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New Essays on Frege

Between Science and Literature

 Springer

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Editors

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Chapter 8

Semantic and Pragmatic Aspects of Frege's Approach to Fictional Discourse

Todor Polimenov

Abstract In many places in his works Frege comes to speak of fiction. Sometimes he appeals to it to get the background against which to draw the semantic boundaries of his logical investigations. Sometimes he gives examples from fiction to clarify some specific relations between his semantic concepts. It is worth analyzing Frege's remarks on fiction in order to see if they contain insights that let us elaborate a Fregean definition of fictional discourse. It is shown that they not just negatively say what fictional discourse is not, but also do indicate what it is. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between semantic and pragmatic features of Frege's view of fiction. The pragmatic ones, it is argued, anticipate some basic insights of a speech-act theoretical approach to fictional discourse. In addition the paper explores what Frege would tell us about the ontological status of fictional objects if the truth conditions of statements about them are taken into consideration in a Fregean manner.

Keywords Fictional discourse • Fictional objects • Frege • Illocutionary force • Reference • Sense

8.1 Introduction

Frege's research interests lay within the areas of logic and philosophy of mathematics. In search of a new logical theory for the purposes of his mathematic-logical program Frege found himself forced to deal with language firstly. The analysis of language, or more precisely, of the way we talk about the world is essentially the method by which he rejects a number of traditional concepts and introduces completely new distinctions and directions in logic. As a result, what turned Frege into one of the founding fathers of the philosophy of language in the analytic tradition were the fundamental insights into the working of language he had gained during

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his logical-linguistic analyses and, more generally, his original approach to the questions of logic from the point of view of the question of the ‘sense’ of our statements. Thus, although for him investigations into language had never been an independent objective of its own, today he is considered one of the key figures in the philosophy of language.

Even less did Frege ever intend to develop a theory of fictional discourse. He, as it seems, discusses fiction and the poetic use of language only peripherally in his works and the respective considerations rarely amount to more than fragmentary remarks. On closer examination, however, one notices a few significant details. Firstly, the reference to fictional discourse gives Frege an important background against which to draw the semantic boundaries of his own logical investigations. Secondly, Frege repeatedly gives examples from fiction at crucial junctures in his writings, where specific relations between his semantic categories are being explained. Thirdly, without trying to define fictional discourse—assuming that we have already mastered it—Frege points to certain features that distinguish it from other ways of speaking and that can be used to characterize it. That is why a study of Frege’s approach to fiction appears to promise to shed valuable light both on Frege’s philosophy of language and on the very nature of fictional discourse.

In order to get a fuller picture of Frege’s views on fictional discourse and to make those views more usable for contemporary debates, we need to—apart from exploring the contexts in which Frege explicitly deals with fiction—also consider the question how, with the help of the tools we inherited from Frege (namely the distinctions he had drawn and the concepts he had got on their basis), we could analyze certain kinds of fictional statements that Frege did not discuss. It is those kinds of statements that are often examined in the secondary literature to test a given theory of fiction of a ‘Fregean’ type. For that reason, they seem to be a good means for assessing the explanatory potential of such a theory.

Certainly, we do not have a full-fledged theory of fictional discourse in Frege. On the other hand, Frege worked out in detail enough semantic distinctions through which a theory of the kind can be developed. Let us mention the most important ones: the distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*), the distinction between customary and indirect reference (more generally, in Carnap’s idiom: between extensional and intensional contexts), the distinction between thought and assertoric force (more generally, in Searle’s idiom: between propositional content and illocutionary force), the distinction between assertion (*Behauptung*) and pseudo-assertion (*Scheinbehauptung*). This is the reason why in the present paper I speak only of Frege’s *approach* to and not of a *theory* of fictional discourse.

The first commentator to notice that Frege’s semantics contains elements that can be employed in the theory of fiction was, it seems, Aschenbrenner (1968). His research, however, remains limited to general suggestions of how to apply the distinctions from “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” (*SB*) to explain the ‘ontology’ of literary works of fiction. He neither took into consideration other passages from Frege’s works relevant to the topic as, for instance, those in “Der Gedanke”, nor—which is more important—could he have used texts from the Frege *Nachlass* that reveal a

number of additional aspects of Frege's views on fiction.¹ A decisive influence on the further discussions was Searle (1975/1979). Although Searle's exposition is systematic and Frege's name is never mentioned, Searle offers an account of fictional discourse, which at least gives the impression of being a development of Fregean ideas placed within a larger speech-act theoretical framework. Whether Searle, of whom we know that he had at an earlier stage studied Frege's semantics, was directly influenced by it in that particular case is not important here. What matters is that his speech-act theoretical perspective on fictional discourse gives us the opportunity to see Frege's own remarks on fiction in a new light. Thus, we can discover in them some features that, today, we can call pragmatic, and claim that Frege at least had anticipated some of Searle's central tenets.

Besides the question of the nature of fictional discourse (the topic of speaking *in* works of fiction) Frege's semantic distinctions have their contemporary relevance mostly to discussions of the ontological status of fictional objects (the topic of speaking *about* fictional works and their characters). A considerable challenge to Frege scholars is presented by the neo-Meinongian approach of Parsons (cf. 1975 and particularly the systematic exposition in 1980); especially in that Parsons (1982) targets directly "Fregean theories of fictional objects" in order to show that they create rather than solve problems with the analysis of sentences which seem to support the assumption that *there are*—in some way—objects that *do not exist*. Examples of such sentences are:

- (1) Sherlock Homes is a fictional detective who is more famous than any real detective, living or dead.
- (2) A certain fictional detective is more famous than any real detective.²

Of course, responses of Fregeans have not taken long to appear (cf. Gabriel 1987/1993; Künne 1995), and debates concerning Frege's conception of fiction and the application of his distinctions to its explanation are still underway (Textor 2011 is representative of the current state of the discussion).

8.2 Fiction and *Dichtung*

The central notion in Frege's semantics is the notion of truth (Frege 1897/1979, 128 ff., 1918/1984, 351 ff., 1919b/1979, 253). According to Frege, it is indefinable. Since truth is a primary phenomenon, the notion of it cannot be decomposed into logically simpler elements and thus defined. That is why we have to proceed from it and use it as a guide for further logico-semantic distinctions. How do we know,

¹The first volume of Frege's *Nachgelassene Schriften* was published a year later, and his *Wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel* in 1976 (cf. the English translations in Frege 1979 and 1980).

²(2) is especially intriguing, because according to modern logical analysis, (2) seemingly expresses an existential statement: " $\exists x (x \text{ is a fictional detective} \wedge \forall y (y \text{ is a real detective} \rightarrow x \text{ is more famous than } y))$ ".

however, that a phenomenon has to do with truth at all? In that respect we can only note: truth is expressed in a speech act of asserting, in uttering a sentence with assertoric force (Frege 1915/1979, 252, 1918/1984, 356). Whoever masters the practice of making assertions already knows what it means to make a truth-claim. It is therefore not surprising that the topic of fictional discourse surfaces in Frege's works precisely in connection with the notion of truth.

