baptism, too. The significant difference is that the name/referent relation need not and cannot link two ontologically different domains — the word (name) and the world (referent) — together. Instead, the name/referent relation becomes fictionalized through the inner mechanisms of the storytelling process. From a mere

grammatical point of view, it might seem that authors of literary works introduce names for some real world entities. But they do not. What they do is merely pretend-referring to the entities of a real world and so it is merely a pretense that the baptismal act they perform establishes a word/world relation. Therefore, purely fictional names cannot be seen as semantically related to referents that are external to the contexts into which they have been originally introduced.

Given this difference, an important question is whether ordinary names can be transferred from common currency contexts into fiction-internal contexts without loss of referential capacity.⁸ Motoarca (2014), Voltolini (2013, 2020) and other opponents of (RCF) give a ‘yes and no’ answer to this question. They argue that ordinary names, in general, retain their referential capacity in fiction-internal contexts — this is the ‘yes’ part of the answer.⁹ But they do not refer to their original real world referent; instead they refer to a surrogate — this is the ‘no’ part of the answer. Consider again the example of Napoleon. The proposed view is that ‘Napoleon’ is a referring name as it occurs in the story of *War and Peace*, but instead of referring to the historical figure it refers there to a surrogate, a fictional Napoleon. Motoarca (2014) explains the phenomenon of referential shift by claiming that fiction-internal contexts induce a change in the semantic profile of names because they function as blocks to reference continuity. If this is indeed so, then all internal token occurrences of ‘Napoleon’ will refer to surrogates. And this holds true even for such an apparently plain sentence as ‘Napoleon was an emperor’ since the real referent is no longer available for the name in internal contexts.¹⁰

According to Voltolini (2013), the second approach may be defended also by means of an ontological argument. The majority of traditional ontologists agree, says Voltolini, that the completeness of an entity is the hallmark of its reality. Completeness means that for any real world entity, *e*, and any property *P*, *e* either possesses *P* or lacks *P*, and there is no third possibility.¹¹ In principle, one can decide whether the real Napoleon possessed or lacked a given property, say, the property of being an admirer of cats. Since Napoleon was a real world entity, he either definitively possessed the property of being an admirer of cats or he definitively lacked that property. There was no third possibility given. In contrast, fiction-internal contexts do not allow us to ascertain such things. Tolstoy’s novel, for example, is completely silent on this issue. Readers of *War and Peace* are therefore not in a position to say anything informative about the intimate relationship between Napoleon and cats. This implies, however, that Tolstoy’s character must be an incomplete entity: the Napoleon of *War and Piece* neither possesses the property of being an admirer of cats nor lacks that property. From the (ontological) incompleteness of the character, Voltolini draws a semantic conclusion: since real world entities are essentially complete, ‘Napoleon’ cannot refer to a real world entity in fiction-internal contexts. So, if it refers at all, ‘Napoleon’ must refer to a fictional surrogate. The essence of the second approach can be summarized in a short form as follows:

The Surrogate Reference View (SRV): If an ordinary proper name, *N*, occurs in a fiction-internal context, *N* will refer there to the surrogate of its real-world referent.

Note that the type-continuity of *N* is presupposed here, just like in (RCF). All of the above suggests, then, that (SRV) is also a plausible candidate for solving the interpretive task. As it has already become clear so far, (SRV) predicts that in fiction-internal contexts ‘... Napoleon ...’ will tell us something true or false about the Napoleon surrogate.

Despite their surface plausibility and despite the fact that they have serious adherents among the followers of the realist doctrine, I tend to think that both (RCF) and (SRV) are incorrect. They are incorrect because the reasoning that lies behind them is based on an inadequate conception of fiction-internal contexts. Realists accept the existence of fictional entities — this is a well-supported position. The problem is that it is rarely, if ever, recognized how the existence of fictional entities depends on the textual level of literary works in which they appear.

In the next section, I first try to clarify why (RCF) and (SRV) leads to insurmountable difficulties and then introduce a novel framework for the analysis of fiction-internal contexts. The last section finally shows how internal occurrences of ordinary proper names can be interpreted within this newly proposed framework.

