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The European Society for Aesthetics

Department of Philosophy

University of Fribourg

Avenue de l'Europe 20

1700 Fribourg

Switzerland

Internet: <http://www.eurosa.org>

Email: secretary@eurosa.org

Fictional Names, Rigidity, and the Inverse-Sinatra Principle

Zsófia Zvolenszky*

Slovak Academy of Sciences & Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE)

ABSTRACT. According to the inverse-Sinatra principle, the following holds for a broad class of proper names, which includes names that refer to a concrete object in the actual world as well as fictional names: if the name can't make it here, it won't make it anywhere. That is, if the name doesn't manage to refer to a concrete, spatiotemporal object here, in the actual world, it doesn't refer to a concrete, spatiotemporal object with respect to other possible worlds either. In this paper I aim to show that the inverse-Sinatra principle can be readily construed as a missing puzzle piece in a comprehensive Kripkean account of proper names. First, it's plausible to view it as the other side of the rigidity thesis (which, on one formulation, states that if a name refers to an object here, in the actual world, then it refers to that object everywhere, in all possible worlds). Second, the principle provides an appealing way to extend to fictional names Kripke's picture about causal-historical chains of use determining the concrete object to which a name refers. Third, several fiction-related remarks by Kripke point toward the need to locate the inverse-Sinatra principle as a missing puzzle piece.

I. Introducing the Inverse-Sinatra Principle

For those familiar with Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* lectures, the notion of rigidity needs no introduction. But what is the inverse-Sinatra principle? Frank Sinatra sang about New York: "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere". According to the inverse-Sinatra principle, the following holds for a broad class of proper names, which includes names that refer (or referred) to a concrete object in the actual world (like 'Michelle Obama') as well as fictional names (like 'Anna Karenina'): if the name can't make it here, it won't make it anywhere.

* Email: zvolenszky@nyu.edu

I first formulated the inverse-Sinatra principle ten years ago (Zvolenszky 2007), and have since returned to exploring its role in theories about fictional characters and fictional names in several papers, two of them in recent *European Society of Aesthetics Proceedings* (Zvolenszky 2014, 2015a; see also Zvolenszky 2015b).¹ Compared to these earlier proposals, in the present paper, I pursue a different line for locating the inverse-Sinatra principle in an account of proper names that encompasses fictional names.² Specifically, I aim to show how the inverse-Sinatra principle can be readily construed as a missing puzzle piece in a comprehensive Kripkean account of proper names.

My starting point is Kripke's (1972/1980) two core claims about the reference of proper names (Section 2). My overarching aim is to explore (in Sections 3–5) one plausible way for extending these core claims so we cover *fictional names*: proper names for objects conjured up by authors in producing works of fiction. Clearly, fictional names don't refer to actual concrete objects.³

Kripke didn't spell out in full the connection between his claims about names that refer to concrete objects and names that don't. I aim to fill this lacuna by formulating the inverse-Sinatra principle for proper names. Before spelling out this principle more precisely, let us first home in on a narrower class of names, to be called *names**, which includes (a) all fictional names of people, places, objects, and (b) all nonfictional names that purport to refer to actual, concrete objects; crucially, *names** exclude proper names for timeless existents (like numbers), names introduced for merely possible objects, and names introduced via descriptive stipulations, without any ostension or pointing.⁴ Thus, plausibly, the overwhelming major

¹ For the latest versions of my views on the metaphysics and semantics of fictional discourse, see Zvolenszky (2013, 2016a, 2016b); for more historical detail, see Zvolenszky (2015b).

² The present paper is based in part on Section 2 of a much longer paper (Zvolenszky 2016b).

³ For the purposes of this paper, I'm not taking a stand on whether names of actual concrete objects, like 'Moscow' in Tolstoy's novels, does or doesn't refer to the actual concrete object: the city of Moscow. Regardless of what stance we take on that issue, 'Moscow' is not a fictional name in the sense I defined it.

⁴ Fictional characters are but one kind of fictional object: objects (people, places, buildings, etc.) conjured up by authors in producing works of fiction. For the purposes

ity of proper names are names*. According to the *inverse-Sinatra principle*, names* are such that the following holds for them: *if it can't make it here, it won't make it anywhere*.⁵ This means (among other things) that if the name*

of the present paper, I'm restricting fictional objects to fictional-world analogs of *concrete, spatiotemporal* objects. My label 'fictional name' is short for 'name of a fictional object'.