When speaking of fiction, Frege uses the German word *Dichtung* (or the derivatives: "dichterische Sprache", "dichterischer Gebrauch", "Dichtkunst", "Dichter"). Besides 'fiction', *Dichtung* can also mean 'poetry', 'poem' (and, respectively, its derivatives can mean: 'the language of poetry', 'poetic use', 'poet', etc.). Probably, Frege uses *Dichtung* in order to sharpen the contrast between fictional discourse, which is, so to say, truth-free, and the language of sciences through which their aim is pursued: the discovery of truths.

Frege speaks of *Dichtung* in two different thematic contexts. The first one concerns truth-valueless sentences—sentences that, although expressing thoughts, belong to the realm of fiction. The other context concerns words or means of expression through which the so-called 'coloring' ('Färbung') of thought is achieved (Frege 1892a, 161, 1897/1979, 139, 1918/1984, 356 ff.). These words are those parts of a sentence, whose meanings do not affect the truth-value-capable core of the sentence's content (the thought). When the role of certain linguistic units is to serve for aesthetic delight by giving speech euphony (rhythm, melody) or by evoking certain feelings and phantasies (*Vorstellungen*) in the mind of the listener or the reader, the translation of *Dichtung* as "fiction" seems inappropriate. Therefore, in these contexts English translations opt for "poetry" etc. I will not deal with the poetic use of language here, but only with fictional discourse. Neither will I discuss figurative speech (the use of metaphors, similes and other rhetorical figures) as it can be encountered both in fictional and in non-fictional discourse (metaphors, e.g., are also used in the language of science, cf. Searle 1975/1979, 60; especially Gabriel 1991).

Let us, as a point of reference, sketch a preliminary definition of fictional discourse, based on views to be found in Frege's works. When we utter an assertoric sentence under ordinary circumstances, we make a claim: things in the world are the way we say they are. This can be called a truth-claim: it is *true* that things in the world are this or that way. Now, whoever utters an assertoric sentence in fictional speech behaves *as if* he makes a truth-claim (Frege 1897/1979, 130, 1918/1984, 356, 1919b/1979, 251). In that case we know: he does not commit himself to the truthfulness of what he says. While in ordinary use the semantic role of assertoric sentences consists in (i) expressing thoughts *and* (ii) claiming that these thoughts are true, uttering assertoric sentences in fiction modifies the semantic rules in such a way that sentences still express thoughts but these thoughts are not put forward as true, it is only pretended to be so.

This affects the semantic rules of the parts of the sentence as well. When someone uses a (simple) assertoric sentence to make an assertion, we *presuppose* that he refers to certain objects in the world through the proper names or definite descriptions that occur in the sentence (otherwise the sentence could be neither true, nor false). The circumstance that the speaker in fictional discourse only behaves as if he

asserts something also gives him the opportunity to only behave *as if* he refers to something through the proper names or definite descriptions that he uses (Frege 1892b/1979, 122). Therefore, the self-evident presupposition (*selbstverständliche Voraussetzung*) of ordinary assertoric speech that the objects that are spoken of exist—i.e., that the used proper names and definite descriptions are not empty—is suspended in fictional discourse (cf. Frege 1892a/1984, 168).

We can witness a similar thing with predicates as well. If their semantic role consists of classifying objects, which happens only when they yield criteria by which it *can* be determined for any arbitrary object whether the predicate is true of it or not, then we could say that it would be sufficient for the fictional use of a predicate that it has a sense (that it contributes to the expression of thought) though it may not contain clear principles of classification. Let us take as an example the word “moly” from the *Odyssey* (Frege 1892b/1979, 122). According to Homer's story, moly is a magical herb that has a milky-white flower and a black root. This description familiarizes us with some properties that an herb should have to be a moly and we can say that the word “moly” includes them in its sense as characteristic features (*Merkmale*). These features, however, would not suffice to establish for any object whether it would be true of it that it is a moly or not. Hence, the word “moly”, as we know it from the *Odyssey*, is not suitable for proper classification of objects. That does not prevent it from having a sense that makes it possible for us to understand those sections of the *Odyssey* that contain “moly”, for instance, the episode in which Hermes gives Odysseus a moly to protect him from Circe's magic. On analogy with complete assertoric sentences and singular terms such as proper names and definite descriptions we can say: anyone who uses a predicate in fictional sentences only behaves *as if* he classifies objects with it.

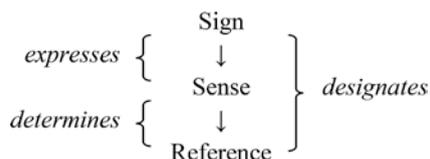
Our preliminary definition is as follows: fictional discourse is an as-if-speech. Frege confines himself only to assertoric speech because it stands in immediate relation to the question of truth but, certainly, in a work of fiction not only assertions are made, but also questions are asked, commands given, suppositions expressed, etc. With respect to the speech acts of asking questions, giving commands, etc. we can say something similar to what we observed with the speech act of asserting: in fiction, the questions are as-if-questions, commands are as-if-commands and so on.

8.3 Thoughts Being Neither True, Nor False

Once we have already at our disposal a preliminary guide to what fictional discourse is, let us consider in more detail how the question of fiction (*Dichtung*) makes its appearance in Frege's works. Frege starts to refer to fictional discourse only after he has semantically specified his logic through, firstly, a strict distinction between the sign (*Zeichen*) and the thing signified (*Bezeichnetes*), and next—which is more important for the present topic—through distinguishing two components in the ‘semantics’ of every logically relevant sign: sense and reference. Before that, just once in the *Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, when discussing the domain of geometrical

truths, Frege says that in so far as they are intuitable (*anschaulich*), even the wildest phantasies in myths and fiction—phantasies that make “animals talk, ... stones turn into people, and people into trees”—are subject to the laws of geometry (Frege 1884/1950, § 14).

Since the topic of the sense and reference of a sign (singular term, predicate, sentence, logical particle) provides the framework within which Frege discusses fiction, let us describe the semantic categories ‘sense’ and ‘reference’ in the following general way: the sense of a sign is what we grasp when we *understand* the sign; reference is what we *mean* by that sign. The sign *expresses* its sense and *designates* its reference, by which the sense mediates the relation between the sign and its reference (the sense presents the reference in a certain way and from a certain perspective). Or in more detail: in expressing a sense, the sign designates the referent determined by that sense. The following scheme can visualize this:



The one and the same reference can be presented by different senses (namely, from different perspectives), and the one and the same sense can be expressed by different signs.

