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Reference in Fiction

Stacie Friend
Birkbeck, University of London

Abstract
Most discussions of proper names in fiction concern the names of fictional characters, such as 'Clarissa Dalloway' or 'Lilliput.' Less attention has been paid to referring names in fiction, such as 'Napoleon' (in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*) or 'London' (in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). This is because many philosophers simply assume that such names are unproblematic; they refer in the usual way to their ordinary referents. The alternative position, dubbed *Exceptionalism* by Manuel García-Carpintero, maintains that referring names make a distinctive semantic contribution in fiction. In this paper I offer a positive argument for Non-Exceptionalism, relying on the claim that works of both fiction and non-fiction can express the same singular propositions. I go on to defend my account against García-Carpintero's objections.

Keywords
Reference, fiction, proper names, fictional discourse, singular thought

1 Introduction

Philosophers of language and of fiction have focused substantial energy on the question of how to understand the names of fictional characters, such as 'Clarissa Dalloway' or 'Lilliput.' Traditionally, such names were considered paradigm instances of empty (non-referring) singular terms, and played an important role in motivating Frege's (1948) introduction of sense (*Sinn*) as well as Russell's (1905) descriptivist account of ordinary proper names. Correlatively, empty names have been construed as a serious challenge to the theory of *direct reference*, or *referentialism*, according to which the semantic contribution of a name to the proposition expressed by an utterance is just its referent. At the same time, a number of philosophers have argued that these names are not in fact empty; instead, they refer (in

one way or another) to real fictional entities.[1]

Far less attention has been paid to referring names in fiction, such as 'Napoleon' (in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*) or 'London' (in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). The working assumption within analytic philosophy—though not in other disciplines—is that such names pose no special problems. Whatever one's theory about how names secure their reference, or about their semantic contribution, the standard view is that the same is true of referring names within the fictional context.

Recently, though, several arguments have put pressure on this standard view. The upshot of these arguments is *Exceptionalism:* the claim that referring names make a distinctive semantic contribution within fiction (García-Carpintero, this volume). The nature of this contribution turns on other theoretical commitments. Exceptionalists who advocate fictional realism deny that names such as 'Napoleon' or 'London' take their ordinary referents in fiction; instead, they refer to fictional entities that are *surrogates* of the real individuals (Parsons 1980; Voltolini 2013; Motoarca 2014). Exceptionalists like García-Carpintero, who defend referentialism about names in ordinary assertive contexts, maintain instead that they function descriptively within fiction. I focus primarily on the latter version of Exceptionalism in this paper.

It is important to appreciate how strong the Exceptionalist conclusion is. If Exceptionalism is right, then authors of fiction who use referring names can *never* invite readers to entertain singular thoughts about real individuals, even if they intend readers to engage in imaginings about those real individuals and even if they meet all criteria of reference. The Non-Exceptionalist position, by contrast, need not hold that authors of fiction who use such names *always* invite readers to entertain such thoughts (though this is the default in the cases I consider). If referring names can be used in other contexts in other ways, then the same applies to fictional discourse.

In what follows I defend Non-Exceptionalism. I begin by outlining the conditions of reference to show that authors of fiction can satisfy them as well as authors of nonfiction (§1). I then propose that

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[1] There are a wide range of realist positions. See Kroon and Voltolini 2018 for an overview. More recent versions are proposed by Bourne and Bourne (2016) and Terrone (2017).

the role of referring names in nonfiction is to invite readers to entertain singular thoughts about their referents (§2). In §3 I argue that we have good reasons to say the same about fiction, resulting in a unified account of names across contexts. I go on to consider Exceptionalist reasons for denying this unified account and argue that they are inadequate (§§4–5). Finally, I criticize Exceptionalism (§6).

2 Conditions of reference

A radical form of Exceptionalism holds that fiction is by definition non-referring. I will not consider this view here; most philosophers reject semantic accounts of fiction in any case. However, as a preliminary to defending Non-Exceptionalism, it is important to establish that the mechanisms of reference are exactly the same in fiction and nonfiction.

I begin with nonfiction. The following sentence is from Alison Weir's history *The Princes in the Tower,* in which she argues that Richard III ordered the murder of his nephews, Edward V and Richard, Duke of York.

(1) "Undoubtedly Richard had a charismatic charm that he could exert when he wished to; there are many still in thrall to it today." (Weir 2011: 129)

In this sentence the name 'Richard' designates Richard III, brother to Edward IV and last of the Plantagenet kings of England. How is reference determined? In virtue of what does Weir designate one particular individual using the name 'Richard'?

Glossing over numerous subtleties, there are three competing answers to this question. According to the first, the name refers to Richard III because Richard III uniquely satisfies descriptions Weir associates with the name. On this descriptivist view, the reference of a name is secured by *fit*. Borrowing a common metaphor, we may say that Weir's use of 'Richard' is linked to a *dossier* or *mental file* that contains information (veridical or not) about Richard.[2] We can construe mental files as ways of organizing relatively stable information about an individual in memory. They are associated with *notions:*

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[2] *Dossier* is Evans's (1973) term, borrowed from Grice (1969).

mental representations of individuals, which function in cognition much like names (Crimmins and Perry 1989).[3] By the time Weir wrote *The Princes in the Tower*, she would have had a very rich file on Richard. The descriptivist position is that Weir refers in her history to Richard III because Richard uniquely satisfies certain descriptions Weir associates with her notion of him.

Importantly, the descriptions that must be satisfied according to this view are those in Weir's mental file—her beliefs about Richard—not those in the work itself. *The Princes in the Tower* surely represents Weir's beliefs. But even if Weir's portrayal of Richard were a tissue of lies, it would be a tissue of lies *about Richard*. According to descriptivists, what secures reference is the fact that Richard uniquely fits the content of descriptions in Weir's mental file, regardless of how she describes him to others.