⁵ In the inverse-Sinatra principle (keeping it parallel with the song), I use the modal auxiliary 'can', by which I mean (as the song's 'can' does) 'is able to'; I don't mean meta-physical possibility. Thanks to Nathan Wildman for discussion on this.

The category of names* doesn't include the following: (i) names of timelessly existing abstract objects (for example numbers), and (ii) names successfully introduced for merely possible objects, (iii) names introduced by descriptive stipulations. An example for (ii): 'Woody' introduced for a lectern kit that could have been assembled based on a comprehensive set of assembly instructions, but is never in fact assembled. Elsewhere (2015b, p. 482, fn. 27) I elaborate the point that there is a very good reason why for a Kripkean about proper name reference, 'Woody', and also names of abstract timeless existents like numbers, are not subject to the inverse-Sinatra principle: introducing such names successfully requires that their referent be *sufficiently specified* during the introduction, so that there is no room left to identify several distinct possible objects as fitting the specification associated with the name. This connects with Kripke's reasoning to support what he calls the metaphysical thesis about fictional names like 'Holmes' in the "Addenda" (1972/1980, pp. 156–158). There, Kripke argues that no such sufficient-specificity requirement for successful name introduction is in place for introducing a fictional name like 'Holmes'; and Holmes is insufficiently specified in the short stories to be identified with just one possible concrete person (because several distinct possible people are equally good candidates to be Holmes and there is no ground for deciding among them which is Holmes). By contrast, type-(ii) names like 'Woody' *are* introduced with sufficient specificity to refer to just one possible concrete object. This is probably why Kaplan claims that "ever-unactualized possibilities are extraordinarily difficult to dub" (Kaplan 1973, p. 505), while leaving it open that unactualized possibilities are *possible* to dub (as Woody was).

Crucially, for a Kripkean about proper name reference, this "no room for distinct possible objects as referent-candidates" feature applies to names* as well, but the *means* by which the feature is secured for names* and for type-(i)–(ii) names is markedly different. To names*, the inverse-Sinatra principle applies, and securing this feature requires (as we will see) some kind of causal-historical connection to the object named. By contrast, for type-(i)–(ii) names, securing the feature calls for sufficient specificity.

As for (iii), names successfully introduced via descriptive stipulations ("the inventor of the zipper, whoever he was, I'll call 'Julius'"; "the first boy born in the 22nd century shall be called 'Newman'"; and even: whatever planet satisfies such-and-such a description shall be called 'Neptune'). My somewhat tentative stance is that such names pattern with type-(i)–(ii) names with respect to sufficient specificity being required for the name to refer. While I'm less committed to excluding such names from names* than type-(i)–(ii) names, this move simplifies considerably subsequent discussion of the two Kripkean

doesn't manage to refer to a concrete, spatiotemporal object here, in the actual world, it doesn't refer to a concrete, spatiotemporal object with respect to other possible worlds either. This principle will afford a way of extending the two Kripkean core claims to fictional names.

2. Two Kripkean Core Claims

Saul Kripke in his *Naming and Necessity* lectures (1972/1980) discusses in detail his views about the reference of proper names in the actual world and in nonactual possible worlds, invoking in the process considerations about rigidity and causal-historical chains. His focus is on proper names that refer (or referred) to concrete objects, and the two pages that he devotes to names like 'Sherlock Holmes' (pp. 157–158) along with his fleeting mention of names like 'Santa Claus' and names of numbers, p. 93, p. 116, fn. 58), and his subsequent (1973/2011, 1973/2013) leave unclear how exactly Kripkean views on proper name reference are supposed to extend to the likes of 'Holmes'. This paper sets out to provide one answer to this question. The constraints and connections uncovered do not hinge on (i) whether we accept or reject that Holmes exists/has being in some sense, and (ii) whether we accept or reject that (on at least some uses), the name 'Holmes' has a referent.

