When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories

BW12: Fiction, Literature and Beyond
(University of Barcelona)

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Plan

Visualizing *Lolita*: a case study in graphic misinterpretations

Fictional objects and descriptivism

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  └─ Visualizing *Lolita*: a case study in graphic misinterpretations
      └─ Introduction to *Lolita*'s imagery

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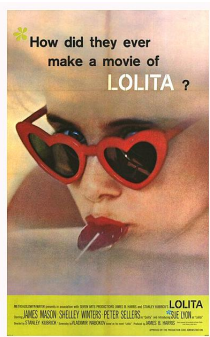 From bad representations to anti-descriptivism
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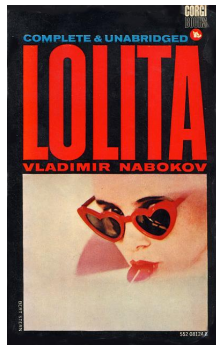
Fictional objects and descriptivism
  Meinong's strong descriptivism
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1962 US Poster for Kubrick's film

1969 GB Transworld (Corgi), London

Even though Lolita's lips are described as being "as red as licked red candy," Humbert buys Lolita a lollipop only once in the novel, and so it is probably due to the power of Kubrick's 1962 film, and the iconic poster of Sue Lyon seductively licking a red lollipop, that we associate this candy so strongly with the character.[1]

[1] *Alice Twemlow "Reflections on Covers Commissioned for the Lolita Book Cover Project", in* (John Bertram 2013: 62)

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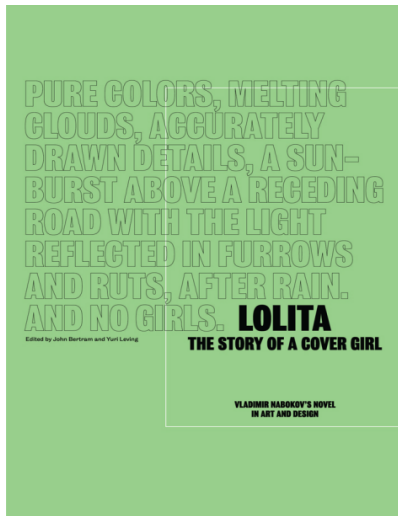   └─ Introduction to *Lolita*'s imagery
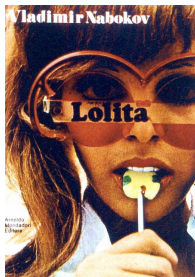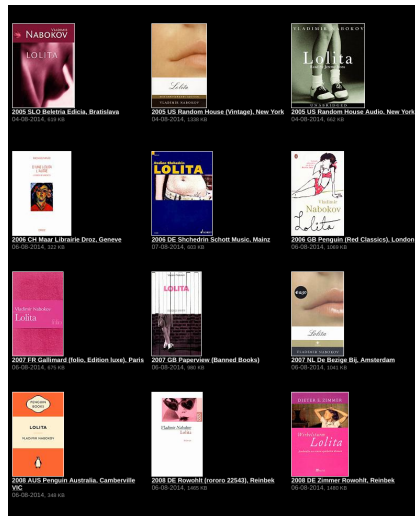

1969 IT Mondadori, Rome

A 2012 Aldo Campaign Used Kubrick-Style Lolita Imagery.

In Chasing Lolita, Graham Vickers writes that "Lolita herself was eventually to become an enduring object of interest for reasons that were rarely literary." Take, for instance, the "counterfeit Lolita fashion," which Vickers argues was a media creation; heart-shaped sunglasses "had nothing whatever to do with [Nabokov's] Lolita [...]" This does not prevent fashion companies and their marketing departments from exploiting imagery indebted to Kubrick's Lolita in selling their products to a young audience.[2]

[2] John Bertram and Yuri Leving "Colorful Misunderstandings, Graphic Misinterpretations", (John Bertram 2013: 21-2)

(John Bertram 2013)

Dieter E. Zimmer's online exhibition

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Ways of identification

- ▶ The previous illustrations purport to identify Dolores Haze.
    - ▶ I use "identify" instead of "refer", because Lolita is a fictional character.
    - ▶ *Technically*, the depicted girl is supposed to co-(pretend)-refer with a Nabokov's fictional use of "Lolita".
    - ▶ In Goodman's terminology, they are not illustrations *of* Lolita, but Lolita-illustrations.
- ▶ Two opposite views on identification of fictional characters:
    1. *Descriptivism*: identification through satisfaction of (a set of) predicates;
    2. *Anti-descriptivism*: direct identification (acquaintance) or identification through origin (in both cases: without satisfaction, relationally).
- ▶ **Claim**: a short study of book covers shows that designers presuppose both views somehow.