In light of arguments by Donnellan (1970) and Kripke (1980), many philosophers reject descriptivism about reference-fixing. They take the use of a name to refer to an individual not because the individual satisfies certain descriptions, but because the use is linked in one way or another back to that individual. The links relevant to reference are characterized in two different ways in the literature. According to the first, uses of a name are linked together by *co-referential intentions* (Korta and Perry 2011).[4] Weir refers to Richard III insofar as she intends to use the name 'Richard' in the same way as those from whom she learned the name, who intended to use it the same way as those from whom they learned the name, and so on back to Richard's "baptism" (Kripke 1980). The co-referential intention may be manifested simply by deferring to others' uses of the same name talking about the same individual as they do (Sainsbury 2015). The basic idea is not limited to a single chain of deferring uses, or even to uses of the same name. For instance, Richard is also called 'Gloucester' because he was the Duke of Gloucester. The practices

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[3] Most philosophers identify notions with mental files. I prefer to treat notions as distinct representations, linked to mental files but also deployed in other representations. For discussion see Recanati 2012: 38–41.

[4] Korta and Perry (2011) prefer the broader concept of *conditional co-reference,* or *coco-reference*, where the intention is to refer to the same person as others do on the condition that there is such a person.

of using the names 'Richard' and 'Gloucester' are each part of a larger network of linguistic references, linked together by intentions to refer to the same individual, the *origin* of the network (Perry 2012). Because the network is sustained by intentions to refer using names and other linguistic devices, I call this a *name-centric* condition of reference (Friend 2014).

Gareth Evans (1973) famously criticized name-centric accounts, arguing that co-referential intentions could not explain the possibility of reference shift. For example, although the name 'Madagascar' was (we are told) originally used to refer to a part of the African mainland, Marco Polo mistakenly used it for the island off the coast. The name came to refer to the island, even though Polo presumably used it with the intention to refer to the same thing as his native guide. According to Evans, the shift occurred because the information associated with the name 'Madagascar' in the network came to be overwhelmingly derived from the island rather than the mainland.[5] Evans concluded that we should not take the referent of a name to be the origin of a co-referential network, but instead the *dominant source of information* associated with the name: roughly, the source of most of the most important information in people's mental files (Dickie 2011, 2015). I call this an *info-centric* condition of reference.

Philosophical disputes over the appropriate conditions of reference focus on cases, such as Evans's Madagascar example, where the name-centric and info-centric conditions deliver different verdicts. I suggest that conflicts between the conditions can make it impossible to determine reference. For example, if most of the information in Marco Polo's mental file comes from the island, then the island is plausibly the referent of his notion; and it is this referent, the one he "has in mind," about which he intends to speak. At the same time, however, he uses the name 'Madagascar' with the intention of exploiting the same convention as his native guide, to refer to the same place. He cannot fulfill both these intentions, generating "confusion" (Lawlor 2007). As a result, reference is simply indeterminate.

In most cases, however, distinguishing between the name-centric and info-centric conditions has no practical importance. There is a

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[5] There are other interpretations of the Madagascar example (see e.g. Devitt 1981), but I use this to illustrate the info-centric view.

single communication network that sustains uses of names to co-refer and transmits information about the referent, so that the origin and the dominant source of information are one and the same. Because this kind of network need not be restricted to names, but may involve other linguistic as well as non-linguistic representations, I will call it a *representation-network*.[6] My view is that representation-networks secure reference. However, as we have seen, Weir meets all three reference conditions, including the descriptivist one.

There is no reason to deny that authors of fiction can meet precisely the same conditions.[7] Take Orwell's use of the name 'London' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* Given his acquaintance with London—he had lived there for a number of years by the time he wrote the novel—the information in his mental file certainly derives from the city. In addition, Orwell intends to use the name 'London' to co-refer with others engaged in the practice of talking about the same place. For example, he writes that before the Fifties, "Airstrip One, for instance, had not been so called in those days: it had been called England or Britain, though London, [Winston] felt fairly certain, had always been called London" (Orwell 1962: 30). Since Orwell knew London well, it is also likely that the city uniquely satisfies the descriptions Orwell associates with the name—not the descriptions *in the novel*, of course, but the ones in his mental file.

Consider now Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard in *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third.* The playwright uses names familiar to his audience, including 'Richard' and 'Gloucester.' By doing so he manifests his intention to co-refer with others engaged in the practice of talking about Richard, thereby meeting the name-centric condition. Shakespeare relied primarily on two sources for the history plays: Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1548) and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587), both of which drew their information about Richard from Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* (Norwich 2009). Shakespeare therefore relies on information that ultimately derives from Richard, transmitted from Richard's contemporaries to More and through Hall and Holinshed to Shakespeare. He

[6] The term is Everett's (2013: 90).

[7] See Mole 2009 for further arguments in favour of reference in fiction.

therefore meets the info-centric condition on reference as well. In short, there is nothing barring authors of fiction from satisfying the same conditions of reference as authors of nonfiction.

3 The role of reference in nonfiction

If authors of fiction can meet the same reference criteria, there is no obstacle to a unified account of the contribution of names in fiction and nonfiction. In this section I consider the role of referring names within nonfiction. In §4 I argue that these names play exactly the same role in fiction. In making this argument I assume referentialism. I adopt this theory not only because I think that a version of the theory is correct, but also because Exceptionalists like García-Carpintero assume that names in nonfiction function referentially.

Motivated by the anti-descriptivist arguments of Donnellan and Kripke, referentialists hold that names contribute only their bearers to the "proposition expressed" by utterances containing them.[8] The proposition expressed reflects the *subject matter* of a thought or utterance: ordinarily, these are the features of the world in virtue of which the statement counts as true or false (Perry 2012). For example, suppose that I make the following claim about the historical facts:

(2) "Richard had his nephews murdered."

