

Fictional Objects, Stories and Denoting Concepts

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Abstract

- Given an appropriate logical framework, noun phrases such as “every man,” “some man” or “the tallest spy,” can be taken to stand for properties of properties, which we may call *denoting concepts* (in the terminology of Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics*); in particular, the denoting concepts corresponding to definite descriptions may be called *definite denoting concepts*. Following a line first proposed by Nino Cocchiarella, I have defended the view that fictional objects, such as Pinocchio or Madame Bovary, are definite denoting concepts, somehow occurring in stories. Stories in turn are complex propositions somehow expressed by fictional works. In this talk I would like to clarify the main aspects and advantages of this approach and illustrate how it deals with some important data regarding the identity of ficta across different stories.

Propositions

- Sentences
- "Romeo loves Juliet"
- "Romeo ama Giulietta"
- Proposition
- *Lrg*

Stories

- Text: a sequence of sentences
- Story: the very complicated proposition S expressed by the text
- truth in a story: a proposition P entailed by story S
- $S \Rightarrow P$
- For example, in *Study in scarlet*, there is the sentence "I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail* bullet"
- and thus
- *Study in scarlet* \Rightarrow *Watson was wounded*
- although it is not literally said.
- * *a simple, cost-efficient and often handmade long arm commonly used in South Asia and parts of the Middle East in the past*

Denoting concepts

- Denoting concepts can be seen as meanings of noun phrases such as “every human,” “some cat,” “the tallest spy” and the like (Russell PoM, Cocchiarella 1982, 2007, Orilia 2010).
- We can represent such meanings as follows: [every H], [some A], [the TS], and similarly for other examples.
- Here H, W, TS, are the properties expressed by “human,” “American,” “tallest spy.”

Properties of properties

- 'dog' and 'mammal' are properties of objects, e.g., of Fido and Bobby
- [every dog] is a property of properties, e.g., of the property 'mammal'
- [every dog](mammal) \Leftrightarrow for every object x , if x is a dog then x is a mammal

Definite denoting concepts

- A denoting concept of the form [the P]
- the tallest spy is British
- [the TS](B) \Leftrightarrow
- (i) there exists exactly one individual with the property of *spy taller than any other spy* and (ii) this individual has the property *British*
- $\exists x(TS(x) \ \& \ \forall y(TS(y) \rightarrow x = y) \ \& \ B(x))$


(non-)referring denoting concepts

- It is important to record here that definite denoting concepts may, or may not, correspond to a certain entity, depending on whether or not their property component is exemplified by precisely one entity. If there is such an entity, we shall say that the denoting concept *denotes* (or *refers to*) it. Thus, for example, if there just one individual with the property TS, the denoting concept [the TS] denotes this individual, otherwise it does not denote anything.
- referring: [the president of Italy]
 - there is exactly one object *x* with the property *president of Italy*
 - *x* is referred by this denoting concept
- non-referring: [the winged horse]
 - No object has the property *winged horse*

Identity positions

- (1) the husband of Carla Bruni is the former president of France
 - there is just one object that had both the property *husband of Carla Bruni* and the property *former president of France*
- (1a) IS([the HCB], [the FPF]).

