

# Names: fictional, real, full, and empty

Between Fiction and Non-Fiction

Uppsala, 13-14 June

Louis Rouillé

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# Plan

Preliminaries

A kripke view

Ryling on with fictional names

Concluding remarks

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## “So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d” (II, 2)

- ▶ Names are words and paradigmatically devices of *singular reference*.
  - ▶ Alongside with other linguistic devices like indexicals, demonstratives, pronouns, and (perhaps) definite descriptions.
- ▶ *How* they achieve singular reference is difficult to spell out exactly
  - ▶ I will follow the “new orthodoxy” in rejecting descriptivism.
    - ▶ i.e. go for direct reference;
    - ▶ *Names* directly refer exploiting some *relation* holding between the utterer and the referent.
  - ▶ Plausibly, the relation extends to “historico-causal” chains.
    - ▶ i.e. there is an initial launching of the name which secures reference;
    - ▶ reference is transmitted *via* chains of use.
- ▶ I do not need to go to the details here:
  - ▶ the distinctions I am interested in here abstract away from the specifics of a theory of names (and should apply across the board to terms).
  - ▶ But since I will mostly discuss (Kripke 1973/2013), it is useful to have this theory of names in the background.

# Distinctions

- ▶ *Empty / full* names:
  - ▶ A name is *empty* whenever it fails to achieve singular reference
    - ▶ e.g. Vulcain
  - ▶ A name is *full* whenever it achieves singular reference
    - ▶ e.g. Andreas Stokke
- ▶ *Fictional / real* names:<sup>1</sup>
  - ▶ A name is *fictional* whenever it was first introduced in a shared pretence
    - ▶ e.g. Romeo Montague
  - ▶ A name is *real* whenever its launching happened in a serious context
    - ▶ e.g. Aristotle
- ▶ These distinctions are uncontroversial:
  - ▶ how to interpret these distinctions breed controversies, though.<sup>2</sup>
  - ▶ Eventually, the aim is to have a general theory of names which explains the semantic contribution of each kind of names.

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<sup>1</sup>An alternative terminology is *conniving / non-conniving* use of a name (Evans 1982).

<sup>2</sup>Especially because *empty names* are a *prima facie* counter-example to the generalisation of direct reference theory, which has independent support (see (Kripke 1972)).

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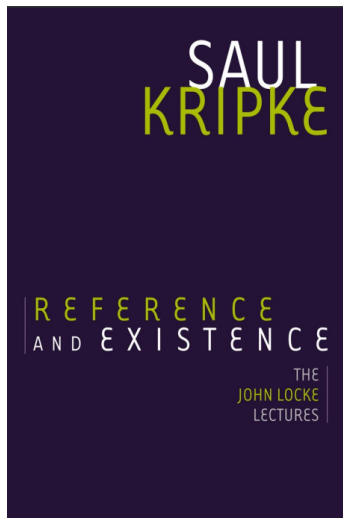
Alter egos

Fictional fictional characters

Fictional nonexistent characters

## Concluding remarks

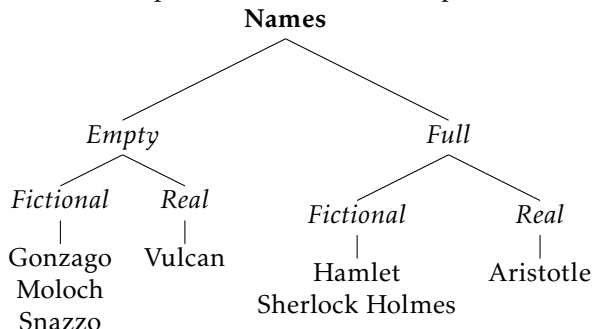
# The root of evil!





# The view

- ▶ In (Kripke 1973/2013: §3-4), Kripke argues that the 2 distinctions (empty/full; fictional/real) are orthogonal.
- ▶ Given his own examples, there are thus four possible cases:



## Intuitive content of the view

- ▶ There are fictional works, and we usually refer to them by their titles.
  - ▶ Fictional works have essential parts, viz. fictional characters, whom we refer to using fictional names.
  - ▶ *Emma* is Emma Woodhouse's story; *Madame Bovary* is Emma Bovary's story, etc.
- ▶ So fictional names refer (they are full)...
  - ▶ ... insofar as there is indeed a fictional work which tells the story of the fictional character bearing that name.
  - ▶ **Beware:** their referent is counter-intuitive (it is as abstract as a fictional work).
- ▶ Using (Donnellan 1975)'s famous terminology:<sup>3</sup>
  - ▶ a fictional name refers to (part of) the block it leads back to;
  - ▶ it fails to refer is there is no such block.