The subject matter of this statement is Richard III and his properties. Therefore we can specify the content of (2) using a *singular proposition*, a proposition containing Richard as a constituent. Following the usual format, I will represent this proposition as an ordered pair of an object and a property, where the boldface indicates that Richard himself is a constituent of the proposition:

(R) <**Richard III**, having-had-his-nephews-murdered>[9]

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[8] Referentialism, which concerns only the semantic contribution of an expression to truth conditions and not the way reference is fixed, should be distinguished from Millianism, according to which names have no content or function other than as tags for objects (Martí 1995). I defend the former but not the latter.

[9] I assume for simplicity's sake that having had one's nephews murdered is a property, because nothing here turns on the analysis of the predicate.

I take propositions to be a tool used by philosophers to classify utterances and thoughts according to their truth conditions (Perry 2012). For any utterance or thought, we can specify a variety of different truth conditions, depending on what we take for granted. (R) indicates the truth conditions *given* facts about reference: that the name 'Richard' refers to Richard III. For this reason, I will follow Perry in calling it a *referential content*. To say that the individual Richard is a "constituent of the proposition" is just to say that a thought or utterance whose content can be specified with (R) will be true in virtue of facts *about Richard*, regardless of how anyone thinks of him.

If we did not take the facts about reference for granted—for instance, if someone heard me utter (2) without knowing about whom I was speaking—we could capture what is understood with a different proposition, one containing a reflexive reference condition (in italics) rather than an individual as a constituent:

(R′) <*the referent of 'Richard' in (2),* having-had-his-nephews-murdered>

In other words, (2) is true so long as the individual to which my token of 'Richard' in the very same utterance refers had his nephews murdered. (R′) specifies the *reflexive content* of (2), rather than the referential content (Perry 2012). It should be clear that both (R) and (R′) provide truth conditions for (2), and indeed that (R) is just (R′) with the information about reference inserted. It should be equally clear that (R), rather than (R′), reflects the subject matter of my utterance: I am talking about *Richard III*, not about the mechanisms of reference.[10]

Suppose that the point of my uttering (2) is to make an assertion that will cause my historically-uninformed interlocutor Louise to form a belief, and that I am successful.[11] The content of Louise's belief can also be specified by (R). I assume for the sake of simplicity the representationalist view that a belief of this sort exhibits a syntactic structure similar to the sentence that expresses it.[12] So we can

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[10] This is not always the case. For instance, if I introduce myself by saying "I am Stacie," I likely communicate the reflexive content.

[11] I here skirt issues concerning whether assertion should be defined this way.

[12] This is a description of the mental at a certain level of abstraction; I claim

say that Louise's belief has at least these two components: a notion of Richard and a mental representation of the (no doubt complex!) property of having had one's nephews murdered. I'll use the term *idea* for a mental representation of a property or relation (Crimmins and Perry 1989). Then we can represent the belief this way (using double brackets to indicate representation of the kind of thought):

<< *Richard-notion*, *idea-of-having-had-one's-nephews-murdered* >>

I will say more about mental representations of this kind shortly. First let us turn to the case of nonfiction.

As we have seen, in *The Princes in the Tower* Weir argues that Richard III ordered the murder of his nephews. In so doing, she asks readers to form a belief like Louise's, whose content can also be specified by (R). Most readers will possess a notion of Richard prior to opening the book, but if they do not they will form one in response to reading. Weir's book weaves a narrative that invites us to represent Richard as having certain properties, including culpability in the murder of his nephews. Indeed readers are not only supposed to represent Richard as guilty, but also to believe that he was, *exporting* this information into their mental files on Richard (Gendler 2000). The content readers are invited to believe is (R), or (more accurately) can be specified by (R).[13] Some readers will not agree with Weir's conclusions, for instance committed members of the Richard III Society who are unalterably convinced that Richard was falsely accused. Such readers disbelieve (R).

To form any attitude whose content can be specified by (R) requires having a singular thought, sometimes also called a *de re* thought, about Richard.[14] Weir's history invites readers to believe, *of Richard*, that he had his nephews murdered. Singularity is preserved so long as the Richard-notion included in our mental representations is not associated with a descriptive "mode of presentation": that is, if we do

only that it is useful to classify thinkers as having beliefs of this structure.

[13] The qualification allows for multiple ways of specifying the belief content. In what follows the qualification should be understood.

[14] Walton (1990) and Jeshion (2010) use this terminology. However, in my view singular thoughts need not have an object, in which case they cannot be *de re* (Crane 2013: 153).

not think of Richard *merely* as the individual satisfying certain condi-
tions, but in a more direct sense. The usual way of cashing out this
sense is by appeal to the role of mental files in cognition, where these
files constitute our cognitive perspective on the individual. When I
think or talk about Richard, I mobilize the file associated with my
Richard-notion, using it to recognize further references, updating
the file as I learn more, and so on. In this way the structure of no-
tions and mental files enables me to bind together and keep track of
information about individuals as well as to identify and re-identify
them in thought (Jeshion 2010). Because the reference of a notion
and the associated mental file is determined by representation-net-
works rather than by satisfaction of descriptive content, notions can
be interpreted as non-descriptive modes of presentation (Recanati
2012). On this picture, thinking of individuals by deploying notions
constitutes singular thought about those individuals. So, Weir's his-
tory invites us to engage in singular thoughts about Richard.

4 A unified account

I claim that we can offer exactly the same account of referring names
in fiction.[15] A unified account is not merely methodologically attrac-
tive. It also provides the most plausible explanation of the systematic
semantic contribution of proper names to fictional content.