2. A representationalist framework for fiction-internal contexts

As we have seen above, realists may interpret literary ‘... Napoleon ...’-type sentences in two different ways. The first is to say that ‘Napoleon’ refers to the historical figure, the second is to say that ‘Napoleon’ refers to a Napoleon surrogate. It is not easy to understand, however, how a realist can wholeheartedly claim that tokens of ‘Napoleon’ should be taken to be (directly) referring expressions in literary works.

Realists typically accept the idea according to which storytelling is governed by authorial pretense: literary stories are told as if they concerned some real world entities. The semantic relation of reference — a relation functioning at the level of authorial storytelling — is also understood by realists as falling under the scope of pretense. This is not an only occasionally supported idea. This is, one could say, an essential or constitutive part of the realist doctrine. Consider an early articulation of the doctrine. In his Lecture I., Kripke (1973 [2013]) says that “[w]hen one writes a work of fiction, it is part of the pretense of that fiction that the criteria for naming, whatever they are, are satisfied. I use the name ‘Harry’ in a work of fiction; I generally presuppose as part of that work of fiction, just as I am pretending various other things, that the criteria of naming [...] are satisfied. That is part of the pretense of this work of fiction” (Kripke 1973 [2013], p.23). Kripke later speaks about a Pretense Principle, summarizing with this label the argument according to which fiction writing must be governed by the mental attitude of pretending. Thomasson (2003) seems to accept completely the Kripkean view concerning pretense. Here is what she says: “Certainly it is plausible that, in writing a work of fiction, the fictionalizing discourse of the storyteller involves a pretense (shared with readers) that she is telling a true story about real people” (Thomasson 2003, p.207). As mentioned above, most adherents of realism agree with this line of thought.

What are the implications of the pretense account of fiction-internal contexts? Consider a character name that has been invented by Tolstoy: ‘Andrei Bolkonsky’. Although the fictional character Bolkonsky is taken to exist as a created abstract entity, the name ‘Andrei Bolkonsky’ is considered as not referring to anything in the internal context of Tolstoy’s story — at least this is the standard picture within the framework of the dominant version of realism. That is, in a fiction-internal context, ‘Andrei Bolkonsky’ is interpreted by realists as an empty name, which merely pretends to refer.

Now consider the sentence ‘Napoleon meets Andrei Bolkonsky’ as it occurs in the text of the novel. (RCF) and (SRV) suggest that because ‘Napoleon’ is a referring name, Tolstoy’s sentence tells us something true or false about either the real Napoleon or its fictional surrogate. This seems to be misleading. Given that ‘Andrei Bolkonsky’ is referentially empty, the correct interpretation cannot assign a complete proposition to the sentence. Instead, it yields the gappy propositional structure ‘Napoleon meets \emptyset ’, which is apparently unsuitable for expressing a truth-evaluable content. One might try to remedy the deficiency by adding the above-mentioned intensional operator ‘According to fiction *F*, . . .’ to the front of the sentence. The application of this operator would signal that the content of the sentence can correctly be evaluated only when we interpret it from the perspective of the possible world of the story. But saying that ‘According to *War and Peace*, Napoleon meets Andrei Bolkonsky’ would not be much help, since the embedded sentence will still contain the problematic empty structural component. Proper names are “modally frozen” in the sense that if in the actual world they are introduced by a fictionalized baptismal act as referentially empty expressions, they will remain empty in every metaphysically possible world.¹²

The same difficulty can also be seen from another point of view. One can contend that the fiction-internal sentence ‘Napoleon meets Andrei Bolkonsky’ involves two names, which are supposed to have opposing semantic (or metasemantic) profiles. And it is not unreasonable to think that a coherent interpretation would require somehow removing this difference from the structure of the sentence. How could this be done? I can imagine only one possibility: one should point out that neither ‘Napoleon’ or ‘Bolkonsky’ are referring names in fiction-internal contexts. In this case, one could claim that although Napoleon and Bolkonsky are genuine fictional characters (i.e. both are abstract artifacts that have been brought into being by Tolstoy’s creative acts), the character names themselves are not referring expressions in the internal context of the text. Unfortunately, adopting a stance like this would be clearly incompatible with both (RCF) and (SRV).