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<sup>3</sup>Note that Kripke uses it *against* Donnellan's own view, for "ending in a block" is originally an explanation of the name's emptiness.

## Textual evidence (Kripke 1973/2013: 71-2)

*So my view is that ordinary language quantifies over a realm of fictional or mythological entities. They don't exist, so to speak, automatically: they are not Meinongian in the sense that whatever is an object of thought exists in some second-class sense. On the contrary, it is an empirical question whether there was such and such fictional character. Was there a fictional or legendary character who married his grandmother? (There, of course, was a famous one who married his mother.) If there was, this will be true in virtue of appropriate works of fiction or legend having been written, or at least told orally, or something of the kind. If there is such a fictional work, then there is such a fictional character.*

*[...] On my view, to write a novel is, ordinarily, to create several fictional characters, as Twain, by writing Huckleberry Finn, brought both a novel and a fictional character into being. It is not that fictional characters exist in one sense but not in another. The fictional character Huckleberry Finn definitely exists, just as the novel does: I would withdraw the statement only if my impression that there was any real novel was mistaken.*

## (Salmon 1998: 301-2)

*Think of the various roles that a director might cast in a stage or screen production of a particular piece of fiction. Now think of the corresponding characters as the components of the fiction that play or occupy those roles in the fiction. It is no accident that one says of an actor in a dramatic production that he/she is playing a “part”. The characters of a fiction the occupants of roles in the fiction are in some real sense parts of the fiction itself. Sometimes, for example in historical fiction, what fictionally plays a particular role is a real person or thing. In other cases, what plays a particular role is the brainchild of the storyteller. In such cases, the role player is a wholly fictional character, or what I (following Kripke) have been calling simply a “fictional character”.*

- ▶ **th:** Fictional characters are *literally* parts of fictional works.
  - ▶ There is an intuitive mereology of fictional works in the background;
  - ▶ fictional works are wholes made of both real and fictional parts.

# Fictional names empty and full

- ▶ So, in the *normal* case, a fictional name is full; but there are *abnormal* cases:
  1. the fictional work they are part of is not real, but fictional
    - ▶ e.g. Gonzago in *Hamlet*;
  2. the name stems from a mis-interpretation of the fictional work and took up
    - ▶ e.g. “Moloch” (the legendary pagan god);
  3. the name is an alleged fictional name, no fictional work attached
    - ▶ e.g. Snazzo.
- ▶ In general, a fictional name is *empty*:
  - ▶ whenever there is no fictional work they are a part of;
  - ▶ **csq**: this is an *empirical* matter.
- ▶ **Rk**: Ironically enough, Gonzago makes Hamlet more real!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>To paraphrase (Cohen 1983): “Shakespeare, with flamboyant intent, repeatedly calls our attention to the fact that *Hamlet* is a play and that illusion, artistic or otherwise, can often hide truth and encourage deception. Ironically, however, the play image [*The Murder of Gonzago*] makes *Hamlet* more real.”

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## Argument for the view

- ▶ Maybe this view<sup>5</sup> is an intuitive view, but, more importantly, there is a simple powerful argument for it, based on so-called “metafictional statements”:<sup>6</sup>
  1. Metafictional statements are truth-evaluable statements containing a fictional name in the subject place.
  2. The principle of compositionality requires that a name in the subject place of a truth-conditional statement refers.
  3. Therefore, fictional names refer.
- ▶ Here is an uncontroversially true metafictional statement:
  - (1) Romeo Montague is the male protagonist of William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

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<sup>5</sup>Later called “artefactualist” when merged with that of (Thomasson 1999)’s, and very much dominant in the contemporary literature.

<sup>6</sup>I called “the realist guns” in (Rouillé 2021); see (Recanati 2021) for an instance of it. The argument was independently put forward in (Van Inwagen 1977); and later interpreted as an instance of an indispensability argument in (Van Inwagen 2003) and (Thomasson 2003).