There are good reasons to think that Shakespeare's *Richard the
Third* invites us to entertain exactly the same singular thought,
whose content can be specified with (R), as Weir's history. First,
we have seen that Shakespeare meets the conditions of reference and
would have expected his audience to recognize this. Second, the play
clearly represents Richard as having had his nephews murdered. In
Act IV, Scene ii Richard tells Buckingham, "I wish the bastards dead;
/ And I would have it suddenly performed." He later instructs Tyrrel
to kill "those bastards in the Tower." After Tyrrel reports that the
deed is done, Richard expresses pleasure knowing that "The sons
of Edward sleep in Abraham's bosom." On any account of *fictional*

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[15] García-Carpintero locates an ancestor of the "Uniformity Argument" I give
in this section in Parsons 1980: 57–8. This argument is distinct from the argu-
ment I gave in favour of reference in fiction in Friend 2000.

content—what is "true in the fiction" or *storified* (Friend 2017)—it is part of the content that Richard had his nephews murdered.

I will assume, as does García-Carpintero, that works of fiction prescribe or invite *imagining* what is storified (Walton 1990).[16] (NB. I do not define fiction in these terms; see §5). There is substantial disagreement about what this means, and more generally about the nature of imagining. However, this disagreement does not concern me for the moment. On any plausible account, imagining that P requires, at a minimum, forming a mental representation with the content P. My claim is that *Richard the Third* invites us to form a mental representation with the content specified by (R). Or in different terms, the play invites us to imagine, *of Richard*, that he had his nephews murdered.

One might object that it is not possible to imagine that Richard was guilty if one also believes that he was guilty. The objection assumes that imagining and believing that P are incompatible. However, adopting this line requires denying that works of fiction invite us to imagine what is storified. After all, works of fiction storify many ordinary truths, for instance that St. Petersburg is in Russia (in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*) or that slavery existed in nineteenth-century America (in Morrison's *Beloved*).[17] Those who wish can reinterpret the "invitation to imagine that P" as the "invitation to believe that P is storified." This will have no effect on my argument, which is that (R) is the content that is storified. I return to the contrast between belief and imagining in §4.

A reason to interpret the play as inviting us to imagine (R), rather than a general proposition, is that this is not the only attitude invited by the play toward the same content. As an exemplification of the Elizabethan genre of "historicall poesie," *Richard the Third* functioned to popularize English history while entertaining the audience.[18] The play is thus standardly interpreted as inviting *belief* in Richard's

[16] Walton (2015) has more recently argued that this is a necessary but not sufficient condition.

[17] How many real-world truths are storified in a fiction is controversial, but most theorists accept that at least some are. I defend a more expansive view in Friend 2017.

[18] See Campbell 1947: 98 and Shapiro 2000: 199.

(real-world) guilt. The invitation to belief explains why revisionist historians object to the portrayal of Richard as responsible for the murder of the princes, but not to his portrayal as ordering the death of his brother George, Duke of Clarence, who was actually executed under Edward IV. It is well-known that Shakespeare altered events and compressed chronology for artistic reasons, and the death of Clarence exemplifies this poetic license. The death of the princes at Richard's order, by contrast, comes (by way of Hall and Holinshed) from More's account, itself a piece of Tudor propaganda.

The most plausible conclusion is that *Richard the Third* invites us both to believe and to imagine (R). To fulfill either prescription, we must form a mental representation associating our Richard-notions with the idea of having had his nephews murdered. Insofar as the notion is appropriately linked to Richard himself, the content of our mental representations can be specified by (R). Notice that this is so even if we are not aware of it; a reader who thinks that Richard is a merely fictional character will nonetheless be imagining *of Richard*, in virtue of the fact that her Richard-notion was formed in response to the play.

Now, suppose that revisionist historians are correct and Richard was the innocent victim of a Tudor disinformation campaign. Then Shakespeare's portrayal misrepresents Richard in more ways than he intended; but so too does Weir's. In that case, a fiction such as Josephine Tey's crime novel *The Daughter of Time*, which portrays Richard as innocent, will be (in this respect) more accurate than Weir's nonfiction history. Importantly, Tey's purpose in writing *The Daughter of Time* was precisely to change people's beliefs about Richard. And she was successful; her novel is largely responsible for inspiring the revisionist movement in the twentieth century that has sought to rescue Richard's reputation.

A natural description of the situation is that Tey's novel asks readers both to imagine and to believe precisely the opposite of Weir's history and Shakespeare's play. If the history and the play invite us to believe and/or imagine (R), the novel invites us to believe and imagine its negation.

Now suppose that I, like many others, read *The Daughter of Time*, and imagine that Richard was innocent. Moreover, convinced that Tey's portrayal is accurate, I export this representation of Richard

into the beliefs in my mental file on Richard. We would not deny that the content of my belief about Richard is a singular proposition, precisely the belief I would assert if I uttered "Richard did not murder his nephews." Yet the mechanism for forming this belief was imagining as Tey's novel prescribed: that is, imagining that Richard did not murder his nephews. It is at best *ad hoc* to maintain that I believe a singular proposition as a result of imagining an entirely different proposition. It is far more plausible that the proposition imagined is exactly the same proposition I come to believe. Since imagining that Richard is innocent is imagining as prescribed by *The Daughter of Time*, it follows that the novel storifies a singular proposition.

However, there is more to imagining as invited by a work than imagining a singular proposition. When a work prescribes imagining about an individual, we count as fulfilling the prescription only insofar as our imaginings are prompted in the right way by the work itself. If I have never heard of Shakespeare's play, but find myself daydreaming about Richard III having his nephews murdered, I might imagine (R); but that is not sufficient to fulfill the prescription generated by *Richard the Third*. My imagining (R) must be connected appropriately to the play.