At this juncture that one might imagine an objection taking the following form. Let us accept that (RCF) and (SRV) characterize the realist’s main options for analysing the semantic behavior of ordinary names in fiction. It does not follow from this, however, that (RCF) and (SRV) exhaust all of the available options. As remarked by a reviewer of this article, by (RCF) and (SRV) no criticisms have been put forward against a realist perspective that doesn’t rely on pretense, but still manages to preserve a Kripkean theory of reference. It might be argued that ordinary names’ references are preserved in fictional texts just like a counterfactual situation in which, let’s say, someone imagines that Napoleon is flying to the moon. According to the reviewer, it is plausible to think that intentionality can be divided into the intentional act, its content and its object. Then the issue at stake is whether the same object is being a part of the intentional act — which clearly is the case, or counterfactuals would be nonsense. The conclusion is, therefore, that the direct reference approach may be consistent and straightforward in fiction, even if it is not based on the idea of pretense. Although it is an interesting issue on its own right, I do not want to dispute the correctness of the above-mentioned approach to intentionality. But even if we grant the correctness of that approach, the objection remains unpersuasive. The problem is that counterfactual reasoning involves a built-in imaginatory element, which makes it quite similar to the mental acts of writing fictional texts. When we imagine counterfactually that Napoleon is flying to the moon, then we are generating an as-if context. That is, we are reasoning so as if it were actually the case

that Napoleon has this kind of superpower. Note, however, that it would be quite difficult to make a significant distinction between the following two kinds of mental act: *supposing* (counterfactually) *as if P* and *pretending that P*. It seems that our commitments to reality are mandatorily suspended in both cases. Thus, if the scope of (counterfactual) as-if reasoning extends to the domain of real objects and we understand this domain to include historical figures like Napoleon, then it is not easy to see how a Kripkean theory of direct reference could be saved from the problems inherent in (RCF) and (SRV).

After this brief detour, let us return to the main subject of this section. Theorists of fiction occasionally flirt with the thought that literary characters like Bolkonsky are in some sense representations. For example, Everett and Schroeder (2015, p.288) are getting close to this viewpoint when they say that characters represent particular persons who possess various properties. Taylor (2014, p.187) remarks in a more general setting, that what really exists in fiction is nothing else than structures of repeatable representations. In my view, it would be a significant step toward the solution of our current problem, if characters and fictional entities in general were seen from a purely representational perspective. However, to adopt such a perspective, it is necessary to clarify two substantial issues.

First, realists should be careful enough *not* to say that fictional entities are represented thus-and-thus in fiction-internal contexts. Fictional entities would have to be thought of in this case as existing separately from internal representations, which would definitively preclude adopting a purely representational stance. Second, it is far from being evident how names (and other nominals) can be properly treated in a representationalist framework. Can one contend, by alluding to the standard account of reference, that names in fiction are devices of representation? Let me take these issues in this order.

There is a characteristic thought pattern concerning representation in fiction which deserves some reflection.¹³ It is sometimes said that those who accept the existence of fictional characters ought to conceive of the mechanism of fictional representation roughly in the following manner. Since we cannot bump into him, cannot have a sensory experience of him, etc., Andrei Bolkonsky must be a purely fictional character. Perhaps it is an abstract entity which has been created by Tolstoy's authorial imagination. This abstract entity, the character, is represented in *War and Peace* as being a prince possessing several interesting individuating properties. The character of Bolkonsky is best seen, therefore, as being dependent for its existence both on Tolstoy's authorial imagination and the text of the novel *War and Peace*. But in spite of its dependent nature, it is a self-standing, non-linguistic abstract entity. Or so the thought goes.

Thinking about fictional representation in this way has some peculiar consequences. The startling part is not that characters are conceived of both as abstract entities and as created entities. In a series of work, Amie L. Thomasson has argued quite convincingly for the creatability and contingent nature of abstract literary entities in the late nineties, and since then many have reacted to the idea of created abstracta positively in other areas of research, too. Notice, however, that the existence of the character Bolkonsky is claimed to depend (partly) on the text of Tolstoy's novel and, at the same time, it is claimed that the character is a self-standing non-linguistic abstract entity. Let me briefly explain, why *this* is peculiar. It is important to clarify what does it mean that a character's existence depends on a particular kind of text. Although 'existence dependence' is a heavyweight metaphysical notion, which has a rapidly growing literature, it is the epistemological aspect of the notion that is more