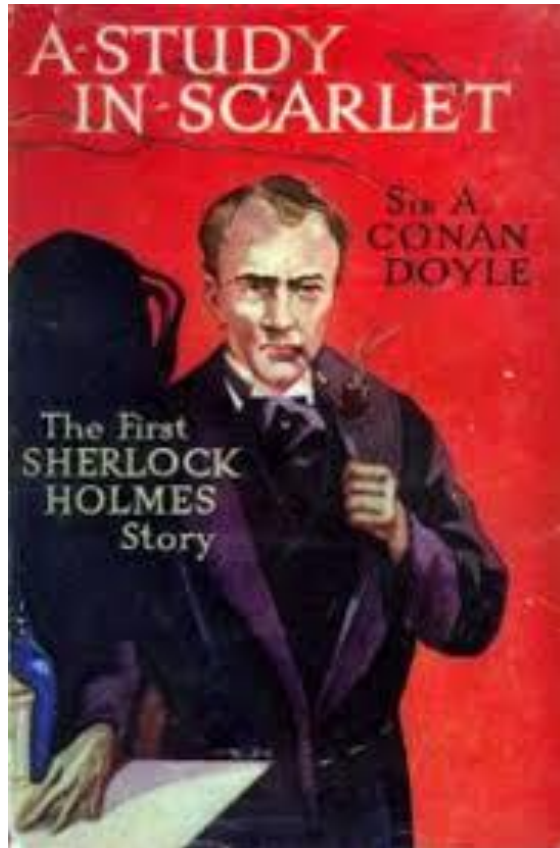
Proper names

- A proper name "N" stands for definite denoting concept [the N]
- N is a "nominal property": *baptized with "N" at a certain specific time t in a certain specific place p*
- "Sergio Mattarella"  [the SM]

denoting concepts occurring in stories

- The text of a story contains, implicitly or explicitly, singular terms (definite descriptions, proper names)
- The story expressed involves corresponding denoting concepts
- the text of *A study in scarlet* has the sentence "Sherlock Holmes rose and hit his pipe"
- the denoting concepts [the SH] and [the pipe belonging to SH] occur in *A study in scarlet*

Creation of a character (i)



- **A Study in Scarlet** is an 1887 detective novel by British writer Arthur Conan Doyle.
- The story marks the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson
- (da Wikipedia)

Creation of a character (ii)

- "**A Study in Scarlet** is an 1887 detective novel by British writer Arthur Conan Doyle. The story marks the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson" (da Wikipedia)
- The definite denoting concept [the F] "creatively" occurs in a story S
 - e.g., someone has written a novel using the singular term "the F" to introduce a new character)
 - [the F] is non-referring, i.e. F is not instantiated (at least not before the story is thought of)
 - S entails many propositions involving [the F] in the light of which one can extract a set of salient properties F1, ..., Fn such that
 - $S \Rightarrow IS([the\ F], [the\ F1\ \&\ \dots\ \&\ Fn])$
- Given all this, ...

Creation of a character (iii)

- [the F1 & ... & Fn] is a (mere) fictum, which we typically refer to
 - by singular terms used in novels, e.g. "Pinocchio" or "Madame Bovary"
 - or by singular terms involving a reference to a story, e.g. "the mad hatter of *Alice in Wonderland*"
- [the F1 & ... & Fn] is present₁ in S
- [the Clever & Detective & Londoner & SH & ...] is present₁ in *A study in scarlet*
- **Interpretation, which may involve literary criticism, determine which characters there are in a story, i.e., which salient features make up a character**
- **Different interpretations may yield different characters**

Ontological worries

- As so understood, ficta are abstract entities
- Not however a new category of abstract entities; they are properties (of properties)
- They allow us to respect the intuitions that
- (I1) "Pinocchio" and "Sherlock Holmes" aren't non-denoting like "Volcano, the 10th planet of the Solar system"
- (I2) " Sherlock Holmes does not exist" is true
- [the Clever & Detective & Londoner & SH & ...] is (i) denoted by the name "Sherlock Holmes" , (ii) non-existent in the sense that it is a merely abstract entity

Migration 1 (i)

- ***The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*** is a 1976 [Oscar](#)-nominated British-American [mystery film](#) directed by [Herbert Ross](#) and written by [Nicholas Meyer](#). It is based on Meyer's 1974 [novel of the same name](#) and stars [Nicol Williamson](#), [Robert Duvall](#), [Alan Arkin](#), and [Laurence Olivier](#).^[2]
- [Dr. John H. Watson](#) becomes convinced that his friend [Sherlock Holmes](#) is delusional—particularly in his belief that [Professor James Moriarty](#) is a criminal mastermind—as a result of his [addiction to cocaine](#). Moriarty visits Watson to complain about being harassed by Holmes. (da WP)



Migration 1 (ii)

- There is a mere fictum [the F1 & ... & Fn] present₁ in a certain story S
- The very same fictum [the F1 & ... & Fn] is also present₁ in a different story S'
- In typical cases, the author of S' knows the previous story S and wants to create another story with the same character
- [the Clever & Detective & Londoner & SH & ...] is present₁ in