In the context of the distinction between sense and reference the topic of fiction is mentioned for the first time in a letter to Husserl from 24/05/1891 (Frege 1891/1980). Here Frege discusses the reference type of predicates (*Begriffswörter*) and distinguishes it from the type of the references of singular terms (*Eigennamen*), pointing out that whereas for the fictional use of language (*den dichterischen Gebrauch*) it suffices that signs have senses, the scientific use requires their references as well.³

The first place where the topic of fiction is considered in more detail and where it plays a key role in the course of the argumentation is *SB*. Here Frege (1892a/1984) argues for two theses: (i) that proper names (and more generally: singular terms)

³Following the traditional distinction between the content and the extension of a concept, Husserl is inclined to think that what a general term (*Gemeinname*) refers to is a set of objects in a similar way that a singular term refers to one definite object. Frege (1891/1980, 63) objects that a general term—unlike an empty singular term—can have a scientific use even when no object falls under the concept it denotes (when the respective set is empty). Let us take “a satellite of Venus” as an example: the sentence “Venus has no satellites” (“There is no thing that is a satellite of Venus”) does not only have a sense but also states a truth. We do not refer to sets by predicates (“... is a satellite of Venus”) but by abstract singular terms: “the set of Venus’s satellites”. The reference of a predicate is a function that maps objects (references of singular terms) to truth-values (references of sentences). Frege calls that function “concept”. That is why the concept is not the sense but the reference of a predicate. The sense is the perspective in which the concept is given. For example, the predicates “... is red”, “... has the colour with the longest wave length” and “... has the colour of blood” have different senses yet identical reference.

have not only references but also senses; and (ii) that sentences (more precisely: assertoric sentences) have not only senses but references as well. It is in the transition from (i) to (ii) where the topic of fiction becomes part of the argumentation that motivates the introduction of truth-values as references of sentences (cf. also Frege 1902/1980, 152).

The argumentation is as follows. Singular terms have sense and reference (which has already been demonstrated), but do complete sentences have senses and references? They express thoughts (which is obvious) but is the thought their sense or their reference? Since the thought stands in functional dependency to the sense of the singular term but not to its reference—as can be seen from the fact that the substitution of co-referential singular terms in a sentence changes the thought that this sentence expresses, whereas the substitution of synonymous singular terms does not—the thought should be regarded rather as the sense of the sentence. Does the sentence then have a reference too? We know that there are singular terms that have senses but not references. Such are, e.g., proper names in *fiction*. We understand the sentence:

(3) Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep.

We grasp its sense. It expresses a thought. The name “Odysseus” also has a sense, because if it did not, (3) would contain a part that has no sense and then the whole sentence would also be without sense (cf. also Frege 1914b/1980, 79). Most probably, however, “Odysseus” does not have a reference, which is not a problem in itself, in so far as we are in the domain of fiction. No one expects that fictional names designate real objects. On the other hand, it seems natural to suppose that the reference of a sentence—if sentences have references—will be something that stands in a certain relation to the references of its parts. So, are there cases in which we require of a name to have not only sense but a reference as well? When do we ask, e.g., whether Odysseus did exist? Questions like the last one do not arise in fiction but when we start to take an interest in, e.g., whether the story sentence (3) is a part of is true. Now, the truth-value of a predicative sentence directly depends on which object we apply the predicate to. If such an object does not exist, the sentence cannot have a truth-value. Just as a sentence does not have a sense if one of its parts lacks sense, a sentence does not have a truth-value if one of its parts doesn't have a reference.

By posing the question of truth, however, says Frege, we leave the realm of fiction and no longer consider (3) as part of a fictional story. We start to take interest in facts—in whether (3) depicts truthfully a certain state of affairs.

In this context Frege calls attention to a peculiarity that Searle (1975/1979, 60) uses later on to draw a distinction between ordinary speech and fictional discourse. Whoever commits to the truth of (3), utters (3) *seriously*. Contrariwise, recognizing (3) as part of fictional speech, we know that it should not be taken seriously: here uttering (3) is just a game. In a fictional context by uttering (3) we do not say anything true or false but rather we express a thought that only *seemingly* (*scheinbar*), within the limits of this game, is posited as true (cf. also Frege 1897/1979; 1918/1984).

In a paper draft that further develops the topic of sense and reference (in *SB* they are discussed only for the case of singular terms and sentences) by explaining the

distinction between sense and reference with respect to predicates (so that it is not confused with the traditional distinction between the content [*Inhalt*] and the extension [*Umfang*] of a concept, cf. note 3), Frege (1892b/1979, 118, 122) brings up the subject of fiction again. This is the only place where in addition to the usual examples of reference-less singular terms (like the proper name “Nausicaa”) Frege also mentions the use of predicates in fiction giving the example with the above-cited word “moly”. The point is the same as the one made in *SB*: when we are interested in truth, we ask about the references of sub-sentential expressions (or presuppose that they have references) and we are not contented with the senses of words and sentences as in fiction (cf. also Frege 1904/1980, 165).

8.4 Assertions Without Assertive Force

The paper draft “Logic” from 1897 reveals some new aspects of Frege’s view on fictional discourse. The text contains the most extensive discussion of fiction in Frege’s works. It is also interesting because it displays, for the first time, the main line along which Frege unfolds his semantic distinctions (in exactly the opposite direction to the one adopted in *SB*): he starts with the notion of truth, introduces the sentence and the thought (the sense of a sentence) as the entities about which the question of truth arises and only then defines the sense of sub-sentential components as their contribution to the expression of thought to finally draw the distinction between sense and reference—not without making a comparison between “serious” and truth-directed speech with fictional speech, which has sense but contains reference-less names and therefrom truth-valueless sentences.

The topic of fiction is introduced in the following way (Frege 1897/1979, 129 ff.). A thought *proper* (*eigentlicher Gedanke*) is always true or false. There is, however, a third case, namely, that of pseudo-thoughts (*Scheingedanken*) which are neither true, nor false. Such thoughts are thoughts in fiction (cf. also Frege 1906b/1979, 198; 1914b/1980, 79 ff.; 1919a/1984, 373 and 389; 1923/1984, 394). Since Frege explicitly calls these pseudo-thoughts “fiction”, we can use his criterion for a pseudo-thought in order to define fiction:

- (F) The sense of a sentence is fiction if that sentence contains a pseudo-proper name (*Scheineigenname*).

A pseudo-proper name is a name which has a sense but no reference. Reference-less proper names (more generally: reference-less singular terms) seem to deprive the sentences that contain them of a truth-value because the truth-value is nothing else but the sentences’ reference. As we said above: if a sentence contains a *part* that has no reference, it seems natural that the sentence itself cannot have one.⁴ In this manner neither the sentences:

⁴In a footnote Frege (1897/1979, 130) explicitly excludes in this regard the cases in which a pseudo-proper name occurs in indirect speech (in intensional contexts). As we shall see later, that

- (4) Scylla has six heads
or
(5) William Tell shot an apple off his son's head

nor their negations could be true, because the names "Scylla" and "William Tell", while having sense, do not have reference. Consequently, (4) and (5) are fictional (cf. also Frege 1914a/1979, 232).