interesting for us here. For one might wonder how readers can come to know of the existence of Bolkonsky if one takes the existence of the text of the novel as given. The answer is disappointingly simple: readers are aware of the existence of Bolkonsky on the basis of their respective reading experiences. One must process and understand accurately at least one sentence of the novel, which contains a token occurrence of the name 'Bolkonsky'. For individual readers, there is no alternative epistemological route to knowledge of that character. Of course, given that the text is a publicly accessible entity, one may acquire the same piece of knowledge through deference to other fans of *War and Peace*. But others are faced with the same epistemic prerequisite when they are willing to know something about the protagonists of the novel. The written text has a privileged status in this regard. It does not exaggerate to say, therefore, that fictional characters (and fictional entities in general) are accessible *only* via mechanisms of text processing.

Of course, one may still accept Thomasson's (1999) view and say that in the metaphysical sense of the word characters depend on the creative acts of their authors. One might add that this kind of metaphysical dependence has some explanatory priority, too. However, it is worth making two observations. First, somewhat interestingly, Thomasson never offers a detailed analysis concerning the nature of these creative acts. But sometimes she seems to identify them with written assertions. We are told at a certain point, for example, that "fictional characters are created merely with words that posit them as being a certain way", and she continues to say that "characters are created by being written about by their authors" (Thomasson 1999, p.12). This is an interesting remark since to say that a character is created merely with words assumes that what has been created (i.e. a character) is distinguishable from the means with which it was created (i.e. from the words). On the one side, we have the creative acts of the authors and the corresponding written words or textual descriptions, and on the other side we have the created characters. This means that although characters have their "birthplace" in the text, they exist externally to the expressions of the text. One might rightly feel that something is missing in this picture, namely an explanation of why we should *not* identify created characters with words. Unfortunately, Thomasson does not give a principled answer to this question. Second, even if Thomasson is right and metaphysical dependence has indeed some explanatory priority in the theory of fictional characters, we should not think of the epistemic issues as being settled.

To repeat, it is important for representationalists to take into consideration the epistemic aspect of the existence dependence of characters because it reveals that there is no gap to be bridged between the knowability of characters and the textual level of works. It is only after they have learned that the name 'Bolkonsky' as a representational function in Tolstoy's text that readers can talk and think about that protagonist. This may, in turn, reveal something also about the nature of fictional characters. For if it is correct to say that (i) a character's existence depends (partly) on the text, and (ii) characters are accessible only via text processing, then one might be encouraged to think, contra Thomasson, that the nature of such entities is linguistic. In thinking this, one may still hold that characters like Bolkonsky are abstract entities. It is the relevant type of abstract entity that can be characterized now in a more accurate manner. Literary texts contain many items which are capable to convey representational content. Many of these items — pronouns, definite descriptions and other types of nominals — are implicitly or explicitly linked to character names. As an illuminating example, let us consider the opening sentences of Chapter IV in *War and Peace*, where the character name

'Bolkonsky' occurs for the first time: "Just then another visitor entered the drawing room: Prince Andrew Bolkonsky, the little princess' husband. He was a very handsome young man, of medium height, with firm, clearcut features." By reading these sentences, readers become aware that a newly introduced character name, 'Bolkonsky', has been associated with the nominal 'husband' — a paradigmatic representational item. It also turns out that the second sentence creates a link between the name and the representational phrase 'young man' through the backward-pointing pronoun 'he' and so forth.

In general, it can be said that the scattered but interlinked linguistic items around a particular character name may be best seen as constituting a specific representational network within the text as a whole.

One of the central insights of the representational approach to fiction is that characters should be regarded as 'unions' or 'embodiments' of such abstract networks.¹⁴ There is nothing more for Bolkonsky to exist as embodying a representational network in *War and Peace*. Or to put it in other words, the way characters are represented does not differ from the way they exist. And this, I think, is why it sounds peculiar to identify characters with self-standing *non-linguistic* abstract entities. All we are interested in is to be found at the textual/linguistic level of literary works. Why should we involve further sorts of *abstracta* (for example, institutional or social *abstracta*) into our investigations? There seems to be no reason for multiplying theoretical entities in this manner.

