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Fiction and common ground

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6 The challenge of metafictional anaphora

This chapter is a rewritten version of ‘The Challenge of Metafictional Anaphora’ in *At the Intersection of Language, Logic, and Information* (itself a rewritten version of the paper ‘Metafictional anaphora: A comparison of different accounts’ in *Proceedings of the 2018 ESSLLI Student Session*). Parts of section 6.4.3 are adapted from ‘Revisiting the ‘wrong kind of object’ problem’ which is a co-authored paper with Prof. Dr. Edward N. Zalta in *Organon F*. The most substantial differences between this chapter and the volume contribution are: First, a removal of the introduction to the basics of the workspace account. Second, the addition of the suggestion to design more uniform fictive closure* and fictive closure** operations by combining them with a de re version of the workspace account (see especially 6.4.3). Third, the incorporation of insights from the co-authored paper with Prof. Dr. Edward N. Zalta ‘Revisiting the ‘wrong kind of object’ problem’, i.e., the specification of the desideratum posed by mixed discourse (see section 6.2.2) and details on how object theory may deal with the seeming reoccurrence of the problem of the wrong kind of object for explicit parafictional statements (see section 6.4.3).

6.1 Introduction

Up until this point in developing the workspace account (as a framework to model regular assertions, lies, fictional statements and parafictional discourse) I have assumed a simple ‘descriptivist’ analysis of parafictional updates (see section 4.6.1). Consider fictional statement (25) and parafictional statement (58):

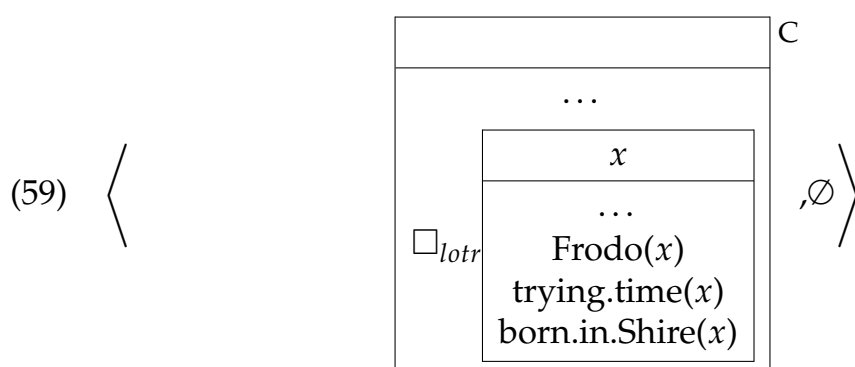
(25) Frodo had a very trying time that afternoon.

I would like to thank Edward Zalta for a very enjoyable and fruitful collaboration and would like to thank four anonymous ESSLLI Student Session reviewers for their valuable feedback.

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(58) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo was born in the Shire.

When engaging with a fictional statements such as (25), the workspace is (temporarily) updated with the content that there is an entity called 'Frodo' and that this entity had a trying time on some afternoon. At fictive closure, this entire workspace (including discourse referents and conditions) is copied into the common ground under a *The Lord of the Rings* fiction operator. Similarly, a parafictional statement such as (58) updates the common ground with the modalized information that in *The Lord of the Rings*, there is an entity named 'Frodo' who was born in the Shire. On the basic descriptivist version of the workspace account a common ground updated with (25) and (58) thus looks as follows:



The current chapter introduces a new type of discourse that will complicate this basic picture: 'metafictional discourse'. Metafictional statements are statements about fictional entities *as fictional entities*. Consider for instance the following statements:

- (6) Frodo was invented by Tolkien.
- (60) Frodo is a fictional character.
- (61) Elijah Wood has portrayed Frodo.

Sentences (6), (60) and (61) tell us something about Frodo, not as a flesh and blood individual, but as a fictional character. Although they feature fictional names, metafictional statements are a type of assertion; (6), (60) and (61) are not just fictionally true but really true. Moreover, as Lewis (1978) argued, they cannot be reduced to implicit parafictional discourse by analysing them as covertly prefixed by a fiction operator; it is not true that in *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo is a fictional character that was invented by Tolkien and that has been portrayed by Elijah Wood. Rather, the above statements seem to be simply true statements about some abstract object called 'Frodo'.

6.2 *The desideratum posed by metafictional discourse*

In this chapter I first specify the exact challenge posed by metafictional discourse using a recent insight due to Semeijn and Zalta (2021) (section 6.2). We have argued that the possibility of anaphoric dependencies and co-predication across different types of statements featuring fictional names establishes a need for a uniform semantic treatment of fictional names across metafictional and parafictional discourse (but not fictional discourse) that avoids the so-called ‘problem of the wrong kind of object’ (e.g., we want to avoid an analysis that implies that a flesh and blood individual was invented by someone or that an abstract object was born in a certain region). Second, I argue that in answering this challenge the workspace account runs into an accessibility problem that is best illustrated by looking at pronominal anaphora across mixed parafictional/metafictional discourse (henceforth ‘metafictional anaphora’) (section 6.3). This issue generalizes to other current dynamic semantic approaches to fiction such as the unofficial common ground accounts (section 6.3.2). I explore and evaluate four different possible solutions based on a descriptivist analysis of pronouns (Section 6.4.1), Maier’s (2017) psychologistic DRT (Section 6.4.2), Zalta’s (1983, 1988) theory of abstract objects (Section 6.4.3) and Recanati’s (2018) dot-object analysis of fictional characters (Section 6.4.4).

6.2 The desideratum posed by metafictional discourse

6.2.1 The problem of the wrong kind of object

The basic puzzle that is posed by metafictional discourse is to provide a coherent semantic analysis of fictional, parafictional and metafictional discourse that avoids the problem of the wrong kind of object.¹ Prima facie, we would like to remain ‘semantically innocent’ and assume that fictional names such as ‘Frodo’ refer uniformly to the same thing in different contexts. Such a uniformity approach can take two basic forms; an ‘anti-realist’ approach and a ‘realist’ approach. Both run into variations of the wrong kind of object problem.

¹This term was originally coined by Klauk (2014) for what I call the realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object.

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First, we may adopt an anti-realist analysis of fictional names (e.g., [Lewis \(1978\)](#); [Walton \(1990\)](#); [Maier \(2017\)](#)) and assume that the name 'Frodo' refers uniformly to a flesh and blood hobbit. Obviously, this hobbit does not exist in the real world but only exists in the *The Lord of the Rings* worlds. Hence we call this the 'anti-realist' approach to fictional names. However, such an approach runs into difficulties with metafictional statements. Surely, a flesh and blood hobbit (that had a trying time and was born in the Shire) is not the right kind of object to also be a fictional character (that was invented by Tolkien and portrayed by Elijah Wood). This is the anti-realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object.

Alternatively, we may adopt a realist analysis of fictional names (e.g., [Zalta \(1983, 1988\)](#); [van Inwagen \(1977\)](#)) and assume that the name 'Frodo' refers uniformly to an abstract object. Insofar as abstract objects exist, they exist in the real world. Hence we call this approach the 'realist' approach: fictional names (e.g., 'Frodo') refer to things that actually exist (i.e., an abstract object). A realist approach to fictional names runs into difficulties with the interpretation of fictional statements such as (25) and parafictional statements such as (58). Surely, abstract objects (e.g., fictional characters) are not the right kind of objects to be having trying times or to be born in the Shire. This is the realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object.

6.2.2 Mixed discourse

A *prima facie* attractive response to the problem of the wrong kind of object is to give up semantic innocence (e.g., [Kripke \(2011\)](#); [Currie \(1990\)](#)). Apparently fictional names, unlike regular proper names, are ambiguous. A name such as 'Frodo' refers to a flesh and blood hobbit in fictional and parafictional statements, and to an abstract object in metafictional statements. This approach avoids both variants of the problem of the wrong kind of object.

Although we will see that there is a grain of truth in an analysis that posits some kind of ambiguity in fictional names, the simple approach sketched above will not do. A widely discussed problem with this strategy is the omnipresence and naturalness of anaphoric dependencies and co-predication across discourse that mixes parafictional and metafictional statements. For instance, consider the following statements:

- (62) Bond is a killer but remains as popular as ever. ([Collins, 2019](#), p.1)

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- (63) Morris Zapp, David Lodge's most colorful character, is a reader-response theorist modeled on Stanley Fish. (Everett, 2013, p.166)
- (64) Sherlock Holmes_i is a fictional character created by Conan Doyle. In Conan Doyle's stories, he_i is a private detective who investigates cases for a variety of clients, including Scotland Yard. (Adapted from Recanati, 2018, p.37)

Sentences (62) and (63) are examples of co-predication of metafictional properties and (implicit) parafictional properties that apply to the same fictional name. Sentence (63) expresses that Morris Zapp is a reader-response theorist (implicit parafictional information) but also that Morris Zapp is modeled on Stanley Fish (metafictional information). Similarly, (62) expresses that Bond is a killer (implicit parafictional information) and that he remains as popular as ever (metafictional information: Bond does not remain "as popular as ever" in the fiction). Prima facie, the fact that a metafictional and an implicit parafictional predicate can simultaneously predicate over the same fictional name suggests that names such as 'Morris Zapp' cannot be ambiguous (i.e., refer to different things in parafictional and metafictional discourse). In a similar vein, (64) is an example of anaphoric dependency across a metafictional and subsequent explicit parafictional statement. The parafictional statement contains a pronoun 'he' that is anaphorically dependent on the name 'Frodo' introduced in the preceding metafictional statement. Standardly, we take this to mean that the two terms (i.e., 'Sherlock Holmes' in the metafictional statement and 'he' in the parafictional statement) co-refer. Again we have a prima facie reason to forgo an analysis that posits an ambiguity between fictional terms used in metafictional as opposed to parafictional contexts.