It is helpful to sum up the crux of a Kripkean position (based on the second lecture of *Naming and Necessity* 1972/1980) about what does and doesn't determine the reference of proper names like 'Tolstoy' and 'Michelle Obama' (which refer to concrete objects) in the form of *two core claims*:

- *Qualitative fit is neither necessary nor sufficient for being the referent of a name**. Suppose individual speakers who competently use a name *N* associate various descriptions with *N*. Kripke's claim: to be the referent of *N*, it is neither necessary nor sufficient that the referent be the unique object fitting the associated descriptions (or fitting the weighted majority of the descriptions). Call this the SIMPLE QUALITATIVE-FIT CLAIM.

claims, I will therefore go ahead with excluding type-(iii) names from names*.

- For names*, a causal-historical connection is necessary for the name* to refer. Competent *N* users refer to an object *o* by using *N* only if there is a causal-historical chain of uses of *N* in their linguistic community leading back to *o*, and to the introduction of *N* as a name for *o*. Call this the SIMPLE CAUSAL-HISTORICAL-CONNECTION REQUIREMENT.⁶

These two claims do not mention a pair of key constraints that are usually implicitly assumed: that the objects at issue (candidates for being referents of proper names) are *concrete* (that is, spatiotemporally located) and *actual*. In the next section, we will make the former constraint explicit. Also, we will lift the latter constraint based in part on Kripke’s well-known thesis about proper names being rigid designators. I will show, however, that extending the core claims to fictional names requires in addition the claim that names* obey the inverse-Sinatra principle.

3. Towards the Generalized Qualitative-Fit Claim: The Role of the Rigidity Thesis

Let’s work backwards and first state the two generalized Kripkean core claims, and then consider how rigid designation and the inverse-Sinatra principle are both needed to motivate moving from the simple core claims

⁶ I’m not including here the corresponding sufficiency claim: that a causal-historical chain of uses leading back to an object being given the name is *sufficient* for it to be the name’s bearer. Considerations about ‘Santa Claus’, and ‘Napoleon’ introduced as a name for a pet (and later, on, also examples like ‘Madagascar’) indicate that much more elaboration and complexity lies ahead before we get a *sufficient* condition for being the referent of a name. And the fact that Kripke (1972/1980, p. 93, pp. 96–97) was pointing out such examples makes it clear that he was aware of the additional complexity required while he was delivering the lectures, so Evans’ (1973) charge that Kripke’s sufficiency claim is unwarranted is itself unwarranted.

One major alternative to my construal of a Kripkean view about causal-historical chains holds that no causal-historical link to the *object named* is required; only a causal-historical link of name-uses leading back to the name’s introduction, at which point the name can be introduced by someone who bears no causal connection to the object—either because the object is named by a descriptive stipulation, or because the object is non-concrete (a number, say). See, for example, Burgess (2012), pp. 32–33 for such a view.

Plausibly, the qualitative-fit claim is about names, and not just names*; but for my purposes, the narrower claim formulated here is sufficient.

(about actual concrete objects as referents of proper names) to their generalized versions (about actual as well as possible concrete objects as referents of proper names):⁷

- In the case of concrete objects (actual as well as possible), qualitative fit is neither necessary nor sufficient for being the referent of a name*. Call this the GENERALIZED QUALITATIVE-FIT CLAIM.
- A causal-historical+ connection to a concrete object is necessary for a name* to refer to that concrete object (actual or possible). Call this the GENERALIZED CAUSAL-HISTORICAL-CONNECTION REQUIREMENT.
(What ‘causal-historical+’ means will be explained in Section 5. The label is short for ‘pw-extended causal-historical connection’.)

In my *ESA Proceedings* paper last year, I merely remarked that “... it is well to generalize, in the light of the inverse-Sinatra principle, the qualitative fit claim and the [causal-]historical connection requirement to characterize the core tenets of a Kripkean stance (Zvolenszky 2015b, p. 582). But what is the exact connection between the principle and the generalized core claims? Answering this question turns out to take the bulk of a paper: the remainder of this paper.