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The subtle art of cover design

Any publisher that understands the significance of paratexts for the fate of the products they support would never make haphazard decisions regarding blurbs and book jackets at the last minute. Above all, a publisher would ensure that the book and its cover did not contradict each other. Many gaffes occur because the illustrators, who often create cover art for several titles at once, frequently don't read the books themselves.

Creating the appropriate book cover for Lolita is a difficult task [...], since the cover must perform a balancing act. On the one hand, it must repudiate the book's theme of pedophilia; on the other hand, the novel is unquestionably about a young girl and a case of erotomania.[3]

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[3]*Dieter E. Zimmer "Dolly as Cover Girl" (John Bertram 2013: 234–5).*

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Nabokov's disregarded intentions

▶ In letters for the 1st amercian edition, Nabokov wrote:[4]

> *[March 1, 1958] What about the jacket? After thinking it over, I would rather not involve butterflies. Do you think it could be possible to find today in New York an artist who would not be influenced in his work by the general cartoonesque and primitivist style jacket illustration? Who would be capable of creating a romantic, delicately drawn, non-Freudian and non-juvenile, picture for LOLITA (a dissolving remoteness, a soft American landscape, a nostalgic highway — that sort of thing)?* *There is one subject which I am emphatically opposed to: any kind of representation of a little girl.*

> *[April 23, 1958] I have just received the five designs and I quite agree with you that none of them is satisfactory ... I want pure colours, melting clouds, accurately drawn details, a sunburst above a receding road with the light reflected in furrows and ruts, after rain.* *And no girls.* *If we cannot find that kind of artistic and virile painting, let us settle for an immaculate white jacket (rough texture paper instead of the usual glossy kind), with LOLITA in bold black lettering.*

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[4]The 1st edition had the traditional green text-only cover distinctive of Olympia Press (Paris).

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From good representations to descriptivism

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From bad representations...

- Here are blatant misrepresentations of Lolita:[5]
  - Picturing Lolita as a 21-year-old woman;
  - Picturing Lolita as blond...

1959 TUR Aydin Yayinevi, Istanbul

2011 GB Penguin (Essentials), London

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[5] At the level of "elucidation" (Friend 2017), i.e. regarding what is "true in the fiction" or "storified".

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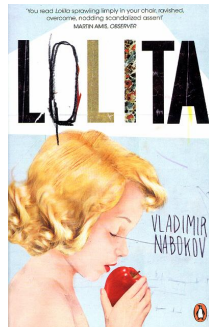
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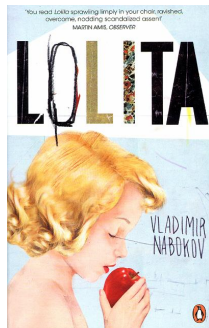1959 TUR Aydin Yayinevi, Istanbul

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... to anti-descriptivism

- ▶ Descriptivism predicts that blatant misrepresentations fail to identify Lolita.
  - ▶ the predicates expressed by the depiction are different from the ones expressed in Nabokov's text.
  - ▶ Hence, the depicted girls on the covers do not identify Lolita.
  - ▶ *Take-home message*: in order to *mis*represent X, *first* one identifies X, *then* one ascribes wrong predicates to X.
    - ▶ Erroneous representations make a case against descriptivism.[6]

- ▶ **Reply**: "Lolita" is written on the cover. The previous images are like those of the legendary Orbaneja:[7]

    a painter there was at Ubeda, who when they asked him what he was painting, used to say "whatever it may turn out"; and if he chanced to paint a cock he would write under it, "This is a cock", for fear they might think it was a fox.