# The realist program

- ▶ In the fiction (*fictional* use), “Romeo” refers to the *flesh-and-blood* lover of Juliet.
  - ▶ It *pretends to refer*, and thus really does not refer at all.<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ Outside the fiction (*metafictional* use), “Romeo” refers to an abstract entity, i.e. the “fictional character *qua* fictionally represented” (Recanati 2018).
  - ▶ To mark the contrast, let’s call it an *individual of paper*.<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ The name “Romeo” is thus *polysemous* (its semantic contribution depends on the context of use):
  - ▶ Fictionally, “Romeo” refers to a flesh-and-blood entity.
  - ▶ Metafictionally, “Romeo” refers to an individual of paper.
- ▶ The realist program consists in explaining this polysemy.

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<sup>7</sup>Maybe this is what is meant by (Salmon 1998: 292) when he says that, in such context, it is a “rigid *nondesignator*”.

<sup>8</sup>Both as a tribute to Salvador Plascencia 2005 *The People of paper*, and not to commit to any specific metaphysical view of what these really are.



## Textual evidence (Kripke 1973/2013: 81-2)

*The introduction of the ontology of fictional characters is in some sense a derivative or extended use of language, at least on the picture I am presenting. When one originally introduces the term “Hamlet” there is merely a pretense of reference, and there is no referent – period. But then we find a referent by the ontology of fictional characters, so that we can say [...], when we talk about Hamlet, that we refer to a fictional character.*

*One shouldn’t confuse the extended use in which the term “Hamlet” really has a referent (not just “in the story”) with the original picture according to which “Hamlet” would have no referent – according to which Hamlet would not exist. [...]*

*I spoke of language as supplying a referent.*

- ▶ The important point of this “polysemy view” is that there is a *dynamic* in the (normal) use of fictional names.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>In his last lecture, Kripke says he will talk about “how a speaker’s reference might become a semantic reference” (Kripke 1973/2013: 143).

## (Salmon 1998: 294)

*According to Kripke, as the name “Sherlock Holmes” was originally introduced and used by Conan Doyle, it has no referent whatsoever. It is a name in the make-believe world of storytelling, part of an elaborate pretense. By Kripke’s lights, our language licenses a certain kind of metaphysical move . It postulates an abstract artifact, the fictional character, as a product of this pretense. But the name “Sherlock Holmes” does not thereby refer to the character thereby postulated, nor for that matter to anything else, and the sentences involving the name “Sherlock Holmes” that were written in creating the fiction express no propositions, about the fictional character or anything else. They are all part of the pretense, like the actors’ lines in the performance of a play. It is only at a later stage when discussing the fictional character from a standpoint outside of the fiction, speaking about the pretense and not within it, that the language makes a second move, this one semantical rather than metaphysical, giving the name a new, non-pretend use as a name for the fictional character. The language allows a grammatical transformation, says Kripke, of a fictional name for a person into a name of a fictional person.*

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# On the metamorphosis of fictional names

▶ The kripke view has two parts:

1. *A metaphysical story*: individual of papers *emerge* from shared pretend-reference to the flesh-and-blood individual.<sup>10</sup>
2. *A semantic story*: the metamorphosis of a empty name into a full name.<sup>11</sup>

▶ Perhaps Italo Calvino gave an apt description of this (Calvino 1988: “Quickness”):

*I would say that the moment an object appears in a narrative, it is charged with a special force and becomes like the pole of a magnetic field, a knot in the network of invisible relationships. [...] We might even say that in a narrative any object is always magic.*

▶ Another metaphor:

- ▶ the flesh-and-blood individual stage is that of the *caterpillar*;
- ▶ the individual of paper stage is that of the corresponding *butterfly*.

<sup>10</sup>There are ongoing discussions about the right sufficient conditions for such emergence to take place. See in particular (Abell 2020)’s institutional view; and (Voltolini 2020)’s “moderate creationism”.

<sup>11</sup>*Aside*: (Predelli 2020: §8)’s “radical fictionalism”, which is supposed to endorse the kripke view, is even more mysterious: it allows the metamorphosis of a *non-name* into a name *via* a square-quote “homonymy” procedure.