The appropriate connection requires, among other things, deploying a Richard-notion that is embedded in the same representation network as Shakespeare's references to Richard—"downstream" of the play, so to speak. Call the relevant network the *Richard-Shakespeare network*, and any notion embedded in it an *R-S-notion*. Then we can specify not just the content to be imagined, but the way in which it should be imagined, as follows:

(R_n) <**Richard III**$_{(R\text{-}S\text{-}notion)}$, having-had-his-nephews-murdered>

The italicized subscript indicates the *type* of notion involved; different people have different Richard-notions appropriately related to Shakespeare's play, but we can classify them together. The notion is not part of the referential content, but instead specifies the *way* in which we are supposed to imagine that content. Fulfilling an invitation to imagine requires imagining the right content in the right way, by deploying appropriate notions.[19]

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[19] Because the relevant notion-type is determined by its place in a particular

The same is true for invitations generated by nonfiction. One of Weir's stated purposes in writing *The Princes in the Tower* is to "convince all those who read this book" (Weir 2011: xiv). For it to be the case that I am convinced *by Weir's history* of Richard's guilt, my new belief must bear an appropriate relation to reading her work; believing (R) independently does not qualify. It follows that in believing Weir I must deploy a Richard-notion that is embedded in the Richard-network, "downstream" of Weir's references. Nothing about this requirement threatens the singularity of my belief. I need not think of Richard in any descriptive way; I automatically deploy the appropriate notion when I believe (R) on the basis of reading Weir. The same is true of the fiction case: Imagining (R) while deploying a notion embedded in a certain network does not imply thinking of Richard descriptively.

It remains the case that different works can invite us to imagine, believe, doubt, deny (and so on) the same referential content. This can only be so if we accept a unified account of proper names. Given the clear advantages of a unified account, we should take it as the default position. The burden of proof lies with the Exceptionalist who treats the fiction and nonfiction cases differently. In the rest of the paper I describe and critique arguments for Exceptionalism.

5 A presupposition of exceptionalism

Exceptionalists agree that in *The Princes in the Tower*, Weir refers directly to Richard III and invites readers to entertain singular thoughts about him. However, they insist that in fiction referring names function in a special way, in parallel with the names of fictional characters. As mentioned in §1, this might mean either that the names designate a fictional entity or that they make a descriptive rather than singular contribution to storified content. In this section I consider a presupposition of all forms of Exceptionalism.

For any version of Exceptionalism to be plausible, there must be a contrast between fiction and nonfiction that underpins the differing contributions of referring names. The standard contrast relies on a distinction between the responses invited by works in each category:

representation-network, we can also specify the prescription with what Perry (2012) calls *network content*. See Friend 2011b for details.

Authors of nonfiction make assertions that invite belief, whereas works of fiction are characterized by *fictive utterances* that invite imagining.[20] I have argued elsewhere that such accounts fail to draw an adequate distinction between works of fiction and nonfiction (Friend 2008, 2011a, n.d.). The basic reason is simple: There are no features possessed by all and only works of fiction or all and only nonfiction. On the Genre Theory I propose, categorization as fiction or nonfiction relies on a set of non-essential criteria (Friend 2012). Such criteria could not sustain a sharp contrast in the semantic contribution of names.

More importantly for present purposes, even if the fictive utterance theory were correct it would not support Exceptionalism. First, all advocates of this approach allow that works of fiction can contain assertions, and most allow that the very same bit of text can be both a fictive utterance and an assertion. This may be because we can adopt different stances to the work depending on our interests (Lamarque 2014); or because the work or its parts may invite different responses from different audiences (Currie 1990) or may be governed by different norms (Davies 2007, 2012; García-Carpintero 2013); or because the kind of imagining invited by fiction simply does not exclude at least some assertion (Stock 2016, 2017). If this is right, Exceptionalists must treat at least some uses of referring names within a fiction as inviting singular thoughts about their referents: specifically, when those names contribute to assertions. And they must treat other uses of the names—or the same uses interpreted according to a different stance or different norms—as inviting other kinds of thoughts. This is hardly a unified account of names within works of fiction.

Let us set aside this concern and assume that we are faced with a fiction that uniformly invites imagining. Does the fact that we are meant to *imagine* rather than *believe* entail that the storified content cannot be singular in the same sense as nonfiction? García-Carpintero (this volume), citing some remarks by Fabian Dorsch (2016), suggests that "the imagination lacks constitutively singular, reality-involving contents." However, the contrast that interests Dorsch is with perception rather than belief. Belief cannot be constitutively

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[20] There are many versions of fictive utterance theory, differing in important ways. See the next paragraph for citations.

singular, since we can have general beliefs. But from this it does not follow that beliefs can *never* be singular, and the same should apply to imagining. Dorsch, for example, writes that reference may be secured in visual imagining or visual depictions with "an additional thought or intention of the subject or artist concerned" (qtd by García-Carpintero, this volume). If an author fulfills the conditions of reference (§1), the storified content can be singular.

In that case it is hard to see what justification there could be for the claim that the corresponding imagining cannot be singular. For example, some imagining involves perception, which (let us assume) is constitutively singular. Suppose that you are looking directly at a friend, and you imagine her wearing a funny hat. In this case you surely imagine, *of your friend*, that she is wearing a funny hat. The same plausibly applies even if the friend is not in front of you; when you call her to mind, you can engage in singular imaginings about her. The case contrasts sharply with imagining *that there is* someone wearing a funny hat; or that there is someone in front of you, who looks like your friend, wearing a funny hat; or imagining that a *surrogate* of your friend is wearing a funny hat. I conclude that there is nothing about the distinction between fiction and nonfiction that supports Exceptionalism.

6 Arguments for exceptionalism

However, Exceptionalists offer further reasons for their views, relying on an analogy to the descriptive modes of presentation involved in attitude ascriptions. For example, Lamarque and Olsen argue that descriptive content plays an essential role in fiction because of the "aspectival presentation of objects," which authorizes only certain ways of thinking about them:

> *The Canterbury Tales* is about a pilgrimage to Canterbury. Now Canterbury, since the 1960s, is a city with a university. But *The Canterbury Tales* is not, from the fictive point of view, about a pilgrimage to a city with a university (or even to a city which would later have a university). Chaucer's fictive presentation does not authorize this perspective on either the city or the pilgrimage. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 126; see also Lamarque 2014: 145–146)[21]

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[21] Lamarque later notes, however, that "the opacity is not *intrinsic* but reflects

García-Carpintero (2015: 157) agrees that the "modes of thinking" about fictional characters and real individuals "provided by the relevant fictions are essential to their contents: no proper appreciation can ignore them."

