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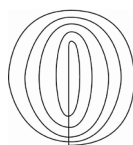
FICTIONAL ENTITIES

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Fictional Entities

Among the most hotly debated issues in contemporary analytic philosophy are those related to the nature and foundations of fiction. One of them regards the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, which pertains to the area of aesthetics. Another one regards the nature of the cognitive and linguistic resources required to produce and appreciate fiction, which pertains to the area of the philosophy of mind and cognitive science and the philosophy of language. One further issue regards the question of whether there are fictional entities as the objects of our thoughts and discourse about fictional characters and, if there are any such entities, what their nature really is. This, which pertains to the area of metaphysics, will be the focus of this entry.

In the philosophy of fiction the term ‘fictional characters’ applies only to the characters originally introduced in a work of fiction. Fictional characters are, e.g., fictional people (Emma Woodhouse, Pinocchio), fictional things (the scarlet letter, the seven-league boots), fictional places (Lilliput, Macondo) and (according to Friend 2007) *perhaps* also fictional events (Ophelia’s death, Crusoe’s shipwreck) that should not be confused with mythical characters (Pegasus, Odin), posits of false scientific theories (Phlogiston, Vulcan) and figments of our imagination (the Bogeyman, a child’s imaginary friend). Furthermore, although Paris plays an essential role in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* and Virgil plays a fundamental role in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, neither Paris nor Virgil is a fictional character (Thomasson 1999; Friend 2003; for a different view see Castañeda 1990, pp. 274-5; Lamarque and Olsen 1994, pp. 126, 293; Voltolini 2013, and 2006, pp. 117-124, Bonomi 2008). Thus, if there really are fictional characters, they belong to a special class of entities known as *fictional entities*.

According to a familiar distinction put forward by Amie Thomasson (1999), there are two different questions that philosophers can ask about fictional entities. The first is what Thomasson calls the *metaphysical* question: if there were fictional entities, how would they be? The second is what she calls the *ontological* question: are there any such entities? While the metaphysical question regards the very

nature of fictional entities, the ontological question regards the *motivations* that can be adduced in favor of or against positing fictional entities into our ontology. Let us consider each question separately, first the first, and second the second.

1 The metaphysics of fiction

Philosophers of fiction face the initially intuitive datum that fictional entities do not exist as ordinary physical objects. For example, we say that Hamlet does not exist and that Middle-earth is just a fiction. Depending on the interpretation that they give of this datum, they divide into two opposite parties. *Fictional irrealists* believe that there are no such entities and hold that the overall domain of what exists does not contain them. Hence, they give a negative answer to the ontological question and for this reason do not even try to answer the metaphysical question. *Fictional realists* instead believe that there are such entities. Hence, they give a positive answer to the ontological question and offer a variety of answers to the metaphysical question, which can be identified with three main metaphysical theories: *fictional Meinongianism*, *fictional possibilism* and *fictional creationism*.

1.1 Fictional meinongianism

Fictional Meinongianism, which was originally inspired by Alexius Meinong's theory of objects (*Gegenstandstheorie*), is characterized by the combination of the following two theses:

*Ontological Thesis*_(Realism): There are fictional entities.

*Metaphysical Thesis*_(Meinongianism): Fictional entities are non-existent objects.

The ontological thesis characterizes fictional realism in general by saying that fictional entities are part of the ontological structure of the world. The metaphysical thesis instead differentiates Meinongianism from the other varieties of fictional realism by stating that there are fictional characters, but that they do not exist. Thus, Meinongianism appeals to a metaphysical distinction between 'there is' and 'exists'. Some upholders of the view think that this is rooted in

ordinary language, as when we say things like ‘there are no one-eyed giants’ and ‘there are one-eyed giants, Polyphemus for example’ (e.g. Parsons 1980; Zalta 1988; Reimer 2001a,b). But other philosophers have denied that there is any such evidence (e.g. Geach 1971, p. 531) and many have simply rejected the distinction (e.g. Quine 1953; van Inwagen 1977; Lewis 1990; Priest 2005).

Meinong’s (1904) departing point was the so-called “principle of intentionality”, according to which every mental phenomenon is directed towards an object. For example, to judge is always to judge something, to have an idea is always to have an idea of something, to imagine is always to imagine something etc. According to this principle, the idea of a round square requires the existence of a round square, which is a contradictory object. One’s thought about the golden mountain also requires the existence of a golden mountain, which is an impossible object. And Ponce de Leon’s search for the fountain of youth requires the existence of the fountain of youth, which we know does not exist. Some philosophers took this kind of cases to be counterexamples to the principle of intentionality and rejected the relational view of intentionality itself (cf. Searle 1983). Meinong instead embraced these consequences. He originally thought that there are two modes of being (*Sein*), namely existence (*Existenz*) and subsistence (*Bestand*). He further divided all objects into *ideal* — or abstract or nonspatiotemporal — and *real* — or concrete or spatiotemporal — and claimed that real objects (e.g. Mont Blanc, Bucephalus, Rome) exist while ideal objects (e.g. numbers, classes, ideas) subsist. Over and above the realms of ideal objects and real objects he further introduced the new realm of nonexistent objects (e.g. the round square, the golden mountain and the fountain of youth).