Let me call (F) a semantic criterion of fiction. Drawing on the semantic property of a singular term of (having only a sense but) lacking a reference, (F) formulates a sufficient (though not a necessary) condition for something to be fiction (for which sentences are to be characterized as fictional). This criterion has puzzled many Frege interpreters because according to (F) it turns out that, e.g.,

- (6) Vulcan causes disturbances in the orbit of Mercury
and
(7) The author of the *Principia Mathematica* found an antinomy in the logical system of Frege's *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*

are fictional sentences. If (F) were adequate, then a substantial part of the history of science would turn out to be fiction, which means: it would consist of sentences that are neither true, nor false.

In the text that immediately succeeds the above discussed one, however, Frege develops his reasoning on fiction as follows:

The writer, in common with, for example, the painter, has his eye on appearances [Schein]. Assertions in fiction are not to be taken seriously [ernst]: they are only pseudo-assertions [Scheinbehauptungen]. Even the thoughts are not to be taken seriously as in the sciences: they are only pseudo-thoughts. If Schiller's *Don Carlos* were to be regarded as a piece of history, then to a large extent the drama would be false. But a work of fiction is not meant to be taken seriously in this way at all: it's all play [ein Spiel]. Even the proper names in the drama, though they correspond to names of historical personages, are pseudo-proper names; they are not meant to be taken seriously in the work. We have a similar thing in the case of an historical painting. As a work of art it simply does not claim to give a visual representation of things that actually happened. A picture that was intended to portray some significant moment of history with photographic accuracy would be not a work of art in the higher sense of the word, but would be comparable rather to an anatomical drawing in a scientific work. (Frege 1897/1979, 130. In part my translation.)

Frege gives us here a second criterion of fiction I would like to call pragmatic since it concerns the *use* of proper names and sentences. Whether a given instance of speech is fictional or not cannot be decided on the basis of the semantic (or syntactic) properties of the sentences it consists of and of the ones of their parts. It is *shown* in the context of its use (on the condition, of course, that the intentions of the speaker are recognizable). The example of Schiller's *Don Carlos* illustrates the point. We can use the proper name "Don Carlos" to refer to the son of King Philip II of Spain in order to describe certain historical facts, or we can, as Schiller does, use that name to

will carry significance in the account of the truth of sentences *about* fictional works and characters.

only pretend to refer to the son of the Spanish king and thus to make up a story that does not bear any or almost any relation to reality. Then that story would consist of sentences by which the storyteller only pretends to make assertions. So, what he makes thereby can be called “pseudo-assertions”. In such a use of names and sentences we know: the question of truth does not arise here. This is only a game.

Just as a work of fiction, e.g., Schiller’s *Don Carlos*, can be confused with a historical treatise, so, conversely, a well-written historical treatise can be easily staged as a theatrical play (cf. Searle 1975/1979, 59; Gabriel 1983/1991, 7). If that is done, however, we already know: its sentences are not to be taken seriously. Which means: in this context it is irrelevant whether the truth conditions of sentences and, respectively, the reference conditions of proper names and definite descriptions have been fulfilled.

There are literary works which, in addition to fictional proper names such as “Jean Valjean” and “Sherlock Holmes”, also contain non-fictional proper names such as “Paris”, “Napoleon”, “London”, “Baker Street” referring, obviously, to real objects. There are novels in which fictional names are used instead of non-fictional ones in order again to refer, as it seems, to real objects (e.g., “Ebenezer Scrooge” in Dickens’s *Christmas Carol* is used to refer to the politician John Elwes, or “the Bulgarians” in Voltaire’s *Candide* to the Prussians). Can we say that such works of fiction, containing as they do truth-valueless sentences can nevertheless convey some knowledge, that we can, after all, learn something about history and geography from them? Perhaps only a part of a literary work is fictional while another part tells certain truths? This supposition appears to be confirmed by the fact that the authors of literary works often insert universal statements about man and the world among singular sentences about people, places, and events (e.g., “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, cf. also Searle 1975/1979, 73 ff.; Gabriel 1983/1991, 8). While Frege’s semantic definition of fiction allows for the division of a literary text into fictional and non-fictional parts, his pragmatic approach is unequivocal: in fiction it is pointless to raise the question of truth with respect to any part of the text—regardless of whether it contains historical or geographical names or universal sentences. Fictional works have no cognitive value. On that issue Frege seems to be an emotivist.⁵

In a letter to Russell dated 28.12.1902 Frege specifies his view on fiction by leaving out the talk of “pseudo-thoughts” and keeping only the talk of “pseudo-assertions”. Indeed, he continues to hold that there are thought-expressing sentences which are neither true, nor false (because they contain proper names or definite descriptions without reference) and that *such* thoughts belong to fiction, but nevertheless, according to him, the thoughts expressed in fictional works are no less

⁵At any rate, Frege restricts the notion of *knowledge* to the notion of *truth* (true thought): “When someone comes to know something it is his recognizing a thought to be true” (Frege 1924/1979, 266), “we cannot recognize a property of a thing without at the same time finding the thought *this thing has this property* to be true” (Frege 1918/1984, 354). Probably, Frege would not have denied that a work of fiction *as a whole* (by way of a fictional story) can convey certain ‘experience’ (a position supported by Gabriel 1983/1991), but, as it seems, he would not have called such individual experience “knowledge”.

thoughts than those that are bearers of truth-values. In the cases of both sentences and sub-sentential expressions, the sense is independent of reference and hence the question of whether something is a thought or not cannot depend on the circumstance of whether it is true, false or has no truth-value in our world. That is why the phrase “pseudo-thought” is misleading. Besides, the phrase is incapable of distinguishing fictional discourse in its specificity, as the example with *Don Carlos* demonstrates.

The retaining of only the talk of “pseudo-assertions” seems to testify to a greater weight given to the pragmatic as compared to the semantic account of fictional discourse. Whereas the question of the (pseudo-)thought that *p* concerns the question of the *sense* of the sentence “*p*” (i.e., the question of the truth-value-capable part—or, in other words, of the descriptive core—of “*p*”’s content), the question of (pseudo-)asserting “*p*” arises in the context of the questions concerning what we *do*, when we utter a sentence (assert something, ask about something, command something; or, namely: pretend to assert something, pretend to ask about something, and so on). Now Frege says: thoughts are *expressed* in fiction too. The only difference with the ordinary speech lies in the fact that in fiction they are not *asserted*. “This is also why a poet [Dichter] cannot be accused of lying if he knowingly says something false in his poetry [Dichtung]” (Frege 1902/1980, 152). Thus, Frege shifts the emphasis in the characterization of fictional discourse from the distinction between thoughts being true or false and thoughts being neither true, nor false to another distinction of his: the one between expressing and asserting a thought.