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[6]Remember Kripke on Aristotle, and Schmidt.

[7]He is mentioned twice by Don Quixote (vol. 2, ch. 3 & 71), each time to worry (metafictionally about vol. 1) that the story published by Cide Hamete Benengeli may not match the deeds.

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The Sue Lyon case

> *However iconic it has become, this popular image of a lascivious Lolita licking a lollipop in the manner of an experienced porn star is a blatant misrepresentation of Nabokov's novel, its characters and its themes. [...] such [sexually explicit] covers continue to perpetuate a narrative nowhere to be found in Nabokov's text: that a twelve year old American kid named Dolores Haze was possessed of a promiscuous sexual appetite and highly charged erotic tastes. Nor do these covers bear any resemblance to the fantasized nymphet conjured by Humbert's romantic imagination, an enthralling image to which he sacrifices the actual child's welfare.[8]*

▶ Identifying the Sue Lyon pose with Nabokov's character is a case of "thematic misinterpretation".[9]

  ▶ Such identification is *erroneous*...

  ▶ ... but not Orbaneja-stye erroneous.

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[8]*Ellen Pfifer "Uncovering Lolita" (John Bertram 2013: §7).*

[9](Friend 2017): "identifying the themes and theses in the work as a whole"

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- ▶ According to descriptivism, granted criticisms like Pfifer's:
  - ▶ Kubrick's film (and the subsequent "counterfeit Lolita Fashion") has nothing to do with Nabokov's original story.
  - ▶ i.e. in particular, they do not talk about the same character.
- ▶ Anti-descriptivism is obviously better:
  - ▶ Kubrick identifies Lolita by pointing to Nabokov's original (pretend) use of the name (he *adapts* the novel)
    - ▶ *Catch-phrase*: a *bad* adaptation is still an adaptation.
  - ▶ Then, Kubrick had a lot of followers...
    - ▶ ... for better or worse.
- ▶ *Again*, misrepresentation presupposes identification.
  - ▶ In this case, misrepresentation is grounded on a shared, controversial (or polemical) interpretation of the original story.
    - ▶ *pace* Nabokov's intentions.

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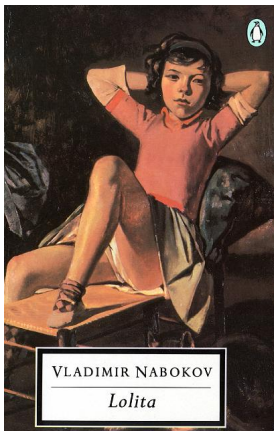   From bad representations to anti-descriptivism
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From good representations...

1995 GB Penguin, London
(Balthus - Girl with a cat - 1937)

Rather than setting a supposedly real Lolita on the cover, going with an older painting is actually not a bad idea. [...] It is, so to speak, an unobtrusive indicator of artistic merit and conveys something to the potential reader: Although this book deals with the erotic appeal of a young girl, it is not pornography, and there is no crude realism to be expected but, rather, an exceptionally artistic rendering of the material.[10]

[10]Dieter E. Zimmer "Dolly as a cover girl" (John Bertram 2013: §10).

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The preference for Balthus is appropriate for a number of reasons. First, he is one of the modern artists Nabokov held in high regard. In an interview with Alfred Appel in 1970, Nabokov began praising the artist without being prompted: "A contemporary artist who I admire, not only because he painted a Lolita-like creature, is Balthus" (Deutliche Worte, 264). Nabokov is referring to the numerous nymphs that Balthus (1908–2001) created during his lifetime, works that were often rightly described as unsettling. The figures were girlish forms, somewhere between child and woman, and set within a sort of anachronistic ambiance. They always seem to exhibit an element of the surreal. In no conventional way could they be construed as cute or sexy, and they become erotic only under the gaze of the viewer. Each one is serious, self-absorbed, enigmatic, and unsettling. Yet, either in spite of, or precisely because of, their distance, they appear to attract covetous glances—neither reluctantly nor entirely unintentionally. Many appear as if they just had been raped or were about to be raped. In this respect they are similar to Lolita—a perfect illustration for the novel.[11]

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▶ Zimmer's reasoning is typically descriptivist:
  ▶ We can / should identify Balthus's "girl with cat" because she "is similar" to Nabokov's Lolita.
  ▶ They are similar *both* at the level of elucidation and thematic interpretation.
▶ *Moreover*, Zimmer's "artistic solution" is incompatible with anti-descriptivism (relation to the origin).
  ▶ The paintings *precede* the story.
  ▶ By definition, they cannot point to the original character.