Based on the perceived admissability and naturalness of co-predication and anaphoric dependencies in such mixed discourses, we might conclude that there is a strong argument for general semantic innocence, i.e., the debate on mixed discourse establishes the need for a uniform semantic treatment of fictional names across the different statements that may feature them. However, as Semeijn and Zalta (2021) have argued, this conclusion may be too quick. In fact, the existing literature only offers examples of co-predication and anaphoric dependencies across (implicit or explicit) parafictional and metafictional discourse. Attempts at anaphoric dependencies

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across parafictional and fictional, or metafictional and fictional discourse are decidedly less natural. Consider the following examples:²

- (65) In the story I made up yesterday, a wizard called Brian_i falls in love with a cauldron. Let me tell it to you: One day, he_i was alone in his_i study trying out a new love-potion recipe... (Semeijn and Zalta, 2021, p. 6)
- (66) In order to capture the witch, Mary_i travelled to the woods and disguised herself as a potato.* In the woods she_i encountered many perils...
- *I know this is weird but I invented her_i while eating chips. (Semeijn and Zalta, 2021, p. 6-7)

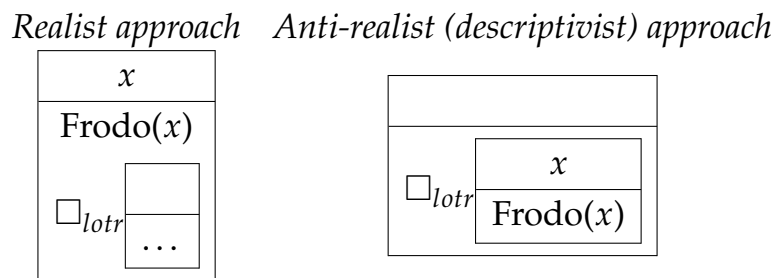
Although (65) and (66) are interpretable, they sound very awkward. In order to construe example discourses that clearly mix *fictional* discourse with parafictional or metafictional discourse (rather than implicit parafictional discourse with explicit parafictional or metafictional discourse), the beginning or interruption of the fictional discourse has to be clearly marked in the language (e.g., By “Let me tell it to you” in (65) or by inserting a footnote in (66)). This is why it is extremely challenging to come up with examples of co-predication across mixed fictional and meta- or parafictional discourse. Moreover, these clearly marked ‘boundaries’ of the fictional discourse make anaphoric dependencies across them as in (65) and (66) sound very unnatural. (65) would become more natural if we repeated the name ‘Brian’ at the start of the fictional discourse (or even better “Once upon a time there was a wizard named Brian who...”). Similarly, (66) would become more natural if we repeated the name ‘Mary’ in the metafictional footnote (or even better “this character”).

In other words, although the literature on mixed discourse does establish a desideratum that the semantic treatment of fictional names across parafictional and metafictional discourse is uniform, an ambiguity analysis with respect to fictional names in fictional discourse (versus fictional names in parafictional and metafictional discourse) is still a viable option. The act of story-telling seems to be importantly distinct from parafictional and metafictional discourse.

²See the appendix for (attempts at) anaphoric dependencies across all possible types of mixed discourse with fictional, parafictional and metafictional statements.

6.3 Metafictional anaphora and accessibility

The current challenge for semanticists of fiction is thus to offer a uniform semantic account of parafictional and metafictional statements (so as to account for the admissibility of co-predication and anaphoric dependencies across parafictional and metafictional mixed discourse rather than only being able to account for these statements in isolation) that avoids the problem of the wrong kind of object in its different variants. In the dynamic framework of DRT this desideratum entails that we require parafictional and metafictional discourse to update on the same discourse referents. It seems that we are back at the two basic strategies described in section 6.2.1: assuming an analysis of parafictional discourse as embedded assertions (see chapter 4), we can adopt a realist approach where discourse referents for fictional entities are available in the main DRS (e.g., It is common ground that there is an abstract object named Frodo) or an anti-realist (descriptivist) approach where these discourse referents are embedded under the relevant fiction operator (e.g., It is common ground that in *The Lord of the Rings* there is flesh and blood hobbit named Frodo):



In the current descriptivist version of the workspace account, parafictional discourse operates on discourse referents that are embedded under fiction operators. Hence the workspace account is anti-realist: Frodo only exists in the *The Lord of the Rings* worlds where he is a flesh and blood hobbit. In this section I will show that this version of the workspace account runs into a specific technical problem of accessibility when dealing with metafictional discourse.

Here it is helpful to consider that the current challenge to give correct interpretations of all admissible forms of co-predication and anaphoric dependencies across parafictional and metafictional discourse subdivides into three challenges: First, account for discourse where a fictional name is introduced in a parafictional statement and a metafictional statement

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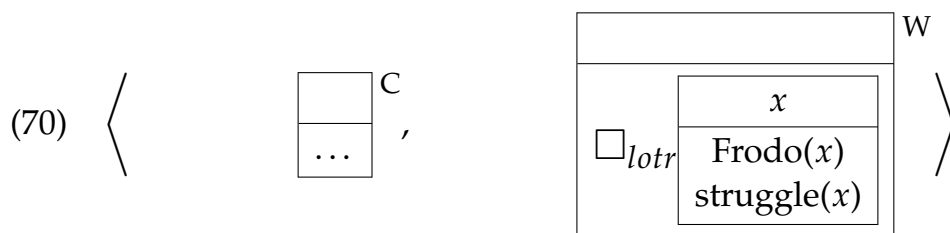
contains a pronoun anaphorically dependent on that, i.e., ‘metafictional anaphora’ (e.g., (67)); second, account for discourse where a fictional name is introduced in a metafictional statement and a parafictional statement contains a pronoun anaphorically dependent on that, i.e., ‘parafictional anaphora’ (e.g., (68)); and third, account for cases of co-predication involving both parafictional and metafictional predicates (e.g., (69)):

- (67) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo_i goes through an immense mental struggle to save his_i friends. Ah yes, he_i is an intriguing fictional character!
- (68) Frodo_i is an intriguing fictional character. In *The Lord of the Rings*, he_i goes through an immense mental struggle to save his_i friends.
- (69) Frodo is an intriguing fictional character that goes through an immense mental struggle to save his friends.

In the following I mainly focus on the challenge posed by metafictional anaphora (Section 6.3.1) because this type of discourse gives rise to accessibility issues in the workspace account. Before turning to possible solutions in section 6.4, I will also show how accessibility issues generalize to other anti-realist dynamic approaches that also embed discourse referents for fictional entities (Section 6.3.2).

6.3.1 Metafictional anaphora in the workspace account

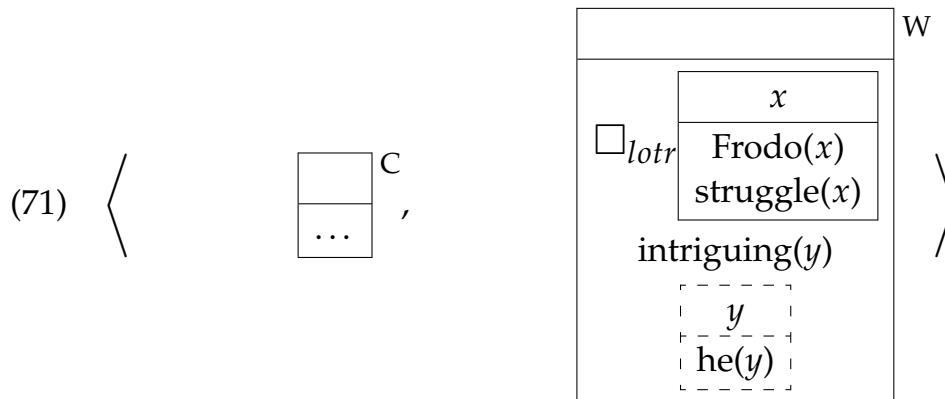
Consider how our central example of metafictional anaphora (67) updates the common ground in the workspace account. Both sentences in (67) (a parafictional statement about *The Lord of the Rings* and a metafictional statement about Frodo) are assertions and hence trigger assertive closure on a workspace updated with (67). First, we open up a workspace and update it with the parafictional statement in (67):



Next, we update the workspace with the metafictional statement in (67). As noted in the introduction, metafictional statements are not covertly embedded under ‘In fiction *s*’-operators. In other words, there is no implicit ‘In

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fiction s' -operator in the second half of (67), so the workspace is updated as follows:



The pronoun 'he' in the metafictional statement in (67) triggers a presupposition that there is a masculine entity (denoted by the dashed box) and we update with the information that this masculine entity is an intriguing fictional character. The pronoun 'he' is anaphoric on the name 'Frodo' introduced in the preceding *parafictional* statement. Normally, we represent this by equating their discourse referents (i.e., resolving the presupposition and replacing all occurrences of y with x) so that the resulting update of the metafictional statement in (67) is 'intriguing(x)'. However, following standard DRT-rules, x is not accessible outside of the 'In *The Lord of the Rings*'-operator and hence the presupposition remains unresolved. The workspace account thus predicts that we cannot update the workspace with (and thus interpret) discourse involving metafictional anaphora such as in (67). Obviously, we *can* interpret (67) and hence we need to adjust our theory.

Related issues may arise with some cases of co-predication with mixed metafictional and parafictional discourse, i.e., when a fictional name is introduced in metafictional and parafictional discourse 'simultaneously'. In general terms, discourse referents introduced by parafictional or metafictional discourse have to be accessible to subsequent parafictional and metafictional statements to account for all admissible anaphoric dependencies. The DRT formalism thus shows that a dynamic approach that involves quarantining of fictional content under a fiction operator quickly runs into difficulties with discourse that involves anaphoric dependencies across metafictional discourse since metafictional statements are unembedded assertions. Although different solutions to this general issue are possible, we will see that the workspace account is pushed into the direction of a realist approach

6.4 A comparison of different solutions

In the rest of this chapter I describe and evaluate four different strategies to meet the described challenge of metafictional anaphora in the workspace account.⁴ First, one can adopt a descriptivist approach and account for metafictional anaphora in non-dynamic terms (section 6.4.1). Alternatively, staying in the dynamic semantic framework, one can either stick to a descriptivist/anti-realist approach and adjust the accessibility relations (section 6.4.2) or accommodate a new discourse referent that is accessible through standard accessibility relations. Such a discourse referent can be understood as an abstract object in a realist framework (section 6.4.3) or as a dot-object (section 6.4.4). The proposed solutions are evaluated with respect to whether they can also be extended to account for parafictional anaphora or co-predication, and whether the solutions avoid the problem of the wrong kind of object in its different variants.

6.4.1 A descriptivist approach: A description of Frodo

D-type accounts

A possible solution to the described challenge in a traditional semantics framework is a descriptivist approach to anaphora (e.g., [Evans \(1977\)](#); [Elbourne \(2005\)](#); [Heim \(1990\)](#)). This analysis was originally proposed as a solution to the accessibility problem posed by donkey anaphora. Consider the following donkey sentence:

(73) If Sarah owns a donkey, she beats it.

Intuitively, the pronoun ‘it’ does not refer to a particular individual donkey but is bounded by ‘a donkey’. However, it is outside of the syntactic scope of ‘a donkey’ and hence inaccessible. On a descriptivist analysis, the anaphoric pronoun ‘it’ functions like, or ‘goes proxy for’, the definite description ‘the donkey’ retrieved from the preceding clause. In Elbourne’s D-type account, this is because NPs at the level of syntax undergo phonetic deletion (are not pronounced at the surface level) when in the environment of an identical NP

⁴Prima facie, the discussed solutions can be extended to address the challenge in other dynamic approaches such as the unofficial common ground accounts. I leave exploration and evaluation of these parallel solutions to future research.