Before we can establish whether a thought is true or not, we have to be able to grasp it. Frege calls the grasping of a thought “thinking” and the acknowledgement of its truth “judging” (1918/1984, 355 ff.; cf. earlier 1892a/1984, 164, fn. 10). These are two mental acts (1897/1979, 145; 1918/1984, 368) with the second one presupposing the first (1915/1979, 251; 1918/1984, 356; 1924/1979, 267). They are connected with certain speech acts, since, according to Frege, we anyway do not have any other access to a thought except by means of sentences (1924/1979, 269). To grasp a thought, we need, therefore, its linguistic expression. In order to convey the judgement that we recognize a thought as true, we also need—apart from the linguistic means for its expression—expressive means for its assertion (1906b/1979, 198). In natural languages, however, the expressive means for these two activities are intertwined (1899/1979, 168; 1906a/1979, 185). Whoever utters a simple assertoric sentence in an ordinary context, e.g.,

(8) The sun has risen.

makes a truth-claim to what is said. In cases like (8) expressing a thought and asserting it coincide, because the two are achieved through the form of the assertoric sentence (1906b/1979, 198, 1915/1979, 252, 1918/1984, 356). To draw attention to the difference between expressing and asserting, Frege gives examples with conditional and interrogative sentences. In the sentence:

(9) If the sun has risen the sky is cloudy.

we merely express the thought that the sun has risen without asserting that this is the case. The thing whose truthfulness we are committed to is that the cloudiness of the

sky would obtain *if* the condition that the sun has risen is fulfilled (*if* it is true that the sun has risen). In uttering (9), however, we do not say whether that condition is fulfilled. Similarly, in the question:

(10) Has the sun risen?

the thought of the sunrise is expressed without being asserted as true. With (10) we request an assertion in the sense: “(8)—yes or no?”.

In the process of elaborating these distinctions Frege points to fictional discourse as an example of the use of language in which we express thoughts without (properly) asserting them. Expressing and asserting thoughts are not linguistic acts of the same order: expressing, just like designating, is a semantic category by which the relations between linguistic units and the world are described whereas asserting is rather a pragmatic category—it is one of the things we perform by uttering sentences in given speech situations. In that connection Frege introduces the term “assertoric force” (*behaftende Kraft*) by which it is indicated whether in expressing a thought an assertion is made or not. For example, while the words “the sun has risen” are uttered with assertoric force in (8), in (9) they are uttered without assertoric force although the whole complex sentence (9) is uttered with assertoric force. Using Searle’s terminology, we can say: assertoric force is one of the illocutionary forces by which speech acts are performed. For example, the speech act performed by (10) has the same propositional content as the one performed by (8)—(10) and (8) express the same thought, as Frege would put it—but has a different illocutionary force, namely, an interrogative one (cf. Searle 1969, § 2.4).

In the thematization of sense-only-sign (i.e., of truth-valueless sentences and reference-less proper names), Frege’s example of fiction was speech containing mythological or legendary proper names (“Odysseus”, “Nausicaa”, “Scylla” and “William Tell”). Then, in the pragmatic account there appeared the example of the proper name “Don Carlos” (that can have both a fictional and non-fictional use). Now, when proceeding from the distinction between expressing a thought and asserting it, the figure of an actor on stage and his speech comes to the foreground.⁶ Frege presents things as follows: the actor on stage utters sentences without assertoric force (Frege 1906a/1979, 194; cf. also 1915/1979, 251). And more generally: in fiction one speaks without assertoric force (Frege 1906b/1979, 198).

Let us, to conclude this topic, quote two longer passages that can help us see more clearly the relation between an assertion and a pseudo-assertion. The first one comes from the letter to Dingler from 06/02/1917:

According to my way of speaking, we think by grasping a thought, we judge by recognizing a thought as true, and we assert by making a judgement known. It is one thing merely to express a thought and another simultaneously to assert it. We can often tell only from the external circumstances which of the two things is being done. What an actor says on the stage has usually the form of an assertoric sentence and would also be understood as an

⁶Indeed, the example is used as early as in *SB* in a footnote where Frege (1892a/1984, 163) speaks of “signs intended to have only sense” and defines as such signs the words of an actor on stage and even the actor himself and his acts.

assertion if it was said off-stage; but we know that on stage it is not said in earnest [Ernst], but only playfully [nur Spiel]. The actor only acts *as if* he were asserting something, just as he only acts *as if* he wanted to stab someone, and he cannot be charged with lying any more than with attempted murder. What is spoken on stage is said without assertoric force. But in the language of science, too, a thought is sometimes merely expressed without being put forward as true, e.g., in interrogative sentences and conditional clauses. That is why I distinguish between thoughts and judgements, expressions of thought [Gedankenausdrücke] and assertions. (Frege 1917/1980, 20 [my emphasis and in part my translation].)

Here, the speaking-as-if that we introduced at the beginning of the paper is explicitly taken to be a characteristic feature of fictional discourse (cf. also Frege 1914a/1979, 233). Let us take a look at a passage from “Der Gedanke”, where Frege discusses the relation between assertions and as-if-assertions (pseudo-assertions):

An advance in science usually takes place in this way: first a thought is grasped, and thus may be expressed in a yes-no question; after appropriate investigations, this thought is finally recognized to be true. We express acknowledgment of truth in the form of an assertoric sentence. We do not need the word “true” for this. And even when we do use it the properly assertoric force does not lie in it, but in the assertoric sentence-form; and where this form loses its assertoric force the word “true” cannot put it back again. This happens when we are not speaking seriously [im Ernste]. As stage thunder is only pseudo-thunder and a stage fight is only a pseudo-fight, so stage assertion is pseudo-assertion. It is only acting [nur Spiel], only fiction. When playing his part the actor is not asserting anything; nor is he lying, even if he says something of whose falsehood he is convinced. In fiction we have the case of thoughts being expressed without being actually put forward as true, in spite of the assertoric form of the sentence [...]. Therefor the question still arises, even about what is presented in the assertoric sentence-form, whether it really contains an assertion. And this question must be answered in the negative if the required seriousness [Ernst] is lacking. (Frege 1918/1984, 356. In part my translation.)

When Dummett considers the passage and similar ones in Frege's works, he criticizes Frege for presenting things in such a way that it leaves the impression that the actor on stage does something “less” than making assertions (let say, merely expressing thoughts). On the contrary, according to Dummett, the actor does something “more”: he is *acting* the making of assertions (Dummett 1973/1981, 311). If we have at our disposal a special assertion-sign, such as the one Frege introduces in his logical notation, and means for a plain expression of thought, we can represent the asserting of the thought that p as follows:

$\vdash (p)$

where “ \vdash ” indicates the assertoric force, and “ (p) ” stands for the expression of the thought that p . If we now add a new sign for, let say, ‘fictional force’, e.g., “ ☹ ”, what the actor on stage or the narrator of a fictional story do,⁷ when they utter assertoric sentences can be symbolized thus:

⁷Although it may seem that while the actor on the stage first and foremost speaks directly, the narrator has to use indirect speech, it is, nonetheless, quite possible for an actor to report somebody's words as well as for a narrator to speak about himself (or to let a fictional character tell the story instead of him). The distinction between simple statements and indirect speech is not really relevant here, but whether the words spoken or written should be taken seriously or not.