Let’s consider the first core claim first. For names that refer to actual concrete objects (like ‘Michelle Obama’ and ‘Saul Kripke’), we need no more than Kripke’s thesis about proper names being rigid designators, to derive, from the simple qualitative-fit claim, the corresponding generalized one. According to one formulation of the thesis:

- Ordinary proper names are rigid designators. And an expression *R* being a *rigid designator* is defined as follows: if *R* refers to a concrete object *o* in the actual world, then *R* refers to *o* in every world in which *o* exists; and in worlds in which *o* doesn’t exist, *R* doesn’t refer to

⁷ By ‘possible concrete object’ I mean a possible object that in the given possible world is or is represented as spatiotemporal. I intend this use to remain neutral about the choice of metaphysics for possible worlds and their inhabitants. For example, I’m not assuming or rejecting here a counterpart-theoretic approach to cross-world identity of objects.

anything other than *o*.⁸ Call this the *rigid designation thesis about proper names*; RIGIDITY THESIS, for short.

Here is how the simple qualitative-fit claim plus the rigidity thesis yield the generalized qualitative-fit claim for names that designate actual, concrete objects. Clearly, the simple core claims are about reference in the actual world, no more. But if we take into account that the *only object* a rigid designator may refer to with respect to nonactual worlds is the object that is its actual referent, then qualitative fit in nonactual possible worlds cannot be sufficient for reference, because that would contradict the rigidity thesis (after all, a rigid designator doesn't refer to a different object, even if it's a dead ringer for the actual object). Also, if we take into account that a rigid designator refers to its actual referent with respect to *every world in which the referent exists*, then qualitative fit in nonactual possible worlds cannot be necessary for reference, because that, again, would contradict the rigidity thesis (after all, an object is a rigid designator's counterfactual referent regardless of potential qualitative mismatch between the actual and the counterfactual object). We have thus established the generalized qualitative-fit claim for names that refer to concrete objects in the actual world.

4. Towards the Generalized Qualitative-Fit Claim: The Role of the Inverse-Sinatra Principle

Notice that the claim that proper names are rigid designators (as I formulated the thesis) leaves open whether *a proper name without an actual concrete referent*—for example, a fictional name like 'Anna Karenina'—does

⁸ For insightful discussion about alternative formulations of rigid designation and why the difference among them matters, see Zouhar (2012). Notice that the rigidity thesis can be extended to cover non-concrete objects also. This seems in line with Kripke's intentions (see Kripke 1972/1980, pp. 115-116, fn. 58; see also Kaplan 1989, pp. 607-608, fn. 101). But the focus throughout *Naming and Necessity* was on the paradigm of reference to *concrete* objects. In any case, extending the rigidity thesis to cover reference to non-concrete objects would not obviate the need for positing, in addition, the inverse-Sinatra principle—about this, see the last paragraph of footnote 12; see also Section 3 of Zvolenszky (2015b).

or doesn't refer to a concrete object with respect to some nonactual possible world or other! After all, the rigidity thesis begins with a conditional antecedent that is false for fictional names like 'Anna Karenina'. For all that the rigidity thesis has established, fictional names could be referring, with respect to nonactual possible worlds, to whatever concrete object in those worlds fits the descriptions associated with the names. If this were the case, then, with respect to those worlds, the generalized qualitative-fit claim's insufficiency-half would fail for fictional names. *Yet Kripke is evidently subscribing to this half of the generalized qualitative-fit claim with respect to fictional names like 'Sherlock Holmes'*, emphatically denying, for example, that a concrete (actual or possible) person's being qualitatively just like Holmes (as described in the short stories) is *sufficient* for that person to be the referent of 'Holmes', given Doyle's intention to conjure up a fictional character rather than describe a concrete person (Kripke 1972/1980, pp. 157–158; see also Kripke 1973/2011, p. 59; 1973/2013, p. 40–42).⁹ The question is what Kripke might be basing his denial on.