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(e.g., 'My shirt is the same as his (shirt)'). Similarly, (73) is in fact equivalent to (74):

(74) If Sarah owns a donkey, she beats the donkey.

This analysis evades the problem of the unbindable pronoun by replacing it with a definite description.

Addressing the challenge

When we apply this strategy to our central example of metafictional anaphora (67), the pronoun 'he' is also analysed as going proxy for a definite description retrieved from the previous clause. However, (67) cannot be the result of simple phonetic deletion of an identical NP. If it were, (67) would be equivalent to something like (75):

(75) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo goes through an immense mental struggle to save his friends. Ah yes, the person named Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* that goes through an immense mental struggle to save his friends, is an intriguing fictional character!

This gives us an incorrect analysis of (67): A flesh and blood person cannot be a fictional character. In other words, through simple phonetic deletion we retrieve the 'wrong kind of definite description' from the parafictional statement and hence run into the anti-realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object.

To get the correct interpretation, what is required is a *metafictional* description such as 'the *character* named Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*' so that (67) becomes equivalent to (76):

(76) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo goes through an immense mental struggle to save his friends. Ah yes, the fictional character named Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* is an intriguing fictional character!

Although (76) gives an acceptable analysis of what is expressed by (67), it is unclear how to compositionally obtain such a meta-description of Frodo from the preceding clause. Moreover, even if we assume that we can accommodate such a definite description for metafictional anaphora, this solution does not extend to parafictional anaphora such as (68). In such cases both simple phonetic deletion and accommodation of a meta-description of Frodo lead to the same incorrect interpretation:

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- (77) Frodo is an intriguing fictional character. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the fictional character named Frodo goes through an immense mental struggle to save his friends.

Here we run into the realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object: a fictional character, being an abstract object, cannot go through an immense mental struggle to save his friends. Deriving the correct interpretation of (68) would thus require accommodation of yet another type of definite description, i.e., a *parafictional* description.

Last but not least, it is unclear how an account of phonetic deletion of NPs can be extended to cases of co-predication in mixed parafictional and metafictional discourse. For instance, in (69) there is no anaphoric pronoun that can be analysed as going proxy for a definite description.

Hence, a descriptivist approach does not (as yet) adequately solve the accessibility issues involved in mixed metafictional and parafictional discourse; simple phonetic deletion provides the wrong kind of definite descriptions in the case of metafictional anaphora and hence we need an account of how to accommodate the right kind of definite descriptions. This fix can, in turn, not be extended to parafictional anaphora or cases of co-predication.

6.4.2 Psychologistic DRT: Adjusting accessibility

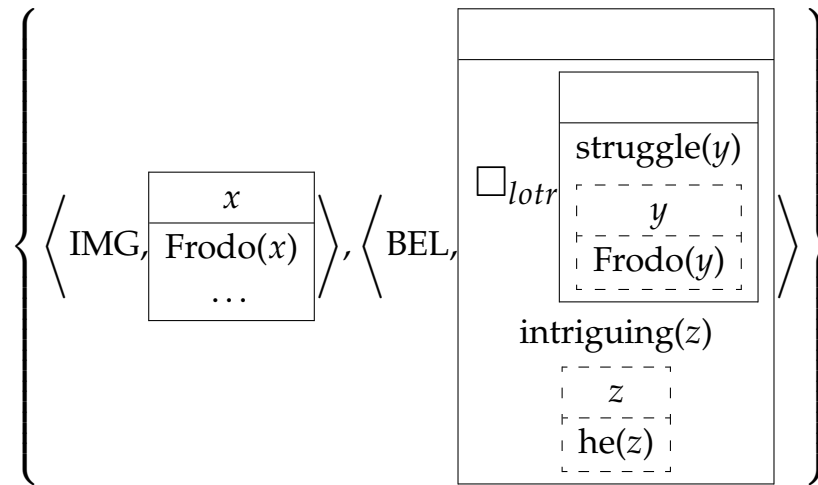
Another possible solution to the problem of metafictional anaphora (that sticks to a dynamic approach of language and an anti-realist approach to fictional names) is to adjust the DRS accessibility relations so that the discourse referent for 'Frodo' is accessible.

Psychologistic DRT

Maier (2017) adopts this strategy in his psychologistic DRT framework in which the context that is updated by statements is an agent's mental state. The agent's mental state is represented as a set of DRS's that are linked to cognitive attitudes such as belief (BEL) and imagination (IMG). In line with the consensus view of fiction interpretation (e.g., Walton (1990); Currie (1990)), fictional discourse updates the imagination-box and non-fictional discourse updates the belief-box. Hence, assuming that the agent updates with (67) after having engaged with *The Lord of the Rings* – and thus having previously imagined Frodo – the agent's mental state after updating with (67), but before pronoun resolution, looks as follows:

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(78)



The parafictional and metafictional statement function similarly in that both, being assertions, update the belief-box and trigger presuppositions that need to take as their discourse referent x for 'Frodo'.⁵

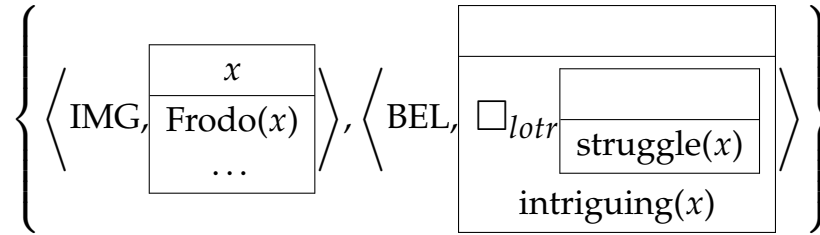
Although this dynamic semantic framework – like the workspace account and the unofficial common ground accounts – involves separating the discourse referents of fictional entities, there is no accessibility problem because Maier assumes, contra usual practice, that attitudes can be referentially dependent on attitudes other than belief.⁶ He gives the example of someone who wants to buy a new smartphone in a few years and imagines it to have a flexible transparent screen. This is a desire dependent imagination. Similarly, doxastic attitudes can be referentially dependent on imagination. When engaging in *The Lord of the Rings* I imagine the existence of an entity named Frodo and when engaging in parafictional or metafictional discourse such as (67) I believe that in *The Lord of the Rings* this entity went through a mental struggle and that this entity is an intriguing fictional character.⁷ Hence the presuppositions triggered by the metafictional anaphora in (67) can be resolved; the content of the imagination-box is accessible:

⁵Here I follow Geurts (1997) in analysing proper names as triggering presuppositions.

⁶Maier does allow that there may turn out to be some structural constraints on specific cross-attitudinal dependencies.

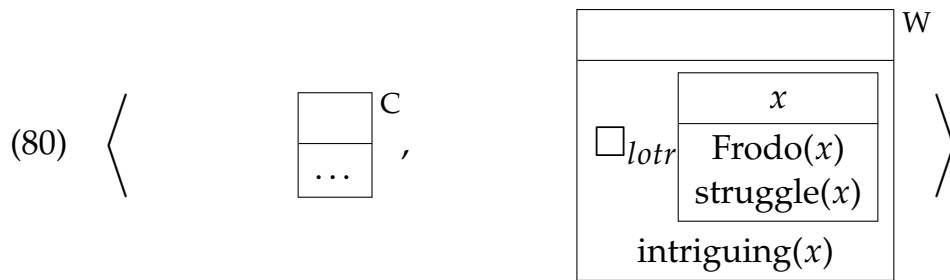
⁷Maier thus offers a uniform anti-realist semantic treatment of fictional names across parafictional, metafictional and fictional discourse. All different types of discourse operate on the same discourse referents.

(79)



Addressing the challenge

Extending this strategy to the workspace account would amount to changing the accessibility relations relative to the content embedded under the 'In fiction *s'*-operator so that the presupposition triggered by the pronoun 'he' in the metafictional statement in (67) can be resolved:



We can thus stick to the basic anti-realist version of the workspace account: The name 'Frodo' refers in both parafictional and metafictional discourse to a flesh and blood entity that only exists in *The Lord of the Rings* worlds. Such a move would solve the accessibility issues involved in metafictional anaphora. The solution can also be extended to account for parafictional anaphora and co-predication in mixed parafictional and metafictional discourse. Discourse referents for fictional entities are always embedded under fiction operators in the common ground. But since such discourse referents are accessible outside of the embedded DRS, presuppositions that are triggered by subsequent or simultaneous metafictional discourse can always be resolved.

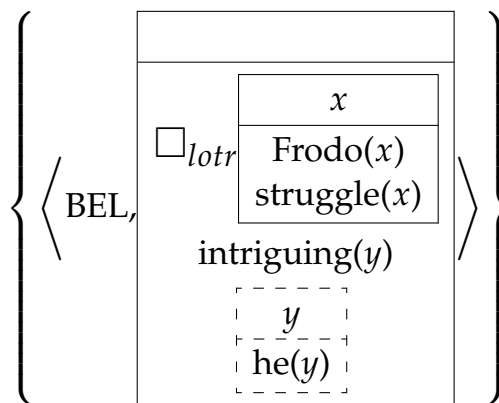
However, although there may be independent reasons to make the content in the imagination-box accessible in Maier's cognitive framework, there are none for doing this with the 'In fiction *s'*-operator, making this an *ad hoc* move. More importantly, there are already substantial theoretical costs in Maier's cognitive framework to making the content of the imagination-box accessible (i.e., a highly complex semantic system) but such a move with

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the ‘In fiction s' -operator would amount to a drastic change of the basic semantics of DRT (in which any type of embedding entails inaccessibility). Such a radical departure of standard DRT semantics is undesirable.

In fact, the accessibility problem of metafictional anaphora may reappear in the psychologicistic DRT framework as well. Because Maier assumes that parafictional and metafictional statements are referentially dependent on existential imagination (induced by fictional statements), he only considers discourse in which the interpretation of parafictional and metafictional statements comes *after* the interpretation of fictional statements. However, fictional names can also be introduced in parafictional or metafictional statements. Suppose (67) featured the first occurrence of the name ‘Frodo’. In this case the fictional name ‘Frodo’ introduced in the parafictional statement cannot be referentially dependent on a previous act of imagination. In Maier’s framework, interpretation of such discourse would have to involve either accommodation of a kind of contentless or minimal imagination during the parafictional discourse (e.g., imagining that there is a person named Frodo) or involve local accommodation of a discourse referent in the belief-box. The latter strategy would result in the following representation of the agent’s mental state:

(81)



Here the discourse referent for ‘Frodo’ is embedded in the ‘In *The Lord of the Rings*’-operator rather than the imagination-box. Making this discourse referent accessible will lead to the aforementioned problems of changing the accessibility relations relative to the ‘In fiction s' -operator.