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"Artistic covers" are all over the place

Detail from *Portrait of a young woman* 1935, by Meredith Frampton

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Wraping up

- ▶ *Lolita* is arguably one of the most spectacular case of massive misinterpretations![12]

- ▶ Interestingly, looking at covers, I showed that visualizing fictional characters pushes in opposite directions:

  - ▶ *On the one hand*, the mere possibility of misrepresentations is incompatible with descriptivism:

    - ▶ Csq: identifying a fictional character cannot (always) be the result of a satisfaction procedure.

  - ▶ *On the other*, the mere possibility of "artistic covers" is incompatible with the originalist anti-descriptivism:

    - ▶ It is possible (sometimes) to identify a fictional character *via* the relevant features.[13]

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[12] It is why american publishers did not want to publish the novel. Nabokov even suggests misinterpretation is one of the reason why Olympia Press published the book in the first place (see "On a book entitled *Lolita*").

[13] After all, the relationist option was bound to be a long shot, for we do not have *real* relations toward Lolita!

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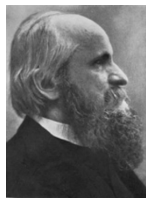 From good representations to descriptivism

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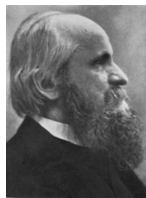 Are fictional objects Meinongian objects?

Meinongian objects (Meinong 1904)

▶ Even though they have no *Sein*, inexistent (and impossible) objects have a
  Sosein and can be the genuine subjects of (true) judgements attributing to
  them:
    ▶ their own constitutive properties:
        ▶ The golden mountain is a mountain
        ▶ Pegasus is a winged horse
    ▶ ontological properties:
        ▶ The golden mountain does not exist/is possible
        ▶ Pegasus does not exist/is incomplete
    ▶ converse intentional properties:
        ▶ The golden mountain is wanted by gold-diggers
        ▶ Pegasus was admired by Greek children

When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
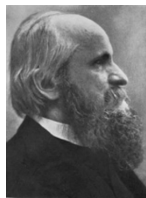Fictional objects and descriptivism
Meinong's strong descriptivism

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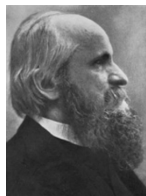└─ Fictional objects and descriptivism
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When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
└─ Fictional objects and descriptivism
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Noneist logic (>< referentialist logic) (Routley 1980)

▶ Existence (Ea) and possibility ($\blacklozenge a$) predicates

EG: $Fa \wedge Ea \vdash \exists x Fx$ UI: $\forall x Fx \vdash Ea \rightarrow Fa$

$\quad\;\; Fa \wedge \blacklozenge a \vdash \Sigma x Fx$ $\quad\;\; \Pi x Fx \vdash \blacklozenge a \rightarrow Fa$

▶ Neutral quantifiers (objectual rather than substitutional interpretation)

EG: $Fa \vdash PxFx$ UI: $UxFx \vdash Fa$

$\Sigma x Fx =_{def} Px(Fx \wedge \blacklozenge x)$ $\Pi x Fx =_{def} Ux(\blacklozenge x \rightarrow Fx)$

$\exists x Fx =_{def} Px(Fx \wedge Ex)$ $\forall x Fx =_{def} Ux(Ex \rightarrow Fx)$

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When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
Fictional objects and descriptivism
Meinong's strong descriptivism

Nuclear and extranuclear (supervening) properties

- ► Ontological properties are extranuclear (*nicht konstitutorisch*)
  - ► otherwise : The existent golden mountain exists
- ► and can only be defined through second order quantification :

  $\blacklozenge a =_{def} (UF)\neg(Fa \land \overline{F}a)$ possible = consistent
  $Ea =_{def} (UF)(\neg Fa \leftrightarrow \overline{F}a)$ existent = complete (except for (Parsons 1980))