☹ ⊢ (p)

Here the “more” demanded by Dummett would be expressed by “☹”. “☹” and “⊢”, however, should not be merged in a single sign for ‘fictional assertion’ because that would double the symbolic presentation of all speech acts, since then we would need, e.g., also a sign for fictional question, fictional command and so on, whereas now by means of the sign for ‘fictional force’ we would simply present “the acting of asking the question whether *p*” thus:

☹ ? (p)

The symbolization of the illocutionary act of asking by “? (*p*)” is borrowed from Searle (1969, 31).

Is the form of as-if-assertions adequately represented by “☹ ⊢ (*p*)”? Dummett seems to be of the opinion that something is added to a proper assertion which turns the latter into an as-if-assertion or a pseudo-assertion. But is the theatrical thunder or the theatrical battle, given by Frege as comparisons, a real thunder or a real battle with an additional something? Is the drawing of a pipe a real pipe plus an additional fictional element? The drawn pipe and the enacted assertion are not a real pipe and a real assertion, although in the context of the drawing or the theatrical performance they *represent* precisely a pipe and an assertion. At any rate, we know: with the enacted assertion the question of truth is inappropriate.

8.5 Fictional Truths Without Fictional Objects

So far we have considered fictional discourse in the sense of the language game that the narrator of fictional stories, the actor on stage, etc. play. We have seen that what is characteristic of the assertoric sentences that the narrator, actor etc. utter is that by them, in their use in the respective literary or theatrical context, no truth-claim is being made. But could we not *truthfully* state that, for instance,

(11) Odysseus was the king of Ithaca

or that

(12) Sherlock Holmes lived on 221B Baker Street

and by this consider the negations of (11) and (12) to be false? Could we not *truthfully* say also that:

(13) Odysseus did not exist.

Could we not also commit to the *truth* of (1) and (2)? Are all of these sentences not true? (11) and (12), (13) as well as (1) and (2) as if present examples of fictional

discourse of which the question of truth is completely justified. And yet: how do we make true assertions of things that obviously do not exist?

As already mentioned, a distinction should be made between speaking *in* fiction (the activity performed by the narrator in a fictional story) and speaking *of* fictional works and characters. Whereas in speaking in fiction we have an activity of speaking-as-if, in which the question of truth is inappropriate, in speaking about fiction we make assertions that could very well be true or false. Frege noticed that distinction (cf. n. 4). In contrast to the attention paid to speaking in fiction, however, he does not discuss speaking about fiction in his works. Nevertheless, by his notion of 'sense' he provides us with an instrument for analysis of that kind of speaking as well.

When in his "Prolegomenon to a Fregean theory of fiction" Künne (1995, 141) considers *true* sentences containing fictional proper names he distinguishes five types of such sentences: (i) intra-fictional sentences like (11) and (12); (ii) inter-fictional sentences such as "Anna Karenina did not live in the same country Madame Bovary lived in" or "Don Juan had an obsession that Don Quixote did not have"; (iii) ontological sentences like (13); (iv) trans-fictional sentences like (1) and (2), which seem to place fictional and real objects in a relation; and (v) sentences which represent mixed cases of (i–iv). Since sentences of type (ii) can be analyzed as a more complex variant of sentences of type (i), and those of type (v) are just various combinations of sentences of the other types, here I will consider only sentences of the types (i), (iii) and (iv).

Are (11) and (12) really true? If we take them literally—according to Frege's account—they are neither true nor false because they contain proper names without reference, and, as said above, the possession of reference by proper names in a sentence is a prerequisite for the truth or falsity of that sentence, and, respectively, for making an assertion by uttering it. The object to which we refer by the proper name is what the predicate is applied to or denied of. If it does not exist, then the predication, it appears, would be impossible. What we talk about—using singular sentences such as (11) and (12)—in ordinary speech are the *references* of singular terms. Frege, however, says that there are cases, e.g., indirect speech, statements of epistemic attitudes etc., in which the *sense* of a singular term becomes its reference. Is this the case with (11) and (12)?

As both apologists and critics of Frege have noticed, it is the idea of the transformation of sense into reference that provides the perspective from which sentences of type (i) are to be analyzed in the spirit of Frege (cf. Gabriel 1970; Parsons 1982; Künne 1995). (11) and (12) are not to be taken literally. They are elliptical sentences expressing thoughts that get full expression, e.g., in:

- (11*) It says in Homer's poems that Odysseus was the king of Ithaca,
 (12*) It says in Conan Doyle's novels that Sherlock Holmes lived on 221B Baker Street.

(11*) and (12*) are true. They can be denied and then we will get false sentences. The words "It says in [the relevant body of literature] that ...", which occur in them introduce an 'indirect context' where words have 'indirect reference' and this is—as Frege says—their customary sense (*gewöhnlicher Sinn*). In Carnap's language the

words “It says in [the relevant body of literature] that ...” create an intensional context, i.e., a context where the principle of substitution does not hold for extensionally equivalent expressions (co-referential expressions) but only for intensionally equivalent expressions (synonymous expressions). Künne (1995, 145 ff.) interprets these and similar words as a ‘narrative operator’, which can be symbolized, for example, as: “ N_x : ...” (where “ x ” is a placeholder for the name of the relevant fictional work). Thus (11*) and (12*) would be expressed as follows:

(11**) N_1 : Odysseus was the king of Ithaca,

(12**) N_2 : Sherlock Holmes lived on 221B Baker Street.

Let “ Fa ” be a sentence containing the singular term “ a ”. If “ Fa ” appears in the scope of “ N_x : ...”, then the truth of the complex sentence “ N_x : Fa ” will not depend on the *truth* of “ Fa ”, but on the *thought* that “ Fa ” expresses (i.e., on the sense of “ Fa ”). That is why the truth of “ N_x : Fa ” will not depend on the reference of “ a ” either (which is irrelevant to the thought that “ Fa ” expresses), but only on what “ a ” contributes to the expression of that thought (i.e., only on the sense of “ a ”). Because the reference of “ a ” does not affect the thought expressed by “ Fa ”, “ N_x : Fa ” can be true even when “ a ” has no reference. Thus, a sentence and its parts ‘change’ their references in the scope of “ N_x : ...”. The sentences begin to stand for the thoughts they ordinarily express and thereby the singular terms we are interested in now begin to stand for the parts of the thought they ordinarily express.