# Taking stock

- ▶ As you might have guessed, my sympathies do not lie with the realist program.
  - ▶ I take the realist program to be grounded on magic;
  - ▶ yet I sympathetically proposed the natural-science metaphor of a butterfly metamorphosis.
    - ▶ Though *prima facie* utterly incredible, these things happen!
- ▶ Regardless of what one thinks of the realist program, the dynamics unearthed by Kripke is interesting to study:
  - ▶ I will now argue that this dynamic does not support the kripke view;
  - ▶ based on what I consider counter-examples to kripke's fictional/real distinction.
- ▶ *Recall:*
  - ▶ Fictionally, a fictional name refers to a flesh-and-blood individual;
  - ▶ Metafictionally, it refers to a corresponding individual of paper, i.e. the relevant part of the fictional work;
  - ▶ Used outside the fiction, fictional names are thus full;
  - ▶ unless something is wrong about the fictional work.

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# Fusion

- ▶ Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde happen to be one and the same character in Stevenson's *Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.
  - ▶ In the fiction, two names and one flesh-and-blood individual.
- ▶ What about outside the fiction?
  - ▶ Well, the “parts” are clearly different, so there should be two individuals of paper.
  - ▶ Moreover, some metafictional statements are true of one but not the other (and vice versa).
- (2) Mr Hyde symbolizes the evil in each of us which tends to overwhelm us.
- (3) Mr Jekyll's character would have been better, had Stevenson made him married to a wife.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>See (Nabokov 1980: 194) for an argument: “It was safer for the artist [Stevenson] not to be specific and to leave the pleasures of Jekyll undescribed. But does not this safety, this easy way, does it not denote a certain weakness in the artist? I think it does.”



# Fission

- ▶ Superman is Clark Kent, i.e. Clark Kent is Superman in disguise.
  - ▶ We know this, and we also know how this much is Frege-puzzling to Lois Lane!
  - ▶ Again, in the fiction, two names and one flesh-and-blood individual.
- ▶ Outside the fiction (same reasoning), there are clearly two individuals of paper.
  - (4) There is something universal about Clark Kent's problem with Lois, and that's why so many people could relate to it.<sup>13</sup>
  - (5) "Clark Kent is Superman's critique on the whole human race".
    - ▶ This is Bill's famous commentary of *Superman* (in *Kill Bill*).

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<sup>13</sup>From Wikipedia entry [Superman and Lois Lane](#) (§ "creation").

## Comments on Bill's interpretation of *Superman*

everyany5000 2 years ago

I fundamentally disagree with Bill's perspective on this but that's really the beauty of the scene. It so thoroughly explains Bill's perspective on his role in the movies. Beatrix's perspective represents what I think Superman's actual intentions are: the desire to embrace humanity. Not critique it but be a part of it. It's a simple desire to be normal because there's an inherent comfort in that. Bill, however, is a cynic he doesn't believe there's a value to being flawed or that someone can choose to be who they want to be. He views Superman's actions as an insult because he can't comprehend that someone with so much power would choose to humble himself like that because he himself never would. He is as much the Superman in this metaphor as Beatrix. Perhaps that's what drives his obsession for her more than anything else.

YouTube <sup>IT</sup>

Search

^ 23 replies



Gatling Hawk 1 year ago

He is the villain so you are supposed to disagree with him



22



Reply



JarvisBailey VA 1 year ago

Which basically makes Bill Lex Luthor.



56



Reply



everyany5000 1 year ago

@JarvisBailey VA The perfect response.



17



Reply

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## From “fictional” to “fictional fictional”

- ▶ Kripke’s distinction between “fictional fictional characters” and “fictional characters” is highly unstable.
  - ▶ *Recall*: real fictional characters are parts of real fictional works; fictional fictional characters are parts of fictional fictional works.
    - ▶ e.g. *Gonzago* is *not* a fictional character, but merely a fictional fictional character.
    - ▶ “Gonzago” is empty.
  - ▶ Metaphorically: *fictional* butterflies are not *real* butterfly; they rather look like real caterpillars!
- ▶ *However*, some fictional characters become fictional fictional:
  - ▶ e.g. Superman in *Kill Bill*.
  - ▶ One can even imagine a case in which there is no trace of the original fiction, and we only have traces of the character as fictional fictional.
    - ▶ Based on empirical evidence, Kripke would predict that there is no such individual of paper.