- ► Converse intentional properties are also extranuclear and somehow supervene on nuclear properties (except for (Jacquette 1996))

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When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
└─ Fictional objects and descriptivism
  └─ Meinong's strong descriptivism

Strong descriptivism

- ▶ Characterisation postulate:
  - ▶ Every object has its own (nuclear) constitutive properties
    - ▶ The actual King of France is a King;
    - ▶ The round square is square (and round)
- ▶ Inexistent objects are "incomplete"
  - ▶ Sherlock H. has (not ?) a mole on his right shoulder;
  - ▶ The triangle is (not ?) equiangular
- ▶ Every change of property yields to another object
  - ▶ the bald King of France ≠ the King of France;
  - ▶ the blue round square ≠ the round square

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When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
    Fictional objects and descriptivism
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Strong descriptivism

- ▶ Meinongian objects keep their properties in all possible worlds
    - ▶ the bald King of France "stands next to" the King of France in every world
    - ▶ All possible worlds have the same domain of objects

        BF: $Ux\Box Fx \rightarrow \Box UxFx$ CBF: $\Box UxFx \rightarrow Ux\Box Fx$

- ▶ Since/if extranuclear properties supervene on nuclear properties, Meinongian objects also keep their extranuclear properties in all possible worlds:
    - ▶ (im)possibility, (in)completeness , (in)existence (unless ≠ completeness)

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When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
└─ Fictional objects and descriptivism
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Strong descriptivism (Parsons 1980)

- ▶ Each objet corresponds to a set of properties: $a \equiv \{F, G, H, ...\}$ (possibly closed under implication)
  - ▶ the round square $\equiv$ {round, square}
    - ▶ ($\equiv$ {round, square, equilateral, rectangular, ...})
  - ▶ the golden mountain $\equiv$ { mountain, made of gold}
  - ▶ But also : Pegasus, Bruno Leclercq, ...
- ▶ Every judgement attributing a nuclear property is analytic: Fa iff $F \in a$
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- ▶ Only judgements attributing "extranuclear" properties could be synthetic

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When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
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Two kinds of predication (Rapaport 1978), (Zalta 1988)

- ▶ Constitutive predication (constituency, encoding): aF iff $F \in a$ (iff $a \equiv \{F, ...\}$)
  - ▶ The bald King of France is bald
- ▶ Contingent predication (exemplification): Fa
  - ▶ Bruno Leclercq is bald
- ▶ Actual objects exemplify their properties
- ▶ Inexistent/Meinongian objects encode but do not exemplify their properties

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Plan

Visualizing *Lolita*: a case study in graphic misinterpretations
    Introduction to *Lolita*'s imagery
    From bad representations to anti-descriptivism
    From good representations to descriptivism

Fictional objects and descriptivism
    Meinong's strong descriptivism
    Are fictional objects Meinongian objects?

When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
Fictional objects and descriptivism
Are fictional objects Meinongian objects?

Are fictional characters/objects Meinongian objects?

- ▶ Should we put Sherlock Holmes and the golden mountain in the same bag?
  - ▶ Like the golden mountain, Holmes would be a set of constitutive properties – explicitly attributed to him in Doyle's novels – and therefore incomplete
  - ▶ Holmes would be the subject of analytic propositions (aF iff $F \in a$)
  - ▶ Holmes could not change any of his properties without changing identity

When Fictive Objects are Visualized: A Challenge for Descriptive Theories
└─ Fictional objects and descriptivism
  └─ Are fictional objects Meinongian objects?

Fictional objects do not comply with strong descriptivism

- ▶ Unlike the golden mountain, Sherlock Holmes does not boil down to some (large) set of explicitly stated properties (and their analytic consequences)
- ▶ "Sherlock Holmes" is supposed to refer to an individual object which is described in – rather than defined by – Doyle's novels.
- ▶ This object is supposed to exist, and be complete, in its fictional world.
  - ▶ In the world where he exists , Holmes either has or doesn't have a mole on his right shoulder; only, we don't know
- ▶ epistemic rather than ontological incompleteness
- ▶ allows for imaginative completion

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Fictional objects do not even comply with descriptivism

▶ Holmes seems to be the subject of synthetic, not only analytic propositions.
  ▶ In the world where he exists, Holmes happens to live in Baker Street and to smoke pipe; it doesn't do that by definition.