There are some commentators such as Parsons (1982) who appeal to Frege’s idea that what a singular term refers to in an intensional context is its sense, in order to argue that, according to a Fregean theory of fiction, fictional characters such as Odysseus or Sherlock Holmes are, in fact, some specific sort of intensional objects, called “individual concepts” (a term borrowed from Carnap). This, in my opinion, implies that the stories about Odysseus and Sherlock Holmes do not speak of concrete objects—objects that could have spatio-temporal dimensions—but rather tell about events that happened to abstract objects. This seems to explain the fact that Odysseus and Sherlock Holmes cannot be found among the concrete objects in space and time, but, on the other hand, gives rise to difficulty of explaining how abstract objects could have concrete properties such as, e.g., being married (Odysseus) or not being married (Sherlock Holmes)?

What is Frege’s position on this? What does he understand by the ‘sense’ of a singular term? An intensional object? An individual concept? Parsons correctly notices that while Frege has technical terms that describe the references of singular terms (“objects”), predicates (“concepts”) and sentences (“truth-values”) as well as terms for the sense of sentences (“thoughts”), he does not have terminology for the sense of singular terms and the sense of predicates (cf. in more detail Polimenov 2013, 17). It is also notable that Frege always explains what the sense of a singular term consists in either (a) with regard to the *object* which we refer to by it (i.e., with respect to its reference) or (b) with regard to the *thought* expressed by the respective sentence that contains it.

In context (a) Frege says: sense is a way of determining the reference (*Bestimmungsweise*) or a mode of its presentation (*Art des Gegebenseins*), or a “path” (*Weg*) of arriving at it. If this is so, how can there possibly be singular terms

that have sense but no reference, if sense, as it appears, is precisely a relation between the sign and its reference (a relation of determining it, presenting it in a certain way or of arriving at it through a certain 'path')? We can put it that way: sense contains criteria for identifying reference—criteria by means of which we pick out an object among all other objects from the respective domain as the object of which we intend to state a certain predicate. Whoever understands a singular term grasps certain criteria for identifying an object. These criteria, however, might not be satisfied by any real object. In that case we say: the singular term has sense but no reference.

In context (b) Frege explains: in understanding a sentence, we grasp the thought expressed by it. In order to understand the sentence, we need to understand its parts, including the singular term. In understanding a singular term, we grasp what the singular term contributes to the expression of the thought. And that is its sense. Now if we combine contexts (a) and (b), we can say: a singular term contributes to the expression of a thought by providing the criteria for the identification of the object that the thought is about.

If to grasp a thought means to understand the sentence that expresses it, let us see what it could mean to understand a (simple) sentence, e.g.,

(14) The evening star is a sunlit celestial body.

Does understanding (14) mean knowing its *truth condition*? (14) is true if the *object* which we refer to by “the evening star”, i.e., the planet Venus has the property of being a sunlit celestial body. It is the same truth condition that the sentence:

(15) The morning star is a sunlit celestial body

has, since the *object* which we refer to by “the morning star” is the *same* as the one which we refer to by “the evening star”. Frege, however, insists: (14) and (15) express *different* thoughts because it is possible for someone who understands both (14) and (15) to reckon one of the sentences true and the other one false. What the thoughts expressed by (14) and (15) differ in are the different criteria for object identification that they contain. It is possible and even quite probable that in understanding (14) and (15) and in grasping in their sense two *different* criteria for the identification of the objects which the thoughts expressed by (14) and (15) are about, we do not know that these criteria are satisfied by the same object. A person who could find himself in this situation would say, for example: I know that the star in the evening sky that is seen then and there is in fact not a star but a planet, though I have no idea whether the star in the morning sky that is seen then and there is a planet too. Whereas the *truth-value* of a sentence depends on the *references* of the singular term and the predicate that occur in that sentence (and we describe that dependence by indicating the *truth conditions* of that sentence) the grasping of the thought that a sentence expresses involves something more than knowing the truth conditions because it is precisely the modes of identification or presentation of the respective objects and concepts that are constitutive for the thought. While the ‘truth’ of “*Fa*” depends on whether the *object a*—no matter how we refer to it—has the property of being *F*, the ‘thought’ that “*Fa*” expresses is constituted by the occasion that the object *identifiable as a*—whichever it is—has the property of being *F*.

We can best elucidate Frege's opinions on the references of sub-sentential expressions from the point of view of the truth of the whole sentence. *The references of the singular term and the predicate are what the truth of a sentence depends on.* In ordinary speech these are the objects which we designate by the singular term and the principles of classification that the predicate stands for. In a complex sentence, however, which contains a subordinate clause in such a way that the truth of the whole complex sentence depends on the *thought* but not on the truth-value of the clause, the *senses* and not the references of the singular term and the predicate of the clause would be what the truth of the whole complex sentence would depend on. It is in this manner that those senses would play the role of the 'references' of the singular term and the predicate in the sentence. Let us take an example: if we symbolize the words "x believes that ..." by " B_x : ..." we could form the following complex sentence:

(16) B_x : the evening star is a sunlit celestial body.

In (16) we cannot substitute "the evening star" by "the morning star" *salva veritate*, because that would change the thought expressed by the subordinate clause, which could change the truth-value of (16). If we assume that "the evening star" has the same sense as the expression "the star in the evening sky that is seen then and then, there and there" we could now put this expression in the place of "the evening star" in (16) *salva veritate*. Therefore, the truth-value of (16) depends on the sense and not on the reference of "the evening star". It is the mode of identification that we grasp when we understand "the evening star" that is constitutive for the truth-value of (16). That is why this mode of identification or presentation which ordinarily constitutes the sense of "the evening star", as in (14), is in (16) the reference of "the evening star".

Is there a place here for some intensional object or individual concept? Can we say that while in (14) by "the evening star" we refer to a celestial body, in (16) by this expression we refer to an intensional object? Is it of an intensional object that we say in (16) that someone believes that it is a sunlit celestial body? If this were so, then the person in question could express in direct speech the thought we ascribe to him/her to believe in by saying: "The mode of presentation of 'the evening star' is a sunlit celestial body" or "The sense of 'the evening star' is a sunlit celestial body". All that seems quite unconvincing since by it we would accept that it is possible for an abstract object to have a property, which, it appears, we can ascribe in a manner that makes sense only to objects in space and time.

Frege accounts for belief sentences of the sort of (16) as follows: in them persons and thoughts are placed in relation. That is why in (16) the thought that the evening star is a sunlit celestial body is not *expressed* but *designated* (cf. Frege 1904/1980, 165). *Mutatis mutandis*, we could say of our examples of intra-fictional sentences: the thoughts that are *expressed* in (11) and (12) are *designated* in (11**) and (12**), but there they are only part of the thoughts that (11**) and (12**) express themselves. Frege, as a footnote of the paper draft "Logic" suggests (cf., n. 4), would have interpreted the conveyance of (parts of) the content of a fictional work in terms of thoughts and indirect contexts. Sentences that we use to convey such contents

state relations between fictional works and thoughts. Therefore, if we are to explain 'intra-fictional' speaking in a Fregean manner, we will not need, as it seems, to assume that fictional characters are kind of intensional objects.