In any case, a solution based on changing the accessibility relations plainly runs into the anti-realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object. The imagined entity (in terms of the psychologicistic DRT framework) or

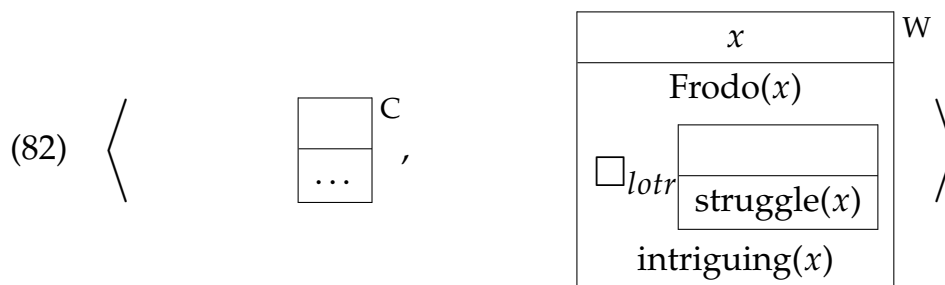
6.4 A comparison of different solutions

the entity that exists in the *The Lord of the Rings* worlds (in terms of the workspace account) is a flesh and blood hobbit. If we make the discourse referent for this object accessible to the metafictional statement in (67), the metafictional statement will be about this flesh and blood individual. However, a flesh and blood hobbit cannot be an intriguing fictional character.

Hence, a solution based on Maier’s psychologicistic DRT does not adequately solve the problem of metafictional anaphora. It cannot straightforwardly be extended to a workspace account and runs into the anti-realist version of the problem of the wrong kind of object.

6.4.3 Object theory: Frodo the abstract object

An alternative strategy to address the challenge of metafictional anaphora is to claim that fictional names in parafictional and metafictional statements refer to an object with a discourse referent that is accessible in the main box:



The above DRS formally resembles a DRS you would expect on a de re version of the workspace account (see section 4.6.1) where fictions that are about non-fictional entities (e.g., Napoleon in *War and Peace*) are analysed as being de re about these entities (rather than about their fictional substitutes). Parafictional discourse about such fictions (e.g., ‘In *War and Peace*, Napoleon examines the Pratzen Heights’) thus takes the discourse referent of an actually existing individual from the main box. However, contrary to Napoleon, Frodo never really existed. One way to account for this is to follow Zalta’s application of his logic of abstract objects – ‘object theory’ (Zalta (1983, 1988)) – to fiction and claim that parafictional and metafictional statements are about abstract objects (e.g., Frodo the fictional character) that really exist.⁸

⁸For details on the object theoretic treatment of fiction see especially Zalta’s (1983) chapter IV, (1988) chapter 7 and Zalta (2000; 1987).

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Object theory

Prima facie, this strategy seems to run head first into the realist version of the problem of the wrong kind of object: both the parafictional and metafictional statements in (67) operate on a discourse referent for an abstract object, but surely an abstract object cannot go through an immense mental struggle! To avoid this problem Zalta distinguishes between two types of objects and two modes of predication.⁹ x is an 'ordinary object' ('O!(x)') if it is, or could have been, concrete (e.g., Mount Everest). x is an 'abstract object' ('A!(x)') just in case it isn't and could not have been concrete (e.g., the empty set). An ordinary object like Mount Everest can 'exemplify' being 8,848 meters tall, i.e., it has the property of being 8,848 meters tall in the standard sense. Zalta denotes this as it would be denoted in standard predicate logic, i.e., with the argument to the right of the predicate. Hence, a natural language statement such as (83) is translated into the formal language of object theory as follows:

(83) Mount Everest is 8,848 meters tall.

(84) 8,848m-tall(m)¹⁰

In contrast, an abstract object can 'encode' a property which means it has this property as one of its constitutive characteristics. What properties an abstract object encodes are the properties that *define* the abstract object. For instance, the empty set encodes the property of having no members. This is denoted with the argument to the left of the predicate. Hence, a natural language statement such as (85) is translated as follows:

(85) The empty set has no members.

(86) (\emptyset)memberless

Ordinary objects cannot encode properties but abstract objects *can* exemplify properties. For instance, the empty set exemplifies (but does not encode) being widely discussed; it has this property but it is not a property that is constitutive of its essence. A statement such as (87) is thus translated as follows:

(87) The empty set is widely discussed.

⁹This distinction originally comes from Mally (1912). See also van Inwagen (2000).

¹⁰In fact, Zalta uses standard predicate logic notation (i.e., (83) is translated as ' Tm '). The current notation is compatible with the standard notation for DRS conditions.

6.4 A comparison of different solutions

(88) widely-disc(\emptyset)

Two types of abstract objects are relevant for the object theoretic analysis of fictional, parafictional and metafictional statements: ‘stories’ and ‘fictional characters’. A story (e.g., *The Lord of the Rings*) is an abstract object that encodes the content of a narrative. It encodes ‘vacuous’ or ‘propositional’ properties of the form ‘being such that ϕ is true’, where ϕ is a proposition that is true in the story. A fictional character is an abstract object that is *native* to a story (e.g., Frodo or the One Ring, but not Napoleon).

The abstract object theoretic analysis of parafictional discourse differs substantially from the Lewisian analysis. Contrary to common practice, Zalta draws a strong distinction between the analysis of explicit parafictional statements such as (58) and implicit parafictional statements such as (89):

(89) Frodo was born in the Shire.

This is because Zalta is a realist about fictional characters (i.e., they exist as abstract objects) and hence we can talk about them as we do about ordinary objects (i.e., without an ‘In fiction s ’-operator or some type of pretence). A statement such as (89) is thus actually not ‘implicit’ in the sense that it is covertly embedded. Rather, it is a plain statement about what properties a certain abstract object encodes:

(90) $(f)\text{born.in.Shire}$

Explicit parafictional statements (e.g., (58)) on the other hand do contain an ‘In fiction s ’-operator (i.e., Σ_s). However, this is not a classical Lewisian fiction operator (i.e., \square_s). Explicit parafictional statements are statements about specific encoding and exemplifying relations between stories and characters. For instance, (58) expresses that *The Lord of the Rings* encodes the vacuous property of being such that Frodo exemplifies living in the Shire:

(91) $\Sigma_{lotr}\text{born.in.Shire}(f)$

Zalta proves a theorem in his theory:

(92) $\forall x\forall s(\text{Native}(x, s) \rightarrow \forall F(xF \equiv \Sigma_s Fx))$

according to which, if some character x is native to some story s , implicit and explicit parafictional statements about x (in s) (e.g., (58) and (89)) are equivalent.

Metafictional statements are statements about what properties fictional characters *exemplify*. For instance, the metafictional statement in (67) ex-

6 The challenge of metafictional anaphora

presses that Frodo exemplifies the property of being an intriguing fictional character:

(93) intriguing(*f*)

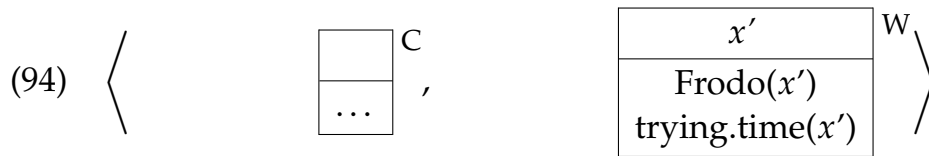
In line with the desideratum formulated in section 6.2, object theory does not extend the uniform semantic treatment of fictional names across fictional discourse. Fictional statements do not involve reference to abstract objects but rather constitute the practice of story telling that determines – through an extended ‘naming baptism’ – what abstract objects the fictional names in parafictional and metafictional statements refer to (see Zalta (2000, 1987); Semeijn and Zalta (2021)). For instance, through Tolkien’s act of writing *The Lord of the Rings*, the unique abstract object that the name ‘Frodo’ refers to (in parafictional and metafictional discourse) is determined. Similar accounts of reference to fictional characters supervening on fictional discourse can be found in Kripke (1973), Schiffer (2003) and Searle (1975) (but see also Hunter (1981) for a contrary view).

Fictive closure*

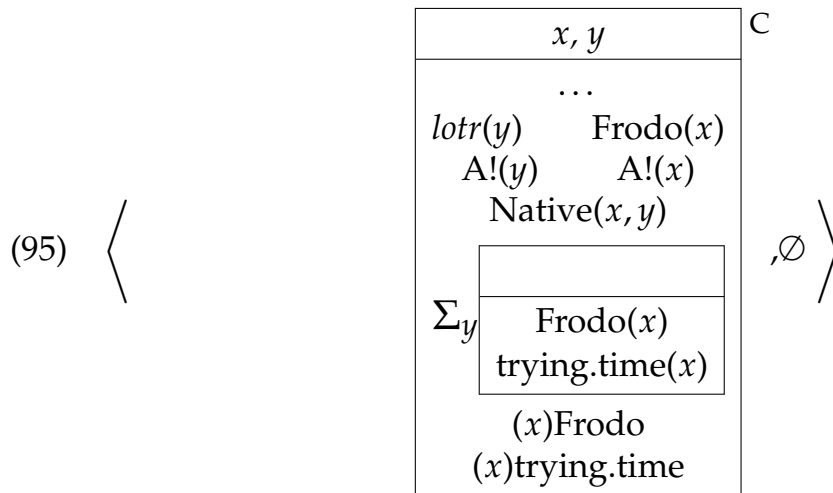
If we incorporate Zalta’s analysis of fictional names into the workspace account, we need to replace our Lewisian analysis of parafictional updates of the common ground by the object theoretical analysis. This entails a different analysis of parafictional discourse but also entails a modification of the fictive closure operation (which also involves a parafictional update). First and foremost, we replace the Lewisian operator (\Box_s) with the object theoretic fiction operator (Σ_y). Second, because of the strong distinction drawn between implicit and explicit parafictional statements, fictive closure can in theory involve two different kinds of updates of the common ground: an update with explicit parafictional information and, if the relevant fictional characters are native to the relevant story, also with implicit parafictional information.¹¹ The following is a representation of fictive closure* of (25) that includes updates of the common ground with both types of statements. First, a workspace is updated with content of the fictional statement, i.e., it is temporarily commonly accepted that there is an entity called Frodo that had a very trying time some afternoon:

¹¹If we also incorporate theorem (92) we can simplify the representation of the common ground with respect to statements about native fictional characters.