A Study in Scarlet

and

The Seven Percent Solution

- It is in principle possible that the author of S' knows nothing about S and "re-creates" the same fictum

Migration 2 (i)

- ***Without a Clue*** is a 1988 British [comedy film](#) directed by [Thom Eberhardt](#) and starring [Michael Caine](#) and [Ben Kingsley](#). It is based on Sir [Arthur Conan Doyle](#)'s characters from the [Sherlock Holmes](#) stories but, in this version, the roles are reversed: [Dr. John Watson](#) is the brilliant detective, while "Sherlock Holmes" is an actor hired to pose as the detective so that Watson can protect his reputation as a physician. (da WP)



Migration 2 (i)

- An author may intend to import in a new story S2 a previous fictum [the F1 & ... & Fn] of a story S1, and shows this with appropriate clues, or may be simply uses a singular term referring to the previous fictum, such as " Sherlock Holmes "
- In this case, there is a denoting concept [the M], occurring in the story, that connects to [the F1 & ... & Fn] in a communication chain, but it need not be the case that [the F1 & ... & Fn] is present₁ in S2: it may be that

$S2 \Rightarrow [\text{the } F1 \text{ \& } \dots \text{ \& } Fn](\text{exist})$

- Let's say [the F1 & ... & Fn] is **present₂** in S2

Migration 2 (iii)

- *Without a Clue (WAC)*
- WAC \Rightarrow [the stupid & actor & Londoner & SH ...](exist)
- WAC \Rightarrow [the clever & detective & Londoner & SH ...](exist)
- [the Londoner & SH] occurs in WAC and connects to [the clever & detective & Londoner & SH & ...]
- [the clever & detective & Londoner & SH & ...] is **present₂** in WAC

Migration 3 (real characters) (i)

- ***The Seven-Per-Cent Solution ...***
- ... Watson enlists the aid of Sherlock's brother, [Mycroft](#), to trick Holmes into traveling to [Vienna](#), where he will be treated by [Sigmund Freud](#).
- During the course of his treatment, Holmes investigates a kidnapping case with international implications and Freud uncovers a dark personal secret suppressed in Holmes's [subconscious](#).



Migration 3 (real characters) (ii)

- The definite denoting concept [the F] "creatively" occurs in a story S
 - e.g., someone has written a novel using the singular term "the F" to introduce a new character)
 - "the F" is referring, i.e. F is uniquely instantiated by a real object
- Then, the F is both a real object and a character in a story (real fictum)
- We may say The F is **present₃** in the story
- For example, Freud, Vienna and London are present₃ in *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*
- Note that many assertions in the story about the real fictum may in fact be false. For example, in the *Divine Comedy* Dante visits Hell, but it is false that he in fact visited Hell

Fusion

- An example by Voltolini:
- (1) the Berget of *Recherche*₁ is not the Vington of *Recherche*₁;
- (2) the Berget of *Recherche*₁ is the Vinteuil of *Recherche*₂;
- (3) the Vington of *Recherche*₁ is the Vinteuil of *Recherche*₂.

[the \$] [the V] R 1
= "Vington"

"Berge"

[the R & V] R 2

"Vintail"

Details about fusion

- there is exactly one b which is Berget of Recherche1 and exactly one v , which is Vington of Recherche1 and $b \neq v$. Say $b = [\text{the } B]$ and $v = [\text{the } V]$
- Recherche1 DOES NOT entail $IS([\text{the } B], [\text{the } V])$
- there is exactly one b which is Berget of Recherche1 and exactly one v' , which is Vinteuil of Recherche2; say $b = [\text{the } B]$ and $v' = [\text{the } B \ \& \ V]$. And Recherche2 entails $IS([\text{the } B], [\text{the } B \ \& \ V])$
- Similarly, Recherche2 entails $IS([\text{the } V], [\text{the } B \ \& \ V])$
- Note that $[\text{the } V]$ and $[\text{the } B]$ are not characters of Recherche2. Only $[\text{the } B \ \& \ V]$. Nevertheless, $[\text{the } V]$ and $[\text{the } B]$ are denoting concepts occurring in Recherche2

Conclusion

- Thank you for your attention!