

Fictional Monsters: why context-shifting operators are not the right way to think about the semantics of fiction

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One of the ways to model the semantics of fiction as part of the semantics of natural language, endorsed in recent discussion by numerous author, is through posing operators shifting the context of evaluation of sentences of fictional discourse. These operators often have properties bringing to mind entities of Kaplan's *Logic of Demonstratives* called "monsters". A monster is originally defined as an operator influencing the *character* of an expression - that is, changing what can intuitively be understood as the linguistic meaning of a word or phrase (in the case of shifting meanings between actual contexts and fictional contexts this effect can be misleadingly subtle, which does not diminish its significance for the semantic properties of such a solution). Monster operators would also allegedly be capable of shifting the interpretation of indexicals on a two-dimensional Kaplan-style semantics.

Whether or not monsters exist in, or could be somehow added to, natural language is an issue of much debate and the present discussion does not aim to provide a definite solution to this quest. The aim of my presentation is only to present a critique of a monster-based solution for fictional discourse. Kaplan's original ban on monsters, I argue, is rooted in the very nature of two-dimensional semantics and must be upheld if a consistent modeling of fiction as belonging to natural language is to be obtained.

One of the main arguments against monsters follows the example of David Lewis' fictional operator which, perhaps in a way unintended by the author, shifts not only the context, but also the *language* between actual discourse and fictional discourse. While such a solution may seem to give good results in many areas, such as establishing an ontology for fictional worlds and entities or explaining the lack of causal interactions between actual and fictional contexts, it has an intuitive drawback of making all attempts at analyzing fiction solely about questions of *language*. When a monster operator is in use, English, that is the object language a theoretician has access to, becomes a metalanguage for the language of Fiction, thus rendering all sentences referring to fictional entities such as *Sherlock Holmes* not accessible in English. The only facts we would be capable of stating about sentences containing names like *Sherlock Holmes* from the perspective of English would be whether or not they are true. The only way to speak *about* Sherlock Holmes, rather than about sentences containing the name *Sherlock Holmes*, would be from inside the fiction, that is by using the language of Fiction. This is not only but metaphysically suspect, and unnecessarily complicated, but is also highly implausible for intuitions of what fiction is and how it works. Thus the argument against postulating monsters in the analysis of fictional discourse: if a monster operator shifts not only the circumstances of evaluation, but also the *language rules* for a sentence of fiction - which I claim it inevitably does, if it is to correctly serve its purpose, - then no statement about anything pertaining to fictional worlds or entities can be made in English. As a metalanguage, English can only be used to talk about semantic properties of fictional sentences or terms. Since such a result is unacceptable, monsters should not be postulated to model the semantics of fiction.

This argument relies on a demonstration of why operators with monstrous properties tend to force, or at least favor, a metalinguistic reading followed by an illustration of why a claim that fiction is a language with a semantics distinct from that of natural language as pertaining to actual contexts is an implausible view. One way to avoid these problems proposes a more pragmatic solutions viewing fiction as a shift in *perspective* rather than a shift in *context*, though details of such a conception are beyond the scope of the presented argument.