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At fictive closure*, as soon as we stop engaging in the fictional discourse, we update the common ground with discourse referents for the newly introduced abstract objects (e.g., the story *The Lord of the Rings* and the fictional character Frodo) and with (explicit and implicit) parafictional information based on the content of the workspace (e.g., ' $\Sigma_{lotr}trying.time(x)$ ' and ' $(x)trying.time$ ')



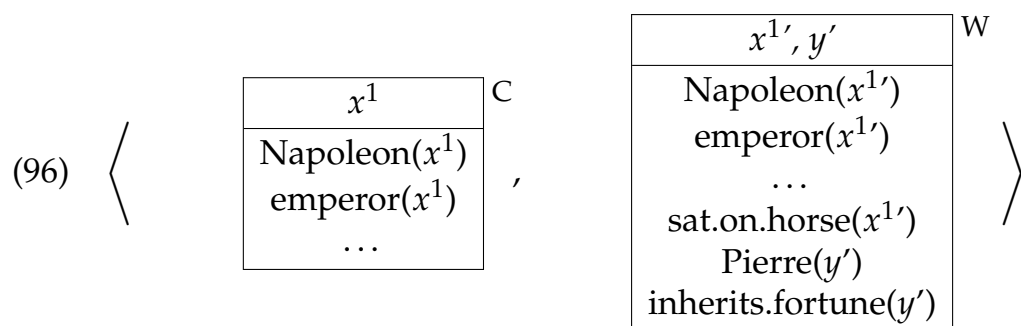
Importantly, not all propositional content of the workspace is updated as parafictional information simpliciter: proper name conditions (e.g., ' $Frodo(x)$ ') are doubled and placed in the main box. This represents the fact that the abstract object Frodo also *exemplifies* being named 'Frodo' outside of *The Lord of the Rings*.

This move comes at a significant theoretical cost since it greatly complicates fictive closure (and opening). The name-predicate 'Frodo' now occurs three times in the DRS, which is counterintuitive. More importantly, some discourse referents for ordinary objects in the workspace (e.g., Frodo, Moria, the One Ring) are replaced with discourse referents for abstract objects in the main box (and vice versa for fictive opening). However, discourse referents for ordinary things in the workspace that have non-fictional substitutes in the common ground (e.g., Napoleon, Paris, the British crown jewels) stay embedded under the fiction operator. The analysis is, however, in line with Zalta's analysis of fictional discourse (i.e., updating a workspace and performing fictive closure) as an extended naming baptism that reference to

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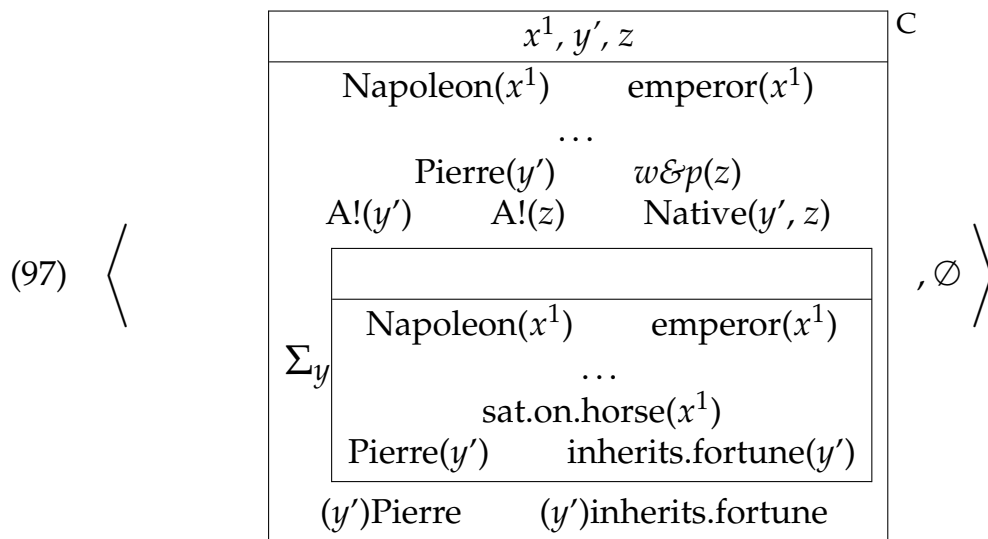
really existing fictional characters (i.e., entities that are represented in the main DRS) supervenes on.

In fact, we can design a more uniform fictive closure* operation if we combine the object theoretic approach to fictional names with a de re version of the workspace account (see section 4.6.1) where fiction about non-fictional entities (e.g., Napoleon in *War and Peace*) is de re about these entities. On such an account, all discourse referents for non-fictional entities in the common ground are anchored to their copies in the workspace. These copies ‘move out’ of the DRS that is embedded under a fiction operator at fictive closure and are replaced by the ‘original’ discourse referents for these non-fictional entities. Combining the object theoretic account of fictional names and a de re account of fiction about non-fictional entities results in a uniform fictive closure operation where *all* discourse referents (whether for non-fictional entities or fictional entities) ‘move out’ of the embedded DRS. Those that are anchored to already existing discourse referents in the main DRS (i.e., discourse referents for non-fictional entities or discourse referents for previously introduced fictional characters) are replaced by those, those that are not (i.e., discourse referents newly introduced in the workspace) give rise to new abstract objects. Consider for instance fictive closure after reading about Napoleon and the fictional character Pierre in *War and Peace*. Suppose that it was already common ground that Napoleon was a French emperor and that the workspace has been updated with (amongst other things) the information that Napoleon sat on a small gray Arab horse in front of his Marshals and that there was a guy named Pierre who inherited a great fortune:



At fictive closure all discourse referents now move out of the embedded DRS:

6.4 A comparison of different solutions



I leave further exploration into the merits of combining fictive closure* with a de re analysis to future research.¹² The rest of this section deals with the object theoretic solution to metafictional anaphora which is compatible with a de re version of the workspace account and a version that is (apart from its treatment of fictional names) descriptivist.

Addressing the challenge

If we adopt the object theoretic strategy we add an abstract object to the shared ontology for any fictional entity that is introduced and is native to the relevant story. This means that we incorporate Zalta's metaphysical assumptions that entail the existence of abstract objects in the actual world. It also means that after a parafictional update (e.g., after engaging in parafictional or fictional discourse) the discourse referent for (the abstract object) 'Frodo'

¹²Arguably, the described account also offers a natural analysis of anaphoric dependencies across parafictional statements and 'regular' assertions about non-fictional entities. Consider:

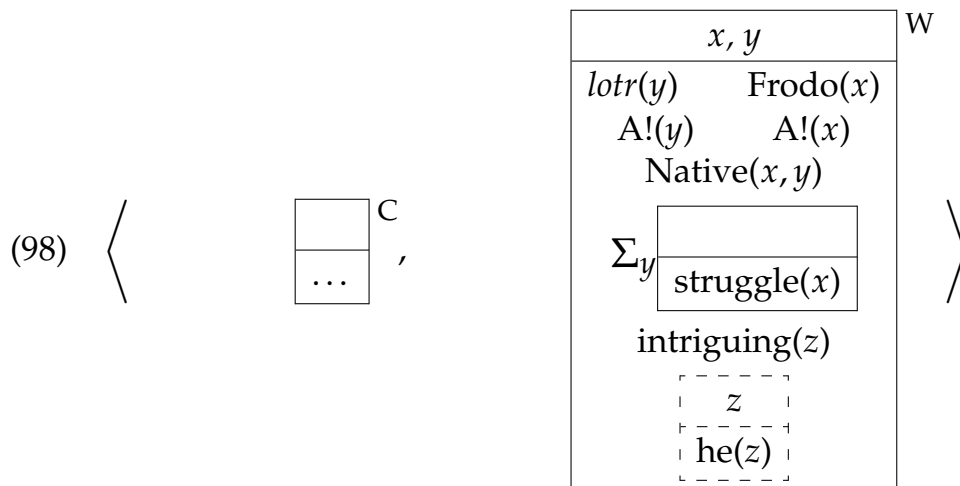
- (iii) In *War and Peace*, Napoleon_i is a hero. But actually, he_i was an overconfident opportunist.

Anaphoric dependencies as in (iii) may lead to comparable accessibility issues as metafictional anaphora on a simple descriptivist version of the workspace account (in this case there *is* in fact a discourse referent for Napoleon accessible in the main DRS but it is not the same as the one that is referred to in the parafictional statement). However, for these cases there is no additional problem of the wrong kind of object looming in the background. I leave exploration of these issues to further research.

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is accessible outside of the ‘In *The Lord of the Rings*’-operator. To see how this solves the challenge posed by metafictional anaphora, we first have to recognize that because Zalta draws a strong distinction between implicit and explicit parafictional statements, the challenge splits up in two sub-challenges: One of pronominal anaphora across mixed *explicit* parafictional and metafictional discourse and one of pronominal anaphora across mixed *implicit* parafictional and metafictional discourse. The central example up to this point, (67), is an example of the first kind. I represent the workspace updated with (67) as follows:

- (67) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo_i goes through an immense mental struggle to save his_i friends. Ah yes, he_i is an intriguing fictional character!

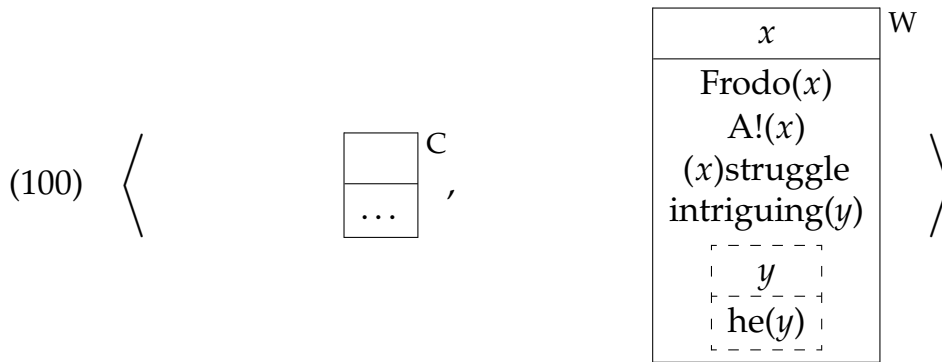


Next, we can make a variation of (67) so that it is an example of pronominal anaphora across mixed *implicit* parafictional/metafictional discourse:

- (99) Frodo_i goes through an immense mental struggle to save his_i friends. Ah yes, he_i is an intriguing fictional character!