It might be objected that representations are not suitable candidates for this alleged role since representing is inherently relational. If characters are indeed embodiments of representational networks, as the above paragraph suggests, then there must be something they represent. Thus, characters may be self-standing non-linguistic entities after all. This is not necessarily so.

Goodman (1968) was among the first to argue that the notion of representation can also be understood non-relationally. According to his view, in analyzing the fundamental structure of artworks, 'represent' may occasionally be applied as an unbreakable one-place predicate. Take first a painting of a centaur. There are no centaurs in the actual world, therefore, construed relationally, the painting represents nothing. But the judgement cannot be correct in this form, since the painting represents "something", namely an actually nonexistent centaur. The tension can be resolved by contrasting two notions of representation. On the one hand, there is the old relational notion, which requires that such representational vehicles as paintings be somehow related to the entities that are represented by them. On the other hand, there is a rival notion, which allows representing even in such cases where there are no appropriate entities to be represented. In this second situation one may contend that what we see before us is a centaur-representing-painting, which is not the same as a painting *of* or *about* a centaur. The notional or conceptual difference lies between two alternative ways of representing entities: representation of *e* and *e*-representation. If a painting is a representation of *e*, then *e* exists, and the painting is (somehow) related to *e*. If a painting is an *e*-representation, then *e* must not exist at all, and — quite obviously — the painting need not be related to *e* in any way.¹⁵

Literary cases of representation have to be analyzed by relying on this latter non-relational conception. So, when one says, colloquially, that Bolkonsky is represented in *War and Peace* as being such-and-such, we should understand them as saying that *War and Peace* contains a network of non-relational Bolkonsky-representations. Competent readers may be fully

aware of the properties of this protagonist without necessarily thinking that the text contains representations of Bolkonsky. This holds also for the above-cited example. When readers understand that the backward-pointing pronoun ‘he’ functions as a link in a representational network around the name ‘Bolkonsky’, then with great probability they will not think that ‘he’ refers anaphorically to Bolkonsky. ‘Bolkonsky’ and ‘he’ cannot be interpreted as being coreferential because the name lacks a language-external representatum to which the pronoun could refer. Likewise, the phrase ‘young man’ cannot be interpreted as an expression for referring to a property of the character because there is no such language-external representatum (i.e. Bolkonsky) that could possess such a property (i.e. being a young man).

One possible objection here is that if someone denies that pronouns and other nominal constructions are devices of reference, then it will remain unclarified what they mean in the story. In order to see the objection, let us consider once again the interpretation of the semantic function of the anaphoric pronoun ‘he’. Opponents of the representational view might argue that there must be a standard referential link between ‘he’ and ‘Bolkonsky’. Otherwise it would be completely arbitrary how a particular token of ‘he’ gets to be interpreted by the readers of the story. In principle, all of the male characters of the novel could become possible targets of semantic interpretation. And if there is indeed such an anaphoric referential relationship between the pronoun and the name, one may plausibly contend that there is something to which both of these nominal expressions refer.

But this objection seems to be misguided. It is correct to say that the pronoun ‘he’ must somehow inherit its semantic significance from a previous textual occurrence of the name ‘Bolkonsky’. It is also correct to say that in order to avoid interpretive arbitrariness we should posit a backward dependence relation between the “meaning” of the pronoun and its antecedent. Representationalists need not deny the existence of this surface semantic (or surface grammatical) phenomenon. What they have to deny is that this relation is a relation of coreference. Instead of regarding it as a manifestation of coreferentiality, they may explain the link between ‘he’ and ‘Bolkonsky’ in terms of corepresenting. It is worth of emphasizing that the semantic phenomenon of corepresenting need not necessarily be thought of as involving a standard kind of word/world relation. When a pronoun is used within a network of a particular character-representation, it comes to be coordinated with other representational elements of the network. Because of this coordinative mechanism, it can be said that the function of ‘he’ consist in enriching and strengthening the representational network organized around ‘Bolkonsky’. And, rather clearly, the pronoun can perform this function even if it lacks a language-external semantic value. In our present theoretical context, representation — the central aspect of the meaning of nominal expressions — should be uniformly understood as a non-relational semantic property or capacity.