## From “fictional fictional” to “fictional”

- ▶ Some fictional fictional characters become fictional:
  - ▶ e.g. pretty much all the famous character of *1001 nights*.
  - ▶ Scheherazade is an individual of paper and her part is described in the following metafictional statement:
    - (6) Scheherazade is a major female character and the storyteller in the frame narrative of the Middle Eastern collection of tales known as the *One Thousand and One Nights*.
  - ▶ But the “most famous characters from *1001 nights*”,<sup>14</sup> viz. Aladdin, Sinbad the Sailor, Ali Baba, etc. are fictional fictional characters, *hence* these are not individuals of paper.
  - ▶ Kripke predicts that “Scheherazade” is full, whereas “Aladdin” is empty.
- ▶ **Csq:** The upshot of this discussion is that this category of “fictional fictional” is highly unstable.
  - ▶ I do not see why it should guide our semantic analysis of fictional names.

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<sup>14</sup>From Wikipedia’s [List of \*One Thousand and One Nights\* characters](#) 

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## Kinds of fictional nonexistents

- ▶ Some fictional characters, we do not know whether they exist in the fiction or not:
  - ▶ Godot in *Waiting for Godot*
  - ▶ The ghost of Hamlet's father in *Hamlet*

- ▶ Some fictional characters, we know they do not exist in the fiction:
  - ▶ The main character of Calvino's *Nonexistent Knight*
  - ▶ "Queen Mab" in *Romeo and Juliet* (I,4)

[M]- [...] Her charriot is an empty hazelnut made by the joiner squirrel or old grub, time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers. [...]

[R]- Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace! Thou talk'st of nothing.

[M]- True, I talk of dreams, which are the children of an idle braim, begot of nothing but vain fantasy [...]

- ▶ **Pb**: if such cases, there is no flesh-and-blood individual to start with.
  - ▶ *Recall*: that the fictional name fictionally refers is a necessary condition for it to metafictionally refer.
  - ▶ *Metaphorically*: for every butterfly, there was a caterpillar.

## Lieutenant Kizhe: a good case

- ▶ *Lieutenant Kizhe* is a 1928 short story by Yury Tynyanov:<sup>15</sup>
  - ▶ From a misspelling of an army clerk, a nonexistent Kizhe is promoted lieutenant.
    - ▶ *praporshchiki zh ... - v podporuchiki*<sup>16</sup>
    - ▶ *praporshchik Kizh, ... - v podporuchiki*.<sup>17</sup>
  - ▶ This Lieutenant Kizhe subsequently has a wonderful career, marries, etc.
  - ▶ When the Emperor wants to congratulate, the military bureaucrats decide to kill him off, to avoid any trouble.
  - ▶ The Emperor, upon learning of Kizhe's death says: "Sic transit gloria mundi".
- ▶ "Kizhe" is a fictional empty name:
  - ▶ It is a "Moloch"-type of example;
  - ▶ actually better than Moloch, for Moloch's text is the bible, which is controversially read as a fiction.

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<sup>15</sup>It is based on a 1870 anecdote by Vladimir Dahl. It was later adapted in the famous 1934 soviet movie (music by Sergei Prokofiev).

<sup>16</sup>it says: "as to Ensigns ... [they are promoted to] Second Lieutenants"

<sup>17</sup>"Ensign Kizh, ... [are promoted to] Second Lieutenants".



▶ But then what is the difference between “Madame Bovary” and “Lieutenant Kizhe”?

- ▶ Both are parts of a fictional work.
- ▶ Both fictions they originate from are *eponymous* fictions.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ Both are very much prone to metafictional talk.

(7) Lieutenant Kijé or Kizhe is a fictional character in an anecdote about the reign of Emperor Paul I of Russia.<sup>19</sup>

(8) Kizhe’s nonexistence displays the absurdity of any bureaucratic society.<sup>20</sup>

▶ Such example thwarts the underlying dynamic story of fictional names:

- ▶ First, a fictional name is used in the pretence;
- ▶ Then, “language provides a referent”.
- ▶ But, here, “Kizhe” is *misused* in the pretence;
- ▶ So the necessary condition for the dynamics is lacking:
  - ▶ There is no “shared pretend use” to start from.