I represent the workspace updated with (99) as follows:

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As the formulas show, in both cases the discourse referent x for ‘Frodo’ is accessible outside of the ‘*In The Lord of the Rings*’-operator. Hence the presupposition triggered by the pronoun ‘he’ in the metafictional statement in (67) and (99) (an assertion about what properties the abstract object Frodo exemplifies) can be resolved.¹³

This approach easily extends to parafictional anaphora and cases of co-predication in mixed metafictional and parafictional discourse. In general, metafictional, explicit parafictional and implicit parafictional discourse all operates on the same globally accessible discourse referents for fictional characters and hence any kind of mixed discourse will be interpretable.

Revisiting the problem of the wrong kind of object

Although this analysis seems to straightforwardly solve the problem of metafictional anaphora while avoiding the problem of the wrong kind of object for *implicit* parafictional statements (i.e., abstract objects are the ‘right kind of objects’ to *encode* properties such as living in the Shire) and metafictional statements (i.e., abstract objects are the ‘right kind of objects’ to *exemplify* properties such as being an intriguing fictional character), the problem seems to reappear for the object theoretic treatment of *explicit* parafictional statements. Recently, Klauk (2014) has argued along these lines. The worry is that because fictional names like ‘Frodo’ refer uniformly to abstract objects in metafictional and parafictional discourse, we would be

¹³In (98) and (100) I assume the standard analysis of the pronoun ‘he’ as triggering a presupposition that there is a *masculine* entity. However, although abstract objects such as Frodo may *encode* masculinity, they cannot *exemplify* this property; abstract objects have no gender. To make the object theoretic solution work we have to assume that the pronoun ‘he’ triggers the presupposition of the existence of an object that is masculine in an underspecified way.

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able to infer something like (101) from an explicit parafictional statement such as (58):

(58) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo was born in the Shire.

(101) In *The Lord of the Rings*, an abstract object was born in the Shire.

(101) is obviously problematic because it leads to a reoccurrence of the realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object: *The Lord of the Rings* is a story about flesh and blood hobbits, not about what properties abstract objects exemplify. Moreover, although we may be able to imagine that an abstract object *exemplifies* living in the Shire, this amounts to imagining a category mistake (i.e., abstracts object cannot live in certain regions) which should be unusual and remarkable and cannot comprise our common practice of engaging in the content of a fictional work.

Semeijn and Zalta (2021) offer a formalisation of Klauk's objection and divide it into three sub-challenges which they address separately. Below I briefly discuss the first and third sub-challenge they discuss.

First, the fact that f in (91) (and hence the name 'Frodo' in the explicit parafictional statement (58)) refers to an abstract object may raise the following worry: (91) expresses that *The Lord of the Rings* (an abstract object) encodes the vacuous property of being such that Frodo (another abstract object) exemplifies living in the Shire. In object theory, what's encoded by a fictional story is supposedly what is true in the fiction. Moreover, what's true in a fiction is what we are mandated to imagine when we engage with the fiction. But then object theory would imply that we are mandated to imagine something about an abstract object! In fact, this reasoning is flawed. In the object theoretic version of the workspace account, reference to abstract objects in explicit parafictional statements does *not* imply that we are mandated to imagine anything about abstract objects. Insofar as a fiction's 'mandate to imagine' plays a role in the workspace account (or in object theory), it is something that is triggered by fictional discourse and not by parafictional discourse. What we are 'mandated to imagine when engaging in a fiction' is what we temporarily accept or entertain while updating the workspace with the relevant fictional discourse. In the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, the workspace is updated with information about flesh and blood hobbits and their adventures. As fictive closure* shows, once we stop engaging with the fiction (and hence stop imagining), this previously imagined information gets converted into parafictional updates of the common ground that make reference to abstract objects. Parafictional

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discourse, being non-fictional statements, operate on this information directly through assertive closure. In other words, even though parafictional statements do track or ‘echo’ the fictional discourse (and hence are reports on what is true in fiction), parafictional discourse itself is non-fictional discourse about abstract objects. This does not mean, however, that updates of the workspace triggered by fictional discourse also make reference to abstract objects. When engaging in *The Lord of the Rings*, we temporarily imagine things about Frodo the flesh and blood hobbit. Afterwards, we permanently believe things about the abstract object Frodo.

Even if reference to abstract objects in explicit parafictional statements such as (58) is not problematic, a further worry is whether – given that f in (91) refers to an abstract object – we can derive problematic statements (e.g., something like (101)) in object theory, as Klauk seems to think. One way this worry may be developed is by looking at the identification conditions of the abstract object called ‘Frodo’. Given that Frodo is native to *The Lord of the Rings*, and given theorem (92), we can derive that Frodo is the abstract object that encodes all properties that Frodo exemplifies in *The Lord of the Rings*:

$$(102) \quad f = \iota x(A!(x) \wedge \forall F((x)F \equiv \Sigma_{lotr}F(f)))$$

Given that the formal language of object theory is completely extensional or ‘denotational’ (i.e., substitution of co-referring expressions is licensed in any context), we are licensed to substitute the definite description in (102) for f in (91). We can thus derive:

$$(103) \quad \Sigma_{lotr} \text{born.in.Shire}(\iota x(A!(x) \wedge \forall F((x)F \equiv \Sigma_{lotr}F(f))))$$

Reading (103) back into natural language would give us the following parafictional discourse:

$$(104) \quad \text{In } \textit{The Lord of the Rings}, \text{ the abstract object that encodes exactly those properties that Frodo exemplifies in } \textit{The Lord of the Rings}, \text{ was born in the Shire.}$$

Surely, our theory should not predict that an utterance of (104) is licensed in a parafictional discussion on *The Lord of the Rings* because (104) ascribes inappropriate content to *The Lord of the Rings*. In fact, object theory does not predict this. Although (103) is a theoretical consequence of the theory, it cannot be read back into the language of the parafictional data. (104) includes technical terms such as ‘encoding’ and ‘exemplifying’ which were

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introduced in object theory to disambiguate the two modes of predication that natural language conflates. In other words, although (104) may be correctly used by an object theorist engaged in a theoretical discussion on the abstract objects *The Lord of the Rings* and Frodo, the technical machinery of object theory used in (104) cannot simply be read back into natural language, i.e., the data we are trying to explain.¹⁴

Lastly, we can develop the worry one step further as follows: even if (103) can't be read back into natural language as (104) – unless as a part of an object theoretic discussion – we can potentially derive something even more problematic from it. Object theory includes the principle *Descriptions* (1988, p. 90), which is a version of Russell's (1905) Theory of Descriptions:

$$(105) \quad (a) \ P \iota x(Qx) \equiv \exists!yQy \wedge \exists y(Qy \wedge Py)$$

$$(b) \ \iota x(Qx)P \equiv \exists!yQy \wedge \exists y(Qy \wedge yP)$$

In words, a formula of the form 'the Q exemplifies/encodes property P ' is equivalent to 'there is a unique y that exemplifies Q and there is a y that exemplifies Q and that also exemplifies/encodes P . If we could apply *Descriptions* to the formula embedded under the Σ_{lotr} operator in (103), we would be able to derive the following:

$$(106) \quad \Sigma_{lotr} \exists!y(A!y \wedge \forall F(yF \equiv \Sigma_{lotr} Ff)) \wedge$$

$$\exists y(A!y \wedge \forall F(yF \equiv \Sigma_{lotr} Ff) \wedge Sy)$$

Formula (106) says (amongst other things) that *The Lord of the Rings* encodes that there is an abstract object that was born in the Shire. Surely, even someone engaged in an object theoretic discussion should not be licensed to say that. The abstract object *The Lord of the Rings* does not encode any existence claims about abstract objects. In fact, this inference is *not* licensed because, although the encoding environment created by the fiction operator may be denotational, it is also *hyperintensional*, i.e., it does not allow for substitution

¹⁴The second sub-challenge discussed by Semeijn and Zalta (2021) relates to substitutions of definite descriptions in the formal language that *can* be read back into natural language. Consider for instance:

- (iv) In *The Lord of the Rings*, the character portrayed by Elijah Wood was born in the Shire.

Object theory predicts that (iv) is part of the parafictional data in natural language. Semeijn and Zalta suggest that this is not problematic because explicit parafictional statements are subject to a *de re/ de dicto* ambiguity and (iv) is in fact true on a *de re* reading.

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of necessary equivalents *salva veritate*. This is possible because, in object theory, necessary equivalence does not entail identity (cf. Myhill (1963)) (e.g., the property of ‘being a brown and colourless dog’ is necessary equivalent to the property of ‘being a barber that shaves all and only those that don’t shave themselves’ but these are distinct properties). Hence the inference from our application of *Descriptions* to the formula embedded under Σ_{lotr} in (103), to (106) is not licensed; we cannot substitute the equivalent formulas within the hyperintensional environment.

Outlook

Although we can incorporate the object theoretic analysis of metafictional and parafictional discourse into the workspace account (and adjust our fictive closure operation accordingly) and hence arrive at a consistent account of the different anaphoric dependencies that are possible across mixed discourse (that avoids the problem of the wrong kind of object), it does come at some theoretical costs. The main issue in combining object theory with the workspace account is that we are forced to give up the Lewisian analysis of the fiction operator in favour of the object theoretic analysis of the fiction operator. First, on the earlier adopted Lewisian analysis of parafictional discourse, implicit parafictional discourse is covertly prefixed by a fiction operator. This is inconsistent with the object theoretic analysis of implicit parafictional statements as unprefixed statements about what properties fictional characters *encode*. Second, even if we wanted to maintain the Lewisian analysis only for explicit parafictional statements, reference to abstract objects in explicit parafictional statements then does become problematic. Assuming that ‘being abstract’ is an essential property in Kripke’s (1980) sense (i.e., a property that cannot change across possible worlds) and given that Frodo is an abstract object in the real world, Frodo will be an abstract object in all possible worlds including the *The Lord of the Rings* worlds. Arguably, we would thus be able to derive that in *The Lord of the Rings*, an abstract object was born in the Shire.

Having to give up the Lewisian analysis of parafictional discourse is somewhat disappointing. First, we lose the benefit of the very natural tie between the common ground framework and the Lewisian analysis that defines fictional truth in terms of overt beliefs in the community of origin. Second, the object theoretic analysis of parafictional discourse applies to both statements of the form ‘In *s*, ϕ ’ and ‘According to *s*, ϕ ’. We thus lose

6 The challenge of metafictional anaphora

any explanatory value of the two offered semantic analyses of ‘In’ and ‘According to’ concerning the diverging linguistic behaviour of these operators (see chapter 7).