Much could be said about the structure and the features of the representational framework, but here we should restrict ourselves to the issue of how the behaviour of proper names can be conceived of within this framework. As already mentioned, networks of non-relational representations are centered typically around textual occurrences of names. This is so, because in fiction-internal contexts, names have a certain representational priority: they provide for readers the most direct epistemic access to characters. Names like ‘Bolkonsky’ can therefore be called primary character-representations. After the name type (or continuant name) ‘Bolkonsky’ has been introduced by Tolstoy into the text, all subsequent tokens of that type retain this representational priority. This is to be compared to the representational

function of other nominals. As mentioned above, a pronoun like 'he' or a nominal phrase like 'young man' may belong to the same network of character-representation as 'Bolkonsky', but these items function in the text as derived or secondary character-representations. In order to know, for example, that a token of 'he' is integrated into a particular network of representation, readers first have to identify the network in question. All of this is reminiscent of the behaviour of ordinary proper names which seems to offer the most direct epistemic access to real world entities in common currency contexts. The fiction-internal function of pronouns may also remind us of the referential behaviour of pronouns in non-fictional environments: in order to know which person is being referred to, the reader must identify an antecedent referent for the pronoun 'he'. Now the question interesting us is whether an adherent of the representationalist framework can provide us a clear explanation for those cases where non-fictional ordinary proper names occur in fiction-internal contexts.

3. The representationalists' argument against (RCF) and (SRV)

A common feature of the most popular approaches — (RCF) and (SRV) — to the interpretation task is that they assume that fiction-internal contexts are reference-friendly environments. According to them, ordinary proper names refer in such contexts either to real world entities or surrogates. Representationalists should reject this assumption. Hence they should reject both (RCF) and (SRV). They ought to say that the notion of reference is inappropriate for explaining how names can be grammatically and semantically significant expressions in fictional texts in spite of the fact that they can stand there only for pretend entities.

Motoarca (2014) and other defenders of (SRV) are certainly right in one important point. Fiction-internal contexts acquire specific features at their genesis, which distinguish them sharply from fiction-external contexts. These features might arise directly from acts of authorial pretense or they might reflect a deep sociocultural convention, which demands that literary texts be interpreted automatically in an indirect or aesthetic setting. This is why the principles governing internal contexts prevent ordinary names from referring to their customary real world referents. But the defenders of (SRV) err when they claim that we must compensate this semantic loss by positing surrogate referents. The correct conclusion would be to say that under such conditions names lose their referential capacity entirely.

One might tend to think that a purely representationalist strategy also faces difficulties when it comes to interpreting such fiction-internal sentences as 'Napoleon was an emperor'. From this it seems *extremely* natural to infer that the name refers back to the historical person. Napoleon was indeed an emperor, so why should we think that *this* Napoleon here in the story is not identical to *that* Napoleon out there in the world. This may be an apt observation. But let's imagine another version of the story in which, a few pages later, we read the sentence 'We were mistaken; Napoleon was in fact an Alien from the spacecraft Nostromo'. In this imagined situation, adherents of (RCF) and (SRV) would be equally in trouble. It is plain that in the second internal sentence 'Napoleon' could not be taken to refer back to the historical person: the Alien on the Nostromo was a non-human creature. On the other hand, it is far from being clear what kind of entity could play here the role of a surrogate referent. What would be the main criteria for positing such an entity? Must the surrogate resemble to a certain extent the

historical person or not? For example, could Napoleon surrogates be non-humans? Instead of trying to give reassuring answers to these hard questions, I would like to point out how representationalists can solve the problem.

According to the representationalist view, in fiction-internal contexts ‘Napoleon’ should be regarded as a character name. As noted in the foregoing, this follows from the widely-shared view that nominal expressions cannot be assigned their default semantic values in fiction-internal contexts. This motivates a shift in theoretical perspective: the aim now is not to assign referents to token names but to characterize the semantic profile of names in terms of representation. The idea is, as it also turned out, to take names to be vehicles of primary character-representations. Thus, in ‘Napoleon was an emperor’ the ordinary proper name ‘Napoleon’ is referentially inert but it is grammatically and semantically significant because it plays an eminent role in a particular network of non-relational representations. When, in the same internal context, we read that ‘We were mistaken; Napoleon was in fact an Alien from the spacecraft *Nostromo*’, we should simply record that the network undergoes a dynamic restructuring. Every representational item that was hitherto connected to a human emperor from this point on should be understood as characterizing a non-human creature. In spite of the backward effect of this restructuring, the name retains its original representational role through the subsequent parts of the text. That is, it will still continue to function in all its textual occurrences as a vehicle of primary character-representation. Hence there is nothing that would endanger the integrity of the story and there is nothing that would endanger the identity of the Napoleon character.