▶ Holmes seems to be liable to modal/counterfactual propositions.
  ▶ Holmes could have lived in another street

▶ *some kind of direct referentiality with* "de re" (*yet* de altero mundo) *reading of definite descriptions*
  ▶ Watson' wife could have been Holmes' wife
  ▶ The ring-bearer could have refused to bear the ring

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Fictional objects and descriptivism
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Fictional objects do not even comply with descriptivism

- ▶ Even if they are known by description, concrete individual objects are somewhat independent from these descriptions.
  - ▶ "Sherlock Holmes"
  - ▶ "the man" (in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*)
  - ▶ "the golden mountain" in a fictional world were dwarfs would be trying to recover their golden mountain from the dragon who invaded it (= "Erebor")
- ▶ They could even be aimed at through referential (>< attributive) use of definite descriptions (Donnellan 1966), (Donnellan 1970)
  - ▶ "the ring-bearer" referring to Frodo on his way back to the County (i.e. after the ring destruction)

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Failures of an extensional account of fictional discourse
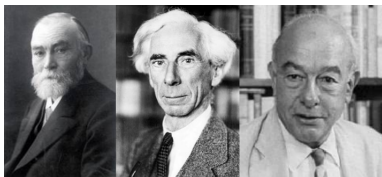
- ▶ Concept / object distinction : general properties/relations satisfied by individuals
- ▶ (genuine) Names (values of variables) refer to objects (make the "ontology")
- ▶ Conceptual terms don't ; they are classificatory principles (make the "ideology")
- ▶ Existence, like any quantification, is a second-order property: $\neg\exists x W x$

Failures of an extensional account of fictional discourse
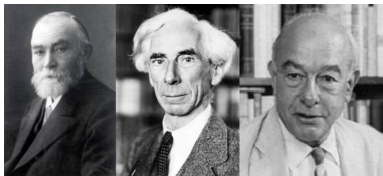
- Paraphrasing strategy for fictional discourse ("Surface" linguistic subjects)

  - Winged horses do not exist $\quad\quad$ $\neg\exists Wx$
  - Winged horses have heads/scales $\quad$ $\forall x(Wx \to Hx/Sx)$
  - Pegasus does not exist $\quad\quad$ $\neg\exists x[Px \land (Py \leftrightarrow x = y)]$
  - Pegasus has a head/scales $\quad\quad$ $\exists x[Px \land \forall y(Py \leftrightarrow x = y) \land Hx/Sx]$

Conceptual nature of Meinongian objects

Objects:

- ▶ characterized by defining features (and as such can be conceived at will)
- ▶ most generally incomplete (indeterminate with regard to some features)
- ▶ possible or impossible according to whether their features are compatible exist or not
- ▶ belong to all worlds yet are not instantiated by existent objects in all worlds
- ▶ subjects of analytic constitutive predications (encoding)
- ▶ terms of identity relations corresponding to L-equivalence
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- ▶ terms of co-substantiation relations corresping to F-équivalence

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- ▶ terms of identity relations corresponding to L-equivalence
- ▶ terms of participation relations corresponding to L-implication
- ▶ terms of co-substantiation relations corresping to F-équivalence

Identification of fictional objects: some challenges

- ▶ between the described object and one of its visualizations that "complete" it
- ▶ between two visualizations of a described object that complete it differently
- ▶ between the described object and one of its visualizations that features some of its core descriptive features yet partially contradicts its description
- ▶ between the described object and one of its visualizations that contradicts some of its core descriptive features

Fictional re-appearance

- Intra-work
  - Subjective
    - |
    - *Fictional (co)reference*
  - Inter-subjective
    - |
    - *Identifying "your" and "my" FC*
- Cross-work
  - Linguistico-linguistic
    - Keeping the original story
      - |
      - *Translations (Most) Fan-fictions*
    - Altering the original story
      - |
      - *Counter-fictions Retcon*
  - Linguistico-non-linguistic
    - |
    - *Adaptations Illustrations*