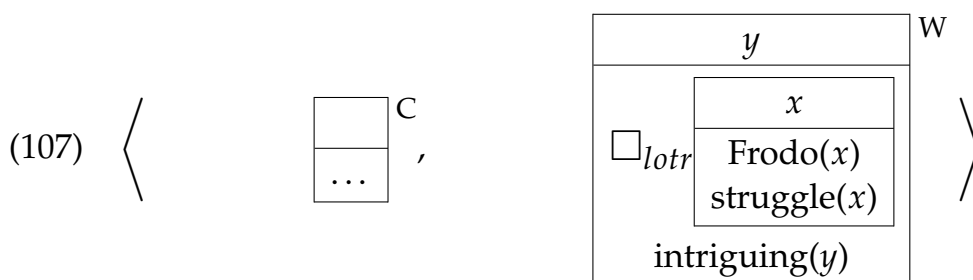
Hence, although an abstract object account adequately addresses the challenge of metafictional anaphora while avoiding the problem of the wrong kind of object, the account only works properly if we give up the Lewisian analysis of parafictional discourse. If we want to hold on to the Lewisian analysis, fictional names in parafictional discourse will somehow need to refer to flesh and blood individuals rather than abstract objects. Hence, in order to account for anaphoric dependencies across mixed metafictional and parafictional discourse while still avoiding the problem of the wrong kind of object in its different variants, it seems we will need to posit some kind of ambiguity in fictional names. The next section explores such an account.

6.4.4 Dot-object theory: The different facets of Frodo

An alternative solution to the problem of metafictional anaphora that is formally similar to the object theoretic solution but that incorporates an ambiguity analysis of fictional names, is to follow [Recanati \(2018\)](#) and claim that fictional names in parafictional and metafictional statements refer to so-called ‘dot-objects’ that are accessible in the main box.

Dot-object theory

Recanati goes back to Kripke’s and Currie’s intuition that fictional names are ambiguous. In parafictional statements ‘Frodo’ refers to a flesh and blood individual and in metafictional statements ‘Frodo’ refers to an abstract object. Such an approach to our central example of metafictional anaphora (67) would result in the following workspace update:



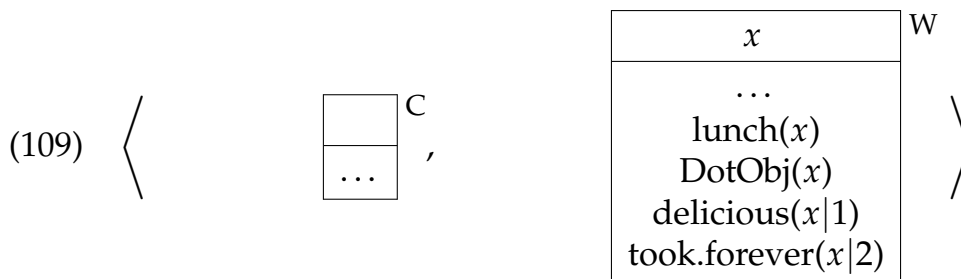
However, as has been explained in section 6.2.2, an ambiguity analysis seems to conflict with the anaphoric link in (67). In other words, it is incompatible

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with what Recanati dubs the ‘Anaphora-Coreference Principle’ (i.e., if a pronoun is anaphoric on an antecedent name, the two terms co-refer (if they refer at all)) that is presupposed by previously discussed accounts of metafictional anaphora. However, Recanati argues, there are apparent counterexamples to this principle. Take the following sentence:

(108) Lunch_{*i*} was delicious, but it_{*i*} took forever. (Adapted from Asher 2011, p.11)

The pronoun ‘it’ is anaphoric on the noun ‘lunch’ of the preceding clause. However, ‘lunch’ and ‘it’ do not co-refer; ‘lunch’ refers to food (which was delicious) and ‘it’ refers to a social event (which took forever). Recanati argues that we can save the Anaphora-Coreference Principle by appealing to the notion of a dot-object (see e.g., Pustejovsky (1995); Luo (2012); Asher (2011)), i.e., “a complex entity involving several ‘facets’” (Recanati, 2018, p.15). For instance, the noun ‘lunch’ is polysemous (i.e., it can refer to two (closely related) things: lunch qua food or lunch qua social event) and hence denotes a dot-object (represented as `food • social event`) involving several facets (i.e., a food facet and a social event facet). Thus, in (108) ‘lunch’ and ‘it’ do actually co-refer (i.e. to the dot-object ‘lunch’ or `food • social event`), but the predicates ‘being delicious’ and ‘taking forever’ apply to different facets of the object (i.e., respectively to the food facet and to the social event facet). A workspace updated with (108) will thus look as follows, where the dot-object lunch (x) is predicated over through its food facet (represented as $x|1$, i.e., x predicated over through its first facet) and through its social event facet ($x|2$):



According to Recanati, fictional names are also polysemous (i.e., they can refer to flesh and blood individuals or to abstract objects) and denote dot-objects (e.g., ‘Frodo’ denotes the dot-object `flesh and blood individual • abstract object`). In metafictional statements ‘Frodo’ refers to this dot-object through its abstract object facet. In (explicit and implicit) parafictional state-

6 The challenge of metafictional anaphora

ments, 'Frodo' refers to this dot-object through its flesh and blood individual facet.

Recanati incorporates Zalta's distinction between encoding and exemplifying properties. The abstract object facet of Frodo both exemplifies properties such as being invented by Tolkien and encodes properties such as being a hobbit. Hence, the duality that is reflected in the two aspects of the dot-object Frodo, is also internal to the abstract object facet. Recanati agrees with Zalta that what properties the abstract object (facet) encodes is determined by our parafictional knowledge. However, whereas for Zalta the name 'Frodo' in parafictional discourse refers simply to an abstract object, for Recanati, it refers to a complex dot-object *through its flesh and blood facet*. Recanati can thus maintain that parafictional discourse that mentions Frodo is *primarily* about the flesh and blood hobbit.

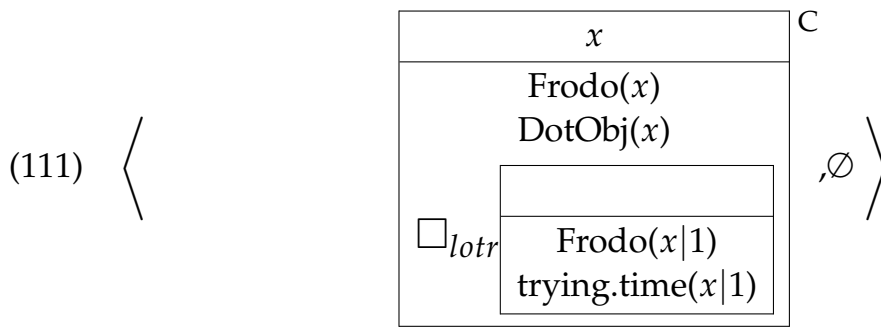
Fictive closure**

Applying Recanati's analysis to the workspace account suggests an adjustment of the fictive closure operation. I present a (simplified) representation of fictive closure** of fictional statement (25). First, we update the workspace with the content expressed by (25):

$$(110) \quad \left\langle \begin{array}{|c|} \hline \\ \hline \dots \\ \hline \end{array} \right\rangle^C, \quad \left\langle \begin{array}{|c|} \hline x' \\ \hline Frodo(x') \\ \text{trying.time}(x') \\ \hline \end{array} \right\rangle^W$$

At fictive closure** we update the common ground with discourse referents for dot-objects for any newly introduced fictional character and with parafictional information based on the content of the workspace. Dot-objects can be referred to as dot-objects (x), through their flesh and blood facet ($x|1$) (as is done in the parafictional condition) or through their abstract object facet ($x|2$). As in fictive closure* (see section 6.4.3), proper name conditions are doubled and also placed in the main box.

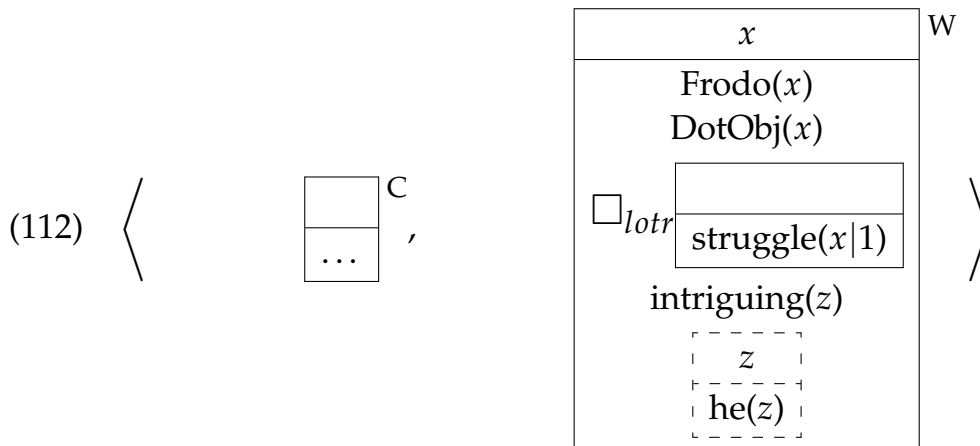
6.4 A comparison of different solutions



As with fictive closure*, fictive closure** greatly complicates the basic (descriptivist) fictive closure operation by moving discourse referents for fictional entities outside of the DRS embedded under the fiction operator. Similar to fictive closure*, fictive closure** can be made into a more uniform mechanism if we combine a dot-object approach to fictional names with a de re version of the workspace account.

Addressing the challenge

A dot-object analysis of fictional characters solves the challenge posed by metafictional anaphora as in (67). A workspace updated with (67) looks as follows (before pronoun resolution):

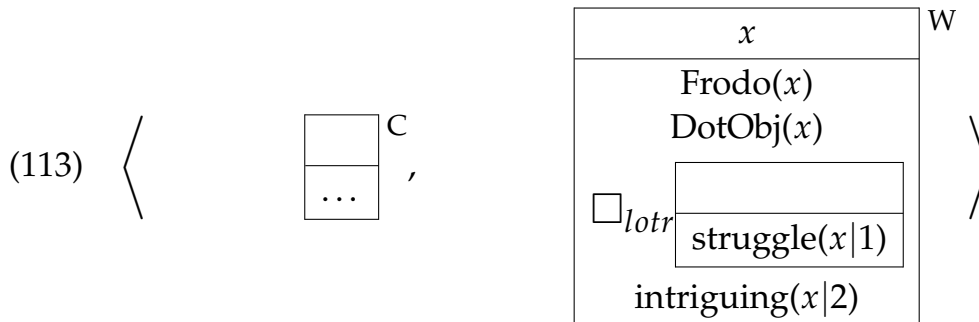


As the DRS shows, the discourse referent x for the dot-object Frodo is accessible outside of the 'In *The Lord of the Rings*'-operator.¹⁵ This dot-object

¹⁵Here I assume that it is common ground that there is a dot-object Frodo after the parafictional update in (67). This is not obvious. Arguably, in the case of (108), as long as we talk about lunch as food and there is no mention of lunch as a social event, we are really just talking about lunch as food. Only at the introduction of the zeugmatic discourse

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can be predicated over through its abstract object facet by the metafictional condition, i.e., ‘intriguing($x|2$)’. Hence we can equate the discourse referents for ‘Frodo’ and ‘he’ and interpret the metafictional statement in (67).