Finally here it is worth stressing that every character ought to be conceived of as embodying a locally specified representational network in its own host story as a whole. Thus, the representational network Napoleon embodies in *War and Peace* should be seen as being different from the network Napoleon embodies in our imagined version of the story. In fact, a Napoleon-representation which is centered on the property of being a human emperor is *radically* different from a representational network in which Napoleon turns out to be a non-human creature. It should be noted, however, that the representationalist’s argument does not depend essentially on counterfactual scenarios concerning the original wording of literary texts. Real textual differences that are much more smaller than our imagined one may also be significant for the specification of networks. Although Napoleon in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* resembles in many respects to Tolstoy’s Napoleon, we must see them as differently construed characters. For example, while the latter embodies a representational network that includes the property of having met Bolkonsky, the former embodies a representational network that clearly lacks this representational item.

The locality of characters, however, is only of secondary importance with regard to the interpretation task. We want to know what happens with the referential capacity of ordinary names in general, when they are used by authors of fictional works. Asking how a particular name behaves in different works is an independent question that should be settled on its own merits. Taking all the above factors into consideration, the representationalist approach can be summed up as follows:

Reference Discontinuity in Fiction (RDF): Ordinary proper names lose their capacity to refer to real world referents or to anything else in fiction-internal contexts, but they become endowed with new non-relational representational properties.¹⁶

(RDF) seems to be in agreement with (RCF) and (SRV) concerning the type-continuity of ordinary proper names between fiction-external and fiction-internal contexts. In any case, representationalists need not necessarily argue for the claim that, as it occurs in literary texts, ‘Napoleon’ is a made-up name. If Kaplan (2011) is right, as I think he is, reference is not an essential determining factor regarding type-continuity. It is more crucial for type-continuity that there be an unbroken chain — causal, historical, causal-historical or whatever you like — between occurrences of names across different times and contexts. But we may go a step further and contend that the type-continuity of a transferred name might be preserved even in cases, where the chain of communication breaks down for some reasons. For instance, let us imagine that there is a common currency name, *N*, which has been introduced within a speech community for referring to a geographical kind, say, a particular island. Imagine also that after a certain time period speakers of that speech community begin to refer to the island by using the name *M* instead of *N*, so that *N* comes to be erased from their collective memory completely. The change might be induced by a simple misunderstanding. As time goes by, however, speakers of that community might decide to introduce *N* as a means for referring to the island once again without remembering that *N* was the name of that geographical object somewhere in the past. If something like this would happen, we could contend that the original communicative chain for *N* was broken, at least for a certain time period, but it has been initialized anew. Thus, in spite of the fact that there was a causal or historical gap in the chain of usage of *N*, all tokenings of this name should be viewed as belonging to the same name type.

In typical cases, however, the communicative chain in the usage of a name traces back to an initial baptismal act in the past and the constancy of the chain guarantees that the same type of name gets to be involved in every subsequent stages of usage. Competent speakers need not always reflectively check the constancy of such chains. In most cases, it is enough if they are able to recognize (in a broad sense of recognizing) that the name type they have to understand is used in their speech community in a constant way. This holds true also for authors of fiction: if they somehow manage to borrow ‘Napoleon’ from an unbroken chain of common currency occurrences, they can continue to use tokens of the same original type of ‘Napoleon’ in their own stories. Thus, although reference continuity has been lost in (RDF), type-continuity remains intact.