Meinong (1904) endorsed the *principle of independence of so-being from being* (explicitly formulated by Mally 1912), according to which the ways in which objects are descriptively given, or the way they are (their *Sosein*), is distinct and independent of their being (*Sein*). Related to this principle he also endorsed the *Characterization Principle*, stating that all objects, whether they exist or not, have the properties which are used to characterize them (explicitly formulated by Routley 1980, p. 46). According to this principle, although the golden mountain does not exist, it does have the properties goldenness

and being a mountain that are used to characterize it; and although Charles Marlow does not exist, he does have the properties in terms of which Conrad characterizes him, e.g. being a sailor for the British Empire or being captain of a steamboat. (However, Raspa 2001 and Marek 2009 notice that in Meinong's original account fictional objects are conceived as higher-order entities constructed out of simpler entities.) Yet, neither the golden mountain nor Charles Marlow are *identical* with the set containing the property of goldenness and being a mountain and with the set containing the properties being a sailor for the British Empire or being captain of a steamboat respectively. Furthermore, Meinong introduced a sort of *Comprehension Principle* for objects stating that for any set of properties, some object has all the properties in that set and no other property. The golden mountain has the properties of goldenness and being a mountain and no other properties. An object is complete if it either has a certain property *F* or it has the negation of *F*, namely *not-F*. Every existing object is a completely determined object. Mont Blanc has an infinite number of properties and is therefore complete. But many non-existent objects simply lack both *F* and *not-F*, and in this sense they are incomplete or indeterminate with respect to *F* and *not-F*. The golden mountain is complete with respect to the properties goldenness and being a mountain, but it is incomplete with respect to properties such as being 1000 meters high and not being 1000 meters high. Similarly, Marlow is complete with respect to the properties attributed to him in the story, but he is incomplete with respect to many other properties not explicitly predicated of him in the story and not implicitly derivable from the explicitly predicated properties, such as having a brown mole on the neck and not having a brown mole on the neck.

Bertrand Russell (1905a, 1905b, 1907) put forward two objections against Meinong's theory (for a detailed discussion of the Russell-Meinong debate see Smith 1985; Griffin 1985-86; and Simons 1992). The first consists in noticing that nonexistent objects are apt to infringe the law of contradiction. According to Meinong there is an object that is both round and square (the round square) and hence that is both round and not-round (Russell 1905b, pp. 482-3). Meinong (1973) accepted the objection and recognized that indeed the round square does infringe the law of contradiction. But he replied

that that law holds only for existent objects and that objects such as the round square are contradictory and hence necessarily nonexistent. Russell's second objection could not be dismissed in the same way. Since Meinong endorsed the Comprehension Principle and since he treats existence as a property, there is an object that has the properties goldenness, being a mountain, and being existent. Hence, it follows that there is an *existent* object that is golden and a mountain. But it is an empirical fact that no golden mountain exists. A further paradox seems to arise from the following considerations. Given the comprehension principle, there is an object having the property being blue. The blue object has exactly one property, i.e. being blue, but it certainly has also the property of having exactly one property. And given that the property of being blue and the property of having exactly one property are not the same, then it follows that the blue object has at least two properties.

Contemporary upholders of fictional Meinongianism — or Neo-Meinongianism — endorse Meinong's distinction between being and existence, but some of them avoid appealing to the notion of subsistence in their theories (e.g. Parsons 1980, p. 10). Depending on their interpretation of the Meinongian metaphysical thesis, they divide into two main groups. On one side are upholders of what I call C-Meinongianism, according to which fictional objects are *concrete* non-existent entities (e.g. Parsons 1980; Routley 1980; Jacquette 1996). On the other side are upholders of what I call A-Meinongianism, who revise Meinong's distinctions between existence and non-existence in terms of being concrete and being abstract and claim that nonexistent objects are *abstract* entities (cf. Zalta 1983 and Pelletier and Zalta 2000; Rapaport 1978 suggests that Meinongian objects should be conceived as of the same metaphysical status as *plans* rather than concrete individuals, but he does not explicitly endorse the view that they are abstract non-spatiotemporal objects). Upholders of C-Meinongianism claim that nonexistent objects are *concrete* in the sense that they are correlates of sets of the very same properties that are usually predicated of ordinary objects (Castañeda 1989, spec. Ch. 11, suggests a similar theory in terms of bundles of *guises* and *consociation*). So, the golden mountain is a concrete non-existent object in virtue of being a correlate of the set containing the properties goldenness and being a mountain. Similarly, Marlow

is a concrete nonexistent individual in virtue of being a correlate of the set of properties attributed to him in the story. Upholders of *A*-Meinongianism instead put forward a technical notion of existence as synonymous with concrete, actual and real, and a notion of non-existence as synonymous with abstract and non-spatiotemporal (Zalta 1983, pp. 12, 173, n. 15). They claim that abstract objects are characterized by a distinct non-spatiotemporal mode of being and by properties that they do not have in the same way as spatiotemporal objects. The way in which the golden mountain has the property of being a mountain is different from the way in which Mont Blanc has that very property. Mont Blanc is a particular object in space and time, while the golden mountain is an abstract entity.