Although the solution is formally very similar to the solution offered by an abstract object account, it avoids a reoccurrence of the realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object while maintaining the Lewisian analysis of parafictional statements: the name ‘Frodo’ refers to the dot-object Frodo *through its flesh and blood facet* rather than to an abstract object in parafictional discourse. Moreover, like the object theoretic solution, a dot-object solution can easily be extended to account for parafictional anaphora and cases of co-predication across mixed metafictional and parafictional discourse. In general, dot-objects for fictional characters are always globally accessible in the main DRS (whether they have been introduced by fictional, parafictional or metafictional discourse). They can be predicated over through their flesh and blood facets in parafictional discourse and their abstract object facets in metafictional discourse. Whether the metafictional predication follows the parafictional predication, precedes it or occurs in the same statement is irrelevant.

Outlook

Although a fictive closure** variant of the workspace account that incorporates dot-objects seems to be a promising alternative to the simple descriptivist version of the workspace account (while still being consistent

does it become common ground that there is a dot-object (food • social event) that we refer to. The same could be true about (67). However, as Recanati suggests, the (overt or covert) ‘In fiction s' -prefix in parafictional discourse forces a ‘metafictional perspective’; it makes us aware of the fictionality of the fictional characters and hence it is directly common ground at the parafictional update that we are referring to a dot-object including an abstract object facet.

6.4 A comparison of different solutions

with adhering to the Lewisian analysis of parafictional discourse), some of the details still need to be worked out. First, as Recanati himself also notes (2018, p. 43), the metaphysical status of dot-objects is controversial: is a dot-object simply an ordered tuple of its facets, e.g., $x = \langle x|1, x|2 \rangle$ (cf. Cooper (2007); Gotham (2017))? Must all facets of a dot-object exist in order for the dot-object to exist? These questions are especially pressing in the case of fiction where one of the facets of the dot-object (i.e., the flesh and blood individual facet) does not actually exist.

If the facets *do* all need to exist (in the actual world), this would mean that in order to engage in metafictional and parafictional discourse we have to assume the existence of both an abstract object *and* the existence of a flesh and blood creature. Arguably, this would make the dot-object x globally accessible through both facets. Such a strategy would entail adopting some kind of pretence analysis of parafictional discourse (cf. Evans (1982); Recanati (2018)) since we talk about fictional entities as if they really existed. In contrast, if we allow for facets to either really exist or (merely) exist in some fiction, we would only have to assume the existence of an abstract object and the existence *in some fictional worlds* of a flesh and blood creature in order to engage in metafictional and parafictional discourse. Arguably, this would imply that, although the discourse referent for the dot-object x is still always globally accessible through its abstract object facet, it is only accessible *through its flesh and blood facet* under the relevant fiction operator. This outcome fits neatly with an analysis of parafictional discourse as embedded assertions. Such a strategy would still amount to assuming some kind of realist/anti-realist ambiguity in fictional names, but would effectively stick to a descriptivist analysis of fictional names in parafictional discourse.

Alternatively, in order to avoid metaphysical assumptions about the existence of multifaceted dot-objects, Recanati suggests that the correct objects of study are in fact dot-*concepts* (i.e., concepts of dot-objects) or mental files (see Recanati (2012)) of dot-objects, rather than dot-objects.¹⁶ Similarly, in the DRS's above, the discourse referents for dot-objects and their associated conditions can be understood as representing concepts rather than objects.

¹⁶Cf. Ninan's (2017) analysis of fictional names as referring to *possibilia*, (i.e., entities that exist at other possible worlds than the actual world) and Stokke's (forthcoming-a) recent proposal that fictional names refer to individual concepts.

6.5 Conclusions and further research

One of the central aims of this chapter has been to draw attention to the general challenge posed by metafictional discourse and especially the current desideratum for a theory of fictional names to account for anaphoric dependencies across parafictional and metafictional discourse while avoiding the problem of the wrong kind of object in its different variants. I have argued that the basic descriptivist version of the workspace account runs into difficulties with metafictional anaphora because the discourse referent for the fictional name introduced in the parafictional statement is not accessible outside of the 'In fiction *s*'-operator. This problem generalizes to other current dynamic approaches that involve separation of the content and discourse referents of the fictional narrative. I have evaluated four different accounts of metafictional anaphora: a descriptivist approach (that requires an additional account of how to accommodate the right kind of definite descriptions and cannot easily be extended to account for parafictional anaphora or co-predication across mixed metafictional/parafictional discourse), an approach based on changing the accessibility relations (that cannot straightforwardly be extended to a workspace account and runs into the anti-realist variant of the problem of the wrong kind of object), an abstract object account (that can give a consistent explanation of all anaphoric dependencies but forces us to give up the Lewisian analysis of parafictional discourse) and a dot-object account (that avoids the aforementioned problem but remains unclear on some crucial parts).

As mentioned in the introduction, any semantic account of fictional names will have to account for the use of pronominal anaphora across all acceptable types of mixed discourse. More specifically, it would be interesting to extend the described accounts of metafictional anaphora to other, potentially problematic, cases. For instance, an interesting type of discourse is what [Bjurman Pautz \(2008\)](#) dubs 'reports on fictional co-reference', i.e., anaphoric dependencies across belief reports on different people's parafictional beliefs as in (114). A related kind of discourse involves anaphoric dependencies across parafictional statements about different, inconsistent, fictional narratives. For instance, I can compare the location of Watson's war wound in two novels of the Sherlock Holmes series that are inconsistent in this respect as in (115). Or, suppose that apart from *The Lord of the Rings* Tolkien also wrote an alternative story (*The Lord of the Schmings*) in which the character

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Gimli (a dwarf in *The Lord of the Rings*) is an elf. I could then felicitously say (116):

- (114) Bridget believes that Sherlock Holmes_i is smart and Caroline believes that he_i is smart. (Adapted from Bjurman Pautz, 2008)
- (115) In *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson's war wound_i is on his shoulder but in *The Sign of Four*, it_i is on his leg.
- (116) In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gimli_i is a dwarf but in *The Lord of the Schmings*, he_i is an elf.

Both types of discourse pose a challenge to a descriptivist version of the workspace account: discourse referents for Sherlock, Watson and Gimli are not accessible in the main box because they are embedded under a fiction operator (and in the case of (114) *also* embedded under a belief operator). Sentences (115) and (116) have the additional complication that, although the pronouns 'it' and 'he' are anaphoric on respectively 'Watson's war wound' and 'Gimli', it is not clear that these terms do in fact refer to the same fictional entity since they are ascribed inconsistent (individual-level) predicates in different narratives.

Discourses involving fictional co-reference or anaphoric dependencies across parafictional statements about distinct (inconsistent) narratives are reminiscent of both the phenomenon of counterfactual imagination (see e.g., Friend (2011b)) and Geach's Hob-Nob puzzle:

- (117) Hob thinks a witch_i blighted Bob's mare, and Nob thinks she_i killed Cob's sow. (Adapted from Geach, 1967)

Here the pronominal anaphora occur across two different propositional attitude reports and although the pronoun 'she' is anaphoric on 'a witch', there need not be one particular witch that is the object of thought of both Hob and Nob. Future research will have to determine how to account for discourses such as (114), (115) and (116) and specify their relation to other puzzles.

As Bjurman Pautz notes, a possible strategy to deal with fictional co-reference as in (114) is to adopt an object theoretic approach so that the terms 'Sherlock Holmes' and 'he' in (114) refer to a globally accessible abstract object. Arguably, a dot-object approach would function similarly. Moreover, both strategies can be extended to account for discourse such as (115) and (116). Concerning the ascription of inconsistent properties to the same fictional character we can maintain, in an object theoretic account,

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that 'Gimli' and 'he' in (116) refer to the same *consistent* fictional character that only encodes being a dwarf (because Gimli is native to *The Lord of the Rings*). In cases where there is no clearly authoritative narrative (e.g., in (115)), we can analyse 'Watson's war wound' and 'it' as referring to the same fictional character that encodes *inconsistent* properties (assuming a theory of fictional truth that allows for inconsistent explicit parafictional statements to be both true). On a dot-object approach, we can – assuming we do not allow for inconsistent 'flesh and blood facets' – analyse the terms 'Watson's war wound' and 'it' in (115) and 'Gimli' and 'he' in (116) as referring to the same dot-objects but through different 'flesh and blood facets'. We thus require dot-objects with three or four different facets: In the case of (116) a 'flesh and blood dwarf' facet, a 'flesh and blood elf' facet, and one or two abstract object facets (depending on whether we allow for inconsistent abstract objects).

Appendix

Examples of all six possible types of mixed discourse with fictional, parafictional and metafictional statements.

<i>Type of mixed discourse</i>	<i>Example</i>
fictional/ parafictional	Hans _i and Gretel _j approached the skyscraper. "Maybe you should have a look inside, Gretel. They might have candy", whispered Hans _i . * Gretel _j moved closer... *In this story, she _j is the hero that saves the day. He _i is the villain. (Semeijn and Zalta, 2021, p.7)
fictional/ metafictional	In order to capture the witch, Mary _i travelled to the woods and disguised herself as a potato.* In the woods she _i encountered many perils... *I know this is weird but I invented her _i while eating chips. (Semeijn and Zalta, 2021, p.6-7).
parafictional/ fictional	In the story I made up yesterday, a wizard called Brian _i falls in love with a cauldron. Let me tell it to you: One day, he _i was alone in his _i study trying out a new love-potion recipe... (Semeijn and Zalta, 2021, p.6)
parafictional/ metafictional	In <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> , Frodo _i goes through an immense mental struggle to save his _i friends. Ah yes, he _i is an intriguing fictional character!
metafictional/ fictional	Frey _i is a fictional character I made up and is the protagonist of my newest story. Here it is: One day she _i was walking through the woods near her home... (Semeijn and Zalta, 2021, p.6)
metafictional/ parafictional	Sherlock Holmes _i is a fictional character created by Conan Doyle. In Conan Doyle's stories, he _i is a private detective who investigates cases for a variety of clients, including Scotland Yard. (Adapted from Recanati, 2018, p.37)