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Notes

¹The technical term ‘fiction-internal context’ will be used in this paper for designating the semantic effects generated by the texts of fictional artworks. On this understanding, ‘fiction-internal context’ is roughly equivalent with ‘internal discourse’ as Voltolini (2006) uses the term, and it has also some similarity with Azzouni’s (2010) term ‘fiction-internal statements’. I have chosen the expression ‘context’ because it has far fewer pragmatic connotations than the terms ‘discourse’ and ‘statements’ have in a semantic vocabulary. Correspondingly, the technical term ‘fiction-external context’ will be used for designating the semantic effects of textual elements that are not part of fictional artworks.

²Cf. Kripke (1973 [2013], p.76).

³In a later paper, Thomasson repeats basically the same kind of thought by adding: “There is a Napoleon character created in the story (to which readers can refer) even if the story is making *de re* reference to the historical Napoleon and pretending to assert various new things about him” (Thomasson 2010, p.128). I am not sure I know how to understand this addition. Thomasson is committed to abstract fictional realism, according to which characters are created abstract entities. If ‘Napoleon’ refers to a concrete person in the story, how can we say that an abstract Napoleon character has also been created by the text? Note also, that on this view there is a strong requirement for being an abstract Napoleon character: it is that the character name ‘Napoleon’ should not refer back to any existing (or once existed) person.

⁴Cf. Folde (2017, p.389). See also Taylor (2014, p.197).

⁵Folde is rightly cautious in his conclusions. One possible counterargument to the thesis that ‘Napoleon’ refers to the historical figure is that the name may be homonymous. Then tokens of the common currency name and tokens of the *War and Peace* name may not be type-identical. A further problem is that the historical person may merely be a model for Tolstoy’s protagonist. For more on this, see Folde (2017, p.395).

⁶For a systematic overview of the status and function of data in linguistic theory construction, see Kertész and Rákosi (2012).

⁷See Kaplan (2011).

⁸There is also the reverse question of whether and how purely fictional names can be transferred into common currency contexts. Most realists give the following answer to this question: if a token of a purely fictional name occurs in a common currency context, it refers to an abstract or concrete fictional character. It is so because language users (in some way) endow such names with a referential capacity in extra fictional contexts.

⁹The term ‘surrogate’ was originally coined by Parsons (1980). It should be mentioned that Voltolini’s position is a bit more complicated than the view of Motoarca. He contends that “[i]n the fictional use of a fiction-involving sentence, the relevant genuine singular term directly refers to an ordinary real individual. In the metafictional uses of a fiction-involving sentence, however, that term directly refers to a fictional surrogate of that individual” Voltolini (2020, p.819). The emphasis lies here on the difference between two kinds of *uses* of sentences. Seen from the perspective of the present paper, this difference, although interesting in its own right, is only of secondary importance.

¹⁰An early articulation of this idea is to be found in Bonomi (2008).

¹¹According to Voltolini, the idea is that “[f]ictional entities are *incomplete*, in the sense that, of some pair of properties *P* and its complement *non-P*, a fictional entity lacks both. Thus, fictional entities significantly differ from real entities” Voltolini (2013, p.239).

¹²Perhaps a neo-Meinongian realist like Berto (2011) can argue that Napoleon has the property of meeting Bolkonsky not at the actual world but at a possible (or better, impossible) world that realizes Tolstoy’s story. However, in such a situation ‘Napoleon’ would be certainly not a type-identical name across possible worlds, so I put aside this option.

¹³See, for example, Brock (2010, p.358) and Kroon (2015, p.164–165).

¹⁴Note that there are many unnamed characters in literary fiction and some characters have more than one name. The representational framework can accommodate such cases without problems. For the relevant details, see Vecsey (2019). A somewhat related view is taken by Kamp (2015), who develops his ideas within the framework of Discourse Representation Theory.

¹⁵More recently, Burge (2010) has also argued for the possibility and coherence of a non-relational understanding of representation. Burge (2010, p.45) summarizes his view in a metaphorical way: “Representation is rather like shooting. Some shots do not hit anything, but they remain shootings”. In a similar spirit, Sainsbury (2018, 2021) urges that we think of artistic representations as ontologically not committing.

¹⁶It should be clear by now what is meant by the clause ‘they become endowed with new non-relational representational properties’. The key point is, of course, that ordinary proper names are connected not only to other parts of their ‘own’ non-relational representational networks but also to other networks of their host stories and this type of connectedness induces a change in their representational properties.