As a consequence, these Exceptionalists argue, descriptions determine the semantic contribution of the name to what we are invited to imagine. For example, Lamarque and Olsen write,

> The London of, say, *Tom Jones* is presented under different aspects from the London of, say, *Bleak House;* so the sense (or descriptive content) of the name will be different in the two novels, even though both the denotation and the inscription-type are the same. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 81–82)

By contrast with works of nonfiction, which will normally invite a transparent construal of their proper names or other referential devices, fictional narratives are typically *opaque:* to understand and appreciate them as fiction we must focus on the ways in which the content is presented, and not merely on the content itself (Lamarque 2014: 146). García-Carpintero (2015: 162) similarly argues that appreciation involves attention to the way real individuals are represented, concluding that the contribution of even a referring name to the literary text is constituted by purely descriptive features.

These theorists differ, though, over which descriptions are relevant to semantic content. For Lamarque and Olsen (1994: 132–33), the sense is given by the qualitative descriptions in the text that are especially salient, the ones we take to be most important to the portrayal of the individual. García-Carpintero instead offers a meta-linguistic analysis in terms of "reference-fixing presuppositions," that is, facts about how names designate their bearers. Whereas in ordinary assertion these presuppositions merely determine which individual is part of the singular proposition, García-Carpintero (2015: 157) contends that in fiction they become part of the content itself. For instance, he takes the descriptive content of the empty name 'Bloom' and the referring 'Dublin' in Joyce's *Ulysses* to be "*person named 'Bloom'/city named 'Dublin' in relation to tokens used in* Ulysses." According to either approach, the way in which the author

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a certain kind of interest taken in the narratives" (2014: 146). I set aside this qualification here because it plays no role in García-Carpintero's argument.

represents a referent—either via qualitative descriptions or the use of a particular name—is part of the storified content, rather than the individuals themselves.

Exceptionalists give several reasons in support of this contention. First, they point to failures of substitutivity in reports of storified content, so-called *paratextual* uses. Lamarque and Olsen (1994: 126) observe that one would not substitute 'the county capital of Kent with a university' for 'Canterbury' in reporting what is storified in Chaucer's tales (see also Lamarque 2014: 146). We can construct a parallel argument for García-Carpintero's approach: that one would not substitute 'Leningrad' for 'Saint Petersburg' in talking about Gogol's "The Nose." García-Carpintero (this volume) makes a related point in imagining a more unusual piece of fiction, *The Ferrante Affair*, within which there are two distinct characters, Elena Ferrante and Domenico Starnone, whose descriptions accord with what is known about two real authors with the same names. Now suppose that in reality 'Elena Ferrante' is a pseudonym of Domenico Starnone. Despite the fact that the names co-refer, someone reporting the content of *The Ferrante Affair* would not substitute 'Ferrante' for 'Starnone.'

These failures of substitution are meant to parallel Fregean arguments concerning attitude ascriptions. For example, it is widely recognized that "Aliya believes that Mark Twain is a great author" can be true while "Aliya believes that Samuel Clemens is a great author" is false, despite the names' co-referring. Descriptivists take such examples to undermine the claim that the semantic contribution of a proper name is (always) just its referent. Similarly, argues García-Carpintero, just because *The Ferrante Affair* prescribes imagining that "Starnone wrote *Denti*" does not mean that it prescribes imagining that "Ferrante wrote *Denti*."

A second motivation for Exceptionalism comes from "intermediate" cases, where it is unclear whether a fiction is or is not about a particular real individual (Motoarca 2014: 1038–42). *War and Peace* is indubitably about Napoleon Bonaparte (wherever one stands on the semantic contribution of the name). *Napoleon Dynamite* is equally indubitably *not* about Napoleon Bonaparte; the title character is an American teenager. I would say the same of the pig Napoleon in Orwell's *Animal Farm,* though here the allusion to the real emperor is

important. Yet there are works that present greater interpretive difficulties, so that it might just be unclear whether the name 'Napoleon' refers to Bonaparte. Motoarca maintains that the mere existence of such intermediate cases supports Exceptionalism, but I agree with García-Carpintero (this volume) that it does not. This is because reference may simply be indeterminate, as in the 'Madagascar' example mentioned in §1. That reference is sometimes indeterminate in fiction (or anywhere else) does not have any implications for how names function in clear cases.

Nonetheless, García-Carpintero (this volume) argues that intermediate cases are easier to explain for Exceptionalists. Suppose that we have a fiction that can be interpreted equally well as being *about Napoleon* or *not about Napoleon*. The Exceptionalist can treat a name as making a consistent contribution across all interpretations of a work, whether this be a descriptive condition or a fictional surrogate. The difference in interpretations, on this approach, is merely a difference in how much information about the real individual we are permitted to *import* into our imaginings or *export* from the story into our beliefs. By contrast, the Non-Exceptionalist must hold that the name makes different contributions in the two interpretations.

A third motivation for Exceptionalism is the denial that there is any important difference between the names of real individuals and the names of fictional characters within fiction. García-Carpintero (this volume) writes, "If 'Bezukhov' is a disguised description (or refers to an abstract representation …), *prima facie* we should say the same about 'Borodino' and 'Napoleon' in the relevant discourses." This is supposed to be by contrast with nonfiction as characterized by assertion. According to García-Carpintero, assertions that contain referring names express singular propositions, and those that contain empty names correspondingly express gappy propositions. This is because empty names in nonfiction assertions indicate a failure to convey information. In fiction, however, empty names function just as well as referring names to prompt imaginings. The Exceptionalist aims to preserve this uniformity of names *within* the fictional context by denying the uniformity of referring names *across* contexts.