For fictional names, and more broadly, for names*,¹⁰ the missing link to yield the generalized qualitative-fit claim's insufficiency-half from its simple version is this: names* are subject to the inverse-Sinatra principle, according to which no object to refer to here (in the actual world) means

⁹ The oft-quoted passage from Kripke (1972/1980, pp. 157–158):

The mere discovery that there was indeed a detective with exploits like those of Sherlock Holmes would not show that Conan Doyle was writing *about* this man; it is theoretically possible, though in practice fantastically unlikely, that Doyle was writing pure fiction with only a coincidental resemblance to the actual man. ... Similarly, I hold the metaphysical view that, granted that there is no Sherlock Holmes, one cannot say of any possible person, that he *would* have been Sherlock Holmes, had he existed. Several distinct possible people, and even actual ones such as Darwin or Jack the Ripper, might have performed the exploits of Holmes, but there is none of whom we can say that he would have been Holmes had he performed these exploits. For if so, which one? (emphasis in the original)

¹⁰ Crucially, names* excludes proper names like 'Woody' introduced for the possible lectern that never gets assembled (see Footnote 5).

no object to refer to in other possible worlds either (qualitative fit notwithstanding). A special case of this, spelled out below, is that no *concrete* object to refer to here means no *concrete* object to refer to in other possible worlds either.

For any name* *N*, if *N* is without a concrete object referent in the actual world, then *N* is without a concrete object referent with respect to all possible worlds. Let's call this the INVERSE-SINATRA PRINCIPLE FOR NAMES*. (For any name*: "if it can't make it here, it won't make it anywhere".)¹¹

Based on this principle, we arrive at qualitative fit being insufficient for fictional names to refer to concrete nonactual objects, given that the principle requires that names lacking an actual concrete referent don't refer to concrete objects with respect to *any* possible world.¹²

¹¹ In the preceding formulation, we spelled out the principle for *concrete* objects, but we could formulate it in more general terms, to apply to *non-concrete* objects also, getting a generalized inverse-Sinatra principle.

¹² In this way, the rigidity thesis and the inverse-Sinatra principle are two facets of an overarching theory about the reference of proper names across possible worlds: the first is about names that refer to an actual concrete object, and the second is about names that do not. The first encompasses all proper names (though it isn't obvious that it covers names introduced by descriptive stipulation). The second applies to names* only, and doesn't apply to names of merely possible objects (see footnote 4 above about 'Woody'). The first yields the generalized core Kripkean claims for names that refer to concrete objects (in the actual world), the second is needed to arrive at the pair of generalized core claims for names* that don't refer to any actual concrete object. We see then that both the rigidity thesis and the inverse-Sinatra principle are needed in a comprehensive account of names.

In sum, the rigidity thesis and the inverse-Sinatra principle play a role within complementary routes—for distinct sets of proper names—leading from the core Kripkean claims to their generalized versions.

I leave open the possibility that an alternative formulation of the rigidity thesis may obviate the need for positing separately the inverse-Sinatra principle. To this end, something along these lines seems like a promising starting point: an expression *R* being a *rigid designator* is defined as follows: *whatever object (if any) R refers to in the actual world, R refers to that same object (if any) with respect to every possible world, and...* Even if such a definition can be formulated, in the context of fictional names, the succinctness, generality and focus of the inverse-Sinatra principle makes for a more vivid and revealing summary of a Kripkean approach to fictional names than a purely rigidity-based way of fitting together various Kripkean claims.

Having only considered the insufficiency-half of the generalized qualitative-fit claim, we have already established four things. First, on a Kripkean approach to proper name reference, there is a central dimension shared by fictional names and names that refer to concrete objects: both are subject to the insufficiency-half of the generalized qualitative-fit claim. Second, for fictional names, this shared dimension is touched upon in Kripke's brief discussion about 'Holmes'. Third, in the background of that discussion about fictional names, we can locate a special role for the inverse-Sinatra principle. Fourth, that role complements and parallels one played by the rigidity thesis in the far lengthier discussion we find in *Naming and Necessity* about names that refer to actual concrete objects (like 'Michelle Obama', 'Tolstoy').

5. Towards the Generalized Causal-Historical-Connection Requirement

Let us turn to the case of the second core Kripkean claim: moving from the simple causal-historical connection requirement to its generalized version. Consider the case of names like 'Michelle Obama', which refer to actual concrete objects. Suppose we are sympathetic to a Kripkean model of proper name reference requiring a causal-historical connection; *now, it seems, we can use those names to talk about objects as they might or must have been; that is, we can talk about one and the same object with respect to worlds other than the actual one, by saying things like 'Michelle Obama might have majored in philosophy in college'*. Then an attractive overarching model of proper name reference suggests itself: that in a derivative sense, the causal-historical connection is in place between the actual name and its referent with respect to worlds other than the actual world also. We can call this a *pw-extended causal-historical connection* between a name and its referent with respect to a nonactual possible world. This is what I provisionally labeled '*causal-historical+ connection*' in the formulation of the second core Kripkean claim.