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<sup>18</sup>Intuitively, *Lieutenant Kizhe* is Kizhe’s story.

<sup>19</sup>From the Wikipedia page [Lieutenant Kijé](#).

<sup>20</sup>And thus any ontology of bureaucratic items.

## Kizhe variables: a dilemma

- ▶ Dilemma:
  - ▶ *either* one has a way of excluding “kizhe variables” in general;<sup>21</sup>
  - ▶ *or* one accepts that “Kizhe” is a regular fictional name (*pace* Kripke).
- ▶ If you accept that “Kizhe” is a fictional name (and there is no other reasonable option), then the appeal to emergence is really hopeless.
  - ▶ The necessary condition for the emergence of an individual of paper (filling the fictional name) is not met.
  - ▶ This is a serious problem for the realist followers of Kripke.

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<sup>21</sup>The expression “kizhe variables” comes from Girard 2018 [Logic 2.0](#) and [On Second Order Logic](#).

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# Kripke's cult following

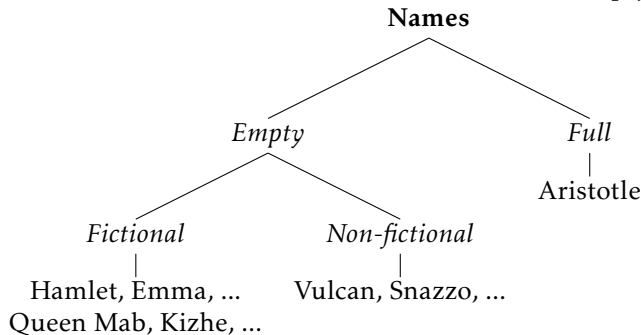
- ▶ The kripke view is in fact a theory of a social phenomenon that can be called “cult following” for fictional characters.
- ▶ But it has nothing to do with semantics:
  - ▶ The difference between a *famous* fictional character/name and an unknown fictional character/name is not semantic in nature;
  - ▶ though it is arguably of historical and cultural importance.
- ▶ This criticism of kripke realists in the philosophy of fiction has been voiced in (Everett 2005) and (Friend 2007) – among many other places.<sup>22</sup>
  - ▶ But these were targetting the *sufficient* conditions of Kripke's artefactualism.
  - ▶ I added a criticism about the *necessary* condition for Kripke's artefactualism.

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<sup>22</sup>See in particular Stacie Friend's 2022 “*Comme s'il y avait des personnages fictifs*” on “minor characters”.

## Back to the naïve view

- ▶ (Kripke 1973/2013) was meant to establish that the two distinctions fictional/real and empty/full are orthogonal.
- ▶ But really, it fails. And we are back to the more intuitive view that the two distinctions interact: fictional names are a kind of empty names.



# Empty terms in general

- ▶ If we go back to the naïve view, fictional names are just one kind of empty names.
- ▶ There are many other kinds of empty terms (all controversial since (Kripke 1973/2013)):
  - ▶ Past individuals: “Aristotle” did refer but does not anymore.
  - ▶ Future individuals: “Newman-1” (Kaplan 1979)
  - ▶ Mere possibilia: “Noman-0”, “Nothan” (Salmon 1998)
  - ▶ Impossibilia: “Sylvan’s box” (Priest 1997)
  - ▶ Failed posits: “Vulcan”
  - ▶ Mis-understanding cases: “Moloch” (Kripke 1973/2013), “Max” (Kroon 2003)
  - ▶ Non-items: “Snazzo” (Kripke 1973/2013)
  - ▶ Objects of dreams, desires, day-dreaming, etc.

**kripke**, adj. Not understood, but considered brilliant. “I hate to admit it, but I found his remarks quite kripke.”








**THE  
PHILOSOPHICAL  
LEXICON**

DANIEL DENNETT, EDITOR










**ryle**, v. To give examples. “He ryles on and on without ever daring a conclusion.”  
Hence, n. An example. “His argument was elucidated by a variety of apt ryles.”  
“The original ryle has been chisholmed beyond recognition.” (2) A variety of smooth, lucid, thin ice that forms on bogs.

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