García-Carpintero (this volume) offers one further argument in favor of descriptivist Exceptionalism, viz. that we do not have the same intuitions of rigidity concerning names in fiction as we do

about names in other contexts. Roughly: Whereas Napoleon could not but be Napoleon (and no one else could have been he), "Napoleon in *War and Peace*" need not have been "Napoleon in *War and Peace*" (and anyone else could have been he). This is because Napoleon would have existed whether or not Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace*, and there could have been a Napoleon character in the work even if Tolstoy had known nothing of the real individual but only coincidentally matched his description. Ultimately the underlying intuition is that "it doesn't matter who plays the Napoleon role [in the worlds of the fiction]; it only [matters] that the role is played in the way the fiction mandates."

7 Against exceptionalism

An unattractive consequence of the Exceptionalist approach is that the distinction between imagining about real individuals and imagining about fictional characters collapses. Lamarque and Olsen (1994: 131) hypothesize that "make-believe reflection on fictional characters (or states of affairs) is not cognitively different from make-believe reflection on real objects (or states of affairs) aspectually presented in works of fiction." For example, though Graham Greene refers directly to a real place, "the Brighton of *Brighton Rock* still in a sense remains a fictional city" (1994: 293). That is because readers are only permitted to think of Brighton under the mode of presentation, the descriptive sense, determined by the novel itself. Similarly, García-Carpintero's view is that we imagine about both real and invented individuals by thinking about them descriptively, as the bearers of certain names used in works of fiction.

However, it just looks false that reference makes no cognitive difference (see Kot'átko 2010). Suppose that I read *Brighton Rock*, which prescribes imagining that Pinkie Brown murders Fred Hale on Palace Pier. It is a natural continuation of my imagining to consider various ways in which Fred Hale might have escaped by hiding in different places in Brighton. This kind of supposition makes sense only if I am imagining about the same Brighton (and Fred), despite departing from the ways they are described in the text. Engaging in such "counter-fictional" imaginings is often essential to understanding a story (Friend 2011b). A similar point holds for the author's way of designating a referent. Perhaps Alena, having read "The Nose" earlier, forgets the

name Gogol used, thinking instead of the setting as Leningrad. It is still possible for Alena to imagine as invited by the story.

These examples highlight the central flaw in the descriptivist approach: the conflation of modes of presentation—the ways in which thinkers access an individual—and the *subject matter* of our imagining about that individual. I think of Brighton as a place of which I have fond memories strolling along the pier. If I imagine that Fred Hale is murdered in the same Brighton, I think about *Fred* and *Brighton*, not the ways in which they are designated in the text. It is true that to imagine as prescribed, I must recognize that the names are used by Greene in a certain way. It is also true that we can specify the prescription to imagine with a proposition that does not take these facts about reference for granted, as with (R′) above. Even so, the reference-fixing presuppositions are not plausibly part of the subject matter to be imagined. They reflect *how* we think of the referent (if any), not *what* we imagine about it.

I do not deny that works of fiction *also* generate invitations to imagine whose subject matter concerns the mechanisms of reference. For example, "The Nose" invites us to imagine that the city is named 'Saint Petersburg' rather than 'Leningrad,' since the narrator uses that name and the story is both written and set at a time when that was its name. As a consequence, readers are invited to imagine that the events occur in a city named 'Saint Petersburg.' If Alena forgets the name used in the story, she cannot satisfy these kinds of invitations. But it does not follow that when she imagines that Major Kovalev chases his nose through Saint Petersburg, the subject matter of her imagining is *the city named 'Petersburg' in "The Nose"* or any similar descriptive content.

Compare: Weir's history invites us to believe that Richard III was also called 'Gloucester.' So it invites us to believe that the man called 'Gloucester' had his nephews murdered. It does not follow that when we believe that Richard had his nephews murdered, the subject matter of our belief is *the man called 'Gloucester' in Weir's history*. In both cases, the referential content includes the real individuals as constituents; just as our belief is about Richard rather than his name, our imagining is about Saint Petersburg rather than its name.

García-Carpintero (this volume) denies that his argument collapses the cognitive difference between the cases. He proposes that

where a representation or surrogate is "vicarious" for a real individual, we are licensed to import and export information about that individual in a way that does not obtain for fictional characters. I do not think that differences in import and export are adequate to capturing the cognitive contrast, however. This is evident when we consider fictional characters who are based on or represent real individuals in a looser way than reference. For example, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is (among other things) a satire of specific people and institutions that would have been easily recognizable to his original audience. The Lilliputian Treasurer Flimnap is generally taken to represent or allude to Sir Robert Walpole, Swift's political enemy and frequent target. In imagining Flimnap, readers are supposed to import some knowledge of Walpole into their imaginings and to export some features of Flimnap to their beliefs. But that is not the same as imagining, *of Walpole*, that he is a six-inch Lilliputian.

Conversely, we may be invited to imagine a real individual to be so different from the reality that most import and export are blocked. For instance, in Norman Spinrod's 1972 novel *The Iron Dream*, Adolf Hitler moves to the U.S. in 1919 and becomes a science-fiction writer. Understanding this novel requires imagining, *of* (the real) Adolf Hitler, that he lived a very different life, although we are prevented from importing or exporting much information about him. We can, of course, import information from before 1919; but we can then just imagine a fiction in which Hitler—*that very person*—died as a baby, and no importation will be appropriate.

If this is right, then it is no virtue of Exceptionalism that it treats all such cases in the same way. Entertaining a singular proposition is just different from entertaining a general proposition, whether or not the attitude we take to the proposition is imagining. If we are dealing with a fiction that can be interpreted equally well as being *about Napoleon* and *not about Napoleon*, then the two interpretations storify different contents. This does not mean, however, that they have nothing in common; for one thing, their *reflexive contents* are the same (§2). But at the level of referential content we would find a stark difference. The consequence for intuitions about rigidity should be apparent: *given that* Tolstoy referred to Napoleon in *War and Peace*, no one else could *be* Napoleon in *War and Peace*. A fictional character could be *named* 'Napoleon,' or have various properties of Napoleon,

and therefore—but in a very different sense—count as "Napoleon-in-*War-and-Peace*"; but that would not make the character *Napoleon*.