Of course, there is no *causal* link between 'Michelle Obama', a name used in the actual world for an actual woman, and a counterfactual Michelle Obama whose college major is different than the actual woman's; but I'm suggesting that there is this *pw-extended causal-historical connection* be-

tween them still. Crucially, the italicized sentence is intimately tied to the rigidity thesis: the latter follows from the former.¹³ That ‘Michelle Obama’ is a rigid designator follows from the fact that we understand modal sentences like ‘Michelle Obama might have majored in philosophy’ as claiming about the referent of ‘Michelle Obama’, that there is a non-actual world with respect to which *that same referent* majors in philosophy. Now, if we understand the causal-historical connection featured in the second generalized core claim as being of the pw-extended variety, then we see that for names with actual concrete referents—via considerations closely tied to the rigidity thesis—we can move from the simple causal-historical-connection requirement to the generalized one.

But this won’t yet tell us anything about *fictional names* and the generalized causal-historical-connection requirement. One further Kripkean consideration that is discernible from Kripke’s fleeting remarks about ‘Holmes’ is that, given Doyle’s intention to write fiction rather than describe reality, there is at best *coincidental resemblance* between concrete objects (actual and nonactual) and Holmes, as described in the short stories. That is to say, *there is no causal-historical connection* (of the required, reference-determining sort)¹⁴ between any of those objects and Doyle’s uses of the name ‘Holmes’, a connection that would justify regarding any of those various concrete objects (actual and nonactual) as Holmes. That is to say, *a Kripkean would reject the possibility of a pw-extended causal-historical connection between ‘Holmes’ and a nonactual concrete object*. What could motivate such a rejection? My answer is that *the only way* for a name* to bear a pw-extended causal-historical connection to a nonactual concrete object is if the name* piggybacks on a causal-historical connection between a use of the name* and an actual concrete object identical to the nonactual one. And this background commitment is intimately tied to the inverse-Sinatra principle: the latter follows from the former. If an actual-world causal-historical connection between a use of the name and an actual concrete object is required for reference with respect to nonactual worlds, then in the absence of such a connection

¹³ I spell out an argument for this in detail in Zvolenszky (2007).

¹⁴ About this, see, for example, Friend (2003), and especially her recent unpublished lecture “Reference in Fiction”, delivered on October 20, 2016 at the conference *Philosophy of Language (I): Semantics of Fictional Discourse* (Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia).

(as with fictional names), the name doesn't refer to any nonactual concrete object. That is, if the name doesn't "make it" here, in the actual world, then it won't "make it" anywhere, in nonactual worlds either.

The upshot: despite the fact that we introduced this looser notion of a causal-historical connection, it still remains the case that fictional names don't refer to nonactual concrete objects because they falter on the generalized causal-historical-connection requirement (just as Kripke wanted). Crucially, this result required considerations closely tied to the inverse-Sinatra principle; and the result would not have been readily gotten based on rigidity-related considerations alone.

6. Conclusion

In sum, I have shown that moving from the two simple Kripkean core claims to their generalized versions is a result a Kripkean about proper name reference should find plausible. Further, when it comes to names of actual concrete objects, considerations allowing the move are closely tied to the rigidity thesis. And when it comes to fictional names, considerations allowing the move are closely tied to the inverse-Sinatra principle.¹⁵

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¹⁵ This paper has benefited from comments by participants at the *Post-Conference Workshop on Proper Names in Fiction* held at the University of Warsaw (Poland) in June 2016, as well as the conference *Modal Metaphysics: Issues on the (Im)Possible IV* held at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava, Slovakia) in August 2016. Special thanks are due to Tibor Bárány, David Braun, Fredrik Haraldsen, Thomas Hodgson, Stefano Predelli, Alex Steinberg, Lee Walters, Nathan Widman, Richard Woodward and Marian Zouhar for many thoughtful and incisive suggestions.

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