Let us now consider ontological sentences of type (iii) as well as a few similar ones. Let us compare the true statements:

(17) Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character

and

(18) Sherlock Holmes is not an historical person.

(17) and (18) do not allow the move of adding the narrative operator. We cannot say: " N_2 : Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character" or " N_2 : Sherlock Holmes is not an historical person" simply because those things are not said in Conan Doyle's novels. If we use a distinction of Wittgenstein's, we can say: that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character is not *said* but is *shown* in Conan Doyle's novels. Whoever understands the way Conan Doyle speaks in his novels and by this understands also that "Sherlock Holmes", as used in them, only behaves *as if* it names a certain person, already knows that (17) is true in some sense. Since in (17), however, the name "Sherlock Holmes" is 'used' and not 'mentioned', (17) is not entirely correct from a semantic point of view because the 'use' of the name presupposes that it has a reference, which means that an object (the name's referent) exists in a certain sense, while in another sense this very same object does not exist (namely, in the real spatio-temporal world). That is why (17) can be re-formulated meta-linguistically:

(17*) "Sherlock Holmes" is a fictional proper name.

Frege (1906a/1979, 191) makes a similar move when he says that the correct expression of the thought expressed in (13) is:

(13*) "Odysseus" designates nothing.⁸

(13*) is also the way in which Frege paraphrases sentences such as (18). What matters in this case is that in this way speaking of fictional objects is reduced to speaking of fictional names and fictional works.⁹

The hardest to explain are trans-fictional sentences. With them the move of adding the narrative operator is not possible either. We cannot say, e.g., instead of (1): "It says in Conan Doyle's novels that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional detective who is more famous than any real detective, living or dead", because (1) says things that are not part of the content of the relevant fictional work but, as it seems, facts from the real world.

Thinking that he defends a Fregean theory of meaning, Church (1956, 8) declares that the sentence "Schliemann sought Troy" does not assert a relation between Schliemann and Troy (since at the time Troy was considered to be just a fictional

⁸Cf. also the metalinguistic way in which Frege (1892a/1984, 168) says that Kepler did (not) exist.

⁹Künne (151 ff.) suggests replacing the metalinguistic " $\neg\exists x$ ('Odysseus' designates x)", where "Odysseus" is mentioned, by the narrative operator and rendering the thought as: " $\neg\exists x$ (N_1 : Odysseus = x)", where "Odysseus" is used.

city) but rather a relation between Schliemann and the concept of Troy.¹⁰ However, we cannot really impute to Schliemann that he was seeking a concept (a fictional object). At the very least, if he had decided to “seek” a concept he would hardly seek it in space and time. Frege would have said that the moment he started looking for Troy (or its remains) Schliemann left fiction and entered the realm of science. By that, however, he had already presupposed that the proper name “Troy” had a reference, although he himself did not know its precise location.

But what was Homer doing when he was composing the *Iliad*? Was he only behaving *as if* he was making assertions, or, on the contrary, believed that he was describing ‘historical’ persons and events (depicted, of course, from the perspective of the then natural mythological dimensions of the world)? Since this question would lead us away from the topic at hand, let us instead ask—as the intentions of, e.g., Conan Doyle seem far more clear to the contemporary reader—whether it would make sense for anyone to start looking for Sherlock Holmes (or traces of him) in the real world? From the point of view of Frege’s conception of fictional discourse that would be completely meaningless and an indication of the fact that this person does not understand the language game Conan Doyle plays in his novels. But Lewis (1978, 39) points out that it is still *possible*, though very unlikely, on the one hand, that Conan Doyle wrote his Sherlock Holmes stories as pure fiction and nevertheless, on the other hand, that, by coincidence and without Conan Doyle knowing, there existed in our world a person to whom all the things described in those stories happened and who was even called “Sherlock Holmes”.

A similar possibility is discussed by Ryle and Moore in connection to Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers* by supposing the existence of a real Mr. Pickwick, of whom Dickens knew nothing. While Ryle (1933, 39) is of the opinion that in this case the sentences of *The Pickwick Papers* would be true of the real Mr. Pickwick (which implies that the name “Mr Pickwick”, as it is used in the novel, would refer to the real person), Moore (1933, 69) objects that if Dickens’s intention was not to tell the story of the real Mr. Pickwick, then neither the sentences of the novel, as *used* by Dickens, could be about the real Mr. Pickwick, nor the name that occurs in them could refer to him. Frege’s position is close to Moore’s. The sentences of a novel in so far as only quasi-assertions are made by them could not be about a real person, and hence the names they contain only behave as if they designate someone. That does not, however, preclude the *use* of the same sentences outside fiction to make assertions about a certain person. According to Frege’s semantics, someone could leave the realm of fiction and start looking for, say, Sherlock Holmes (more precisely: could try to check whether the name “Sherlock Holmes” is empty) if for some reason he finds, e.g., researching whether Conan Doyle used a prototype etc. interesting. And, conversely, someone could leave the realm of science and let a historical treatise be enacted by actors on stage. The important thing is not to con-

¹⁰Church (1951, 111) calls this type of concepts “individual concepts”, giving the following examples: “I am thinking of Pegasus”, “Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth” and “Barbara Villiers was less chaste than Diana”. These sentences contain the singular terms “Pegasus”, “the fountain of youth” and “Diana”, that, according to him, designate individual concepts.

fuse these two realms and to remember that in science we are guided by questions of truth, which is irrelevant to fiction.¹¹

What happens, however, with sentences (1) and (2)? In their criticism of Parsons (1982), Gabriel (1987/1993, 369–374) and Kühne (1995, 156–160) draw attention to the fact that the predicate “famous” is an epistemic one. An object in itself does not have the property of being famous, it is famous only with regard to other objects that *know* it. Can we replace “famous” in (1) and (2) with a predicate that does not include in its content a relation to the intentional acts of other objects? Can we say, e.g.: “Sherlock Holmes (is a fictional detective who) solved more complicated crimes than any other real detective (living or deceased)”? This statement sounds strange, because we know that the fictional character Sherlock Holmes could not possibly solve any real crime. The famousness of a person can be interpreted, as it seems, as a famousness of his/her name. That is why Gabriel (1987/1993, 373) proposes that we paraphrase (1) and (2) thus:

- (1*) “Sherlock Holmes” is a fictional detective-name, which is more famous than the name of any real detective, living or dead.
- (2*) A certain fictional detective-name is more famous than the name of any real detective.

The way in which Frege specifies ontological sentences of type (iii) suggests that probably he would have considered (1*) and (2*) as a more precise expression of the thoughts of (1) and (2). In any case, it appears that the sentences used to make true assertions about fictional objects can be reduced to sentences about fictional names and works of fiction.

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¹¹The fact that Frege was a contemporary to Schliemann's discovery is worth noting. We can suppose that the examples with the name “Odysseus” or the sentence “Priam's palace was wooden” in the *Begriffsschrift* (§ 2) were topical for him and his readers.

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