The upshot of these considerations is *not* disunity in the treatment of names within fiction. That conclusion would follow only if the names of fictional characters function descriptively, but that is something I deny. When I imagine that Bezukhov wants to assassinate Napoleon, I do not merely imagine that someone or other who fits certain descriptions wants to assassinate Napoleon, nor need I engage in any imaginings about a name or its tokens. My imaginings seem rather to be directed at a particular individual. I claim that even with fictional characters, we are invited to engage in singular imaginings. Because I reject fictional realism I do not think that such names contribute referents to semantic content. Instead, utterances containing them, whether in fiction or nonfiction, express gappy propositions (as García-Carpintero says regarding nonfiction). In my view, lack of reference is no obstacle to authors' using names to invite singular thoughts understood on the model described above, that is, by deploying notions associated with mental files, even if those notions fail to refer. Accounting for the intentionality of thought in the empty case is certainly a challenge, but not one restricted to fiction.[22] So there is a uniform account for names across and within contexts, though only some names have referents.

Nor do considerations of substitutivity aid the descriptivist. Even if it were true that we would not substitute co-referring names in paratextual discourse, the explanation would have nothing to do with fictionality. Suppose that I believe the revisionist historians who argue that Richard III was not responsible for his nephews' murder. I still would not normally report what is storified in Weir's nonfiction history by saying, "In Weir's book, the king who did not murder the princes in the tower was charming when he wished to be." The misleading implication of such a report is that Weir describes Richard as innocent, much as the misleading implication in the other examples is that Chaucer describes Canterbury as the county capital of Kent with a university, that Gogol calls the city "Leningrad," or that 'Starnone' and 'Ferrante' are interchangeable within the world

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[22] Here I agree with, e.g., Jeshion (2010) and Crane (2013). However, those who reject this claim can reformulate the claims in terms of 'as-if singular thought.'

of the story. This shows that substitution within reports of storified content might be problematic insofar as these reports are treated as *de dicto* (that is, as indicating the actual wording in the text). Even if all reports of storified content were *de dicto*, however, this would have no implications for the content of the story itself, just as the singularity of beliefs is not threatened by views on which propositional attitude reports are *de dicto*.

Furthermore, reports of storified content need not be *de dicto*. Suppose that Alena reads Gogol's "The Nose" in 1982, at a time when her native city is named 'Leningrad.' In describing what happens in the story, it would be natural for her to use the Soviet name, particularly when highlighting events that have occurred in familiar locations. Similarly, when conversationalists recognize the real individuals depicted in a roman à clef, they may use the fictional name and the real name interchangeably. If I say, "In Joel Klein's *Primary Colors*, Bill Clinton has several affairs," I report the content accurately, despite failing to use the invented name 'Jack Stanton.' Even descriptions can figure in *de re* reports of storified content, if the context is appropriate. A tour guide in London might announce, on Baker Street, "Holmes and Watson lived on the road where you are standing now."

The Starnone/Ferrante case is designed to demonstrate more than the failure of substitution in reports of storified content, though; it is meant to show that the imaginings prescribed by *The Ferrante Affair* "about Starnone" do not have the same content as imaginings "about Ferrante." The significance of the example turns on how it is elaborated. García-Carpintero suggests two possibilities: either the author is a "playful postmodernist" or she is "ignorant of the facts." I will assume that in both scenarios, the author fulfills the conditions of reference outlined in §1. Otherwise (e.g., if the author merely intended to base two fictional characters on the real individuals), the case could not constitute a counterexample to Non-Exceptionalism.

Suppose, then, that the author intends to refer, but falsely believes that the names 'Elena Ferrante' and 'Domenico Starnone' designate two different, real people. She is in exactly the same position as the ancients who did not realize that the Morning Star and the Evening Star were the same object (Venus). If the author were writing nonfiction, presumably García-Carpintero would say just what we ordinarily say about the astronomically ignorant: that she unknowingly refers

to the same thing twice over, inviting readers to believe two sets of (at least partially incompatible) singular propositions with the same individual as a constituent. I see no reason to deny that this is also true in the fiction case. Regardless of the attitude, the invitation is to mobilize two notions associated with two names and two mental files, which happen to co-refer. If readers are as ignorant as the author, they will find this straightforward, though unbeknownst to them they are all the time imagining *of* the same individual. Readers aware of the error will have to do whatever we ordinarily do when we seek to understand the beliefs of someone who is confused about reference.

The more interesting case is one in which the author, far from being ignorant, is a playful postmodernist who expects readers to recognize the twice-over reference. Such a fiction, if successful, ought to strike readers as challenging and (perhaps) amusing. But it is challenging only insofar as it invites us to imagine, of the same real person, that he is two different characters. If the story merely invites us to imagine in one way about a 'person named Ferrante' and in another way about a 'person named Starnone,' then it is hard to see where the interest lies. This case seems to support Non-Exceptionalism rather than Exceptionalism.

Conclusion

I have argued that the reasons offered by García-Carpintero and others in favor of Exceptionalism are inadequate to undermine a unified account of the semantics of names, and moreover that Exceptionalism has implausible consequences. However, in closing it is worth noting that the argument as I have presented it relies on the assumption, shared by García-Carpintero, that the correct semantics of proper names in other contexts is referentialist. Someone convinced by the kinds of Fregean considerations marshalled by García-Carpintero for the fiction case could just as well argue that names in all contexts are descriptivist, thereby defending a more traditional form of Non-Exceptionalism. It is my view that this would be a mistake; fiction, no less than nonfiction, invites readers to entertain singular thoughts about the referents of names.[23]

Stacie Friend
Department of Philosophy
Birkbeck, University of London
London WC1E 7HX
s.friend@bbk.ac.uk

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