Mally (1912) originally suggested two kinds of strategies based on two alternative metaphysical distinctions that defendants of Meinongianism could use in order to solve the difficulties involved in Meinong's original theory. The first strategy appeals to the distinction between two kinds of properties; the second appeals to the distinction between two kinds of predication or two kinds of relations between properties and individuals. Upholders of *C*-Meinongianism and Meinong (1972) himself followed the first strategy in distinguishing between two kinds of properties that all objects have, i.e. *nuclear* and *extranuclear* (this is Parsons' terminology, which was later endorsed by Jacquette 1996). Nuclear properties are ordinary properties such as being blue, being kicked by Socrates or kicked somebody (Routley 1980, pp. 507-10, similarly talks of an object's *characterizing* properties). Extranuclear properties are ontological properties such as being existent and being fictional, modal properties such as being possible and being impossible, intentional properties such as being looked for and being thought about etc. Thus, the golden mountain has the nuclear properties goldenness and being a mountain, but it does also have the extranuclear property being thought by Meinong. And Charles Marlow has the nuclear properties being a sailor and being the captain of a steamboat, but he also has the extranuclear properties being a fictional character and being a recurrent character of Conrad's novels.

The two kinds of properties strategy has been criticized by Priest (2005: 83-84) as putting forward a distinction that is gerrymandered by the desire to avoid the aforementioned problems (and hence *ad*

hoc) and unmotivated. This becomes perspicuous if one considers (as Priest does) that even the existence property is relevant for the identity of an object. Although I might fear a real serial killer (e.g. the Unabomber), whom I know to exist, I might not fear a fictional serial killer, whom I know not to exist (e.g. Dexter). The fact that the fictional serial killer does not exist is clearly relevant for its identity and characterization. Furthermore, one important drawback of this strategy consists in the fact that there is no principled criterion to draw the distinction between nuclear and extranuclear properties. The property being a fictional character can be both nuclear and extranuclear. In *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* Jessica Rabbit is a fictional character (a cartoon), but she is a fictional character also outside the story, just like Marlow and Winston Smith. Thus it seems that the property in question is both nuclear (the property being a fictional character is among those characterizing her in the story) and extranuclear (she is really just a fictional character). Upholders of the distinction have a ready answer to this problem in terms of watered-down properties (Parsons 1980, pp. 42-4). They hold that the nuclear property in question is the watered-down counterpart of the corresponding extranuclear property. According to this proposal there are two properties rather than just one. However, this answer would also be *ad hoc* and it would further face an endless regress of more watered-down nuclear properties (Jacquette 1996, pp. 83-4; Voltolini 2006, p. 28).

Upholders of *A*-Meinongianism avoid this kind of problem by following the alternative distinction between two modes of predication. (Some opponents of Meinongianism, e.g. van Inwagen 1977, appeal to the same strategy although for different reasons.) Although they do recognize that nonexistent objects have the very same kind of properties that ordinary objects have, they hold that the ways in which they have them are very different. When we say that Charles Marlow was a sailor of the British Empire during the late 19th and early 20th century and that Joseph Conrad was a sailor of the British Empire during the late 19th and early 20th century we use two different kinds of predication of the same property. Rapaport (1978) talks of properties that are *constituents* of objects and properties that are *exemplified* by objects. Zalta (1983, 1988) claims that fictional entities *encode* such properties while ordinary objects *exemplify* them.

Castañeda (1989) appeals to an *internal* as well as *external* mode of predication of properties. Furthermore, according to Zalta (1983: 12), encoding is a primitive notion that is used to prove the existence, and derive the properties, of abstract objects, including fictional objects. According to both Castañeda (1989: 200) and Rapaport (1978: 162), internal predication applies to set-correlates, and so internal predication and properties that are constituents of objects can be defined in terms of set-membership: a (fictional) entity *e* has a property *F* internally or as a constituent if and only if *F* belongs to the set of properties that is correlated with *e*. While both Charles Marlow and Joseph Conrad have the property being a sailor of the British Empire during the late 19th and early 20th century, Marlow has the property as a constituent (Rapaport), he encodes the property (Zalta), or the property is predicated of him internally (Castañeda), while Conrad exemplifies it (Rapaport and Zalta) or has it externally (Castañeda).

One virtue of fictional Meinongianism is that it can give a straightforward account of the nonexistence datum. When we say that Hamlet does not exist we say something true because Hamlet is a non-existent entity. Another virtue is that it accounts for the intuition that fictional objects have the properties that we predicate of them, either as nuclear or extranuclear, or as externally or internally predicated. Hence, a related virtue is that it provides a straightforward account of the truth of statements such as ‘Winston Smith is an employee of the Ministry of Truth and a fictional character’ and of comparative statements such as ‘both Marlow and Conrad were sailors for the British Empire in the late 19th and early 20th century’. A further virtue is that it can offer a straightforward account of impossible or inconsistent fictions. One famous example of the first kind is Conan Doyle’s characterization of Dr. Watson as having a single war wound, variously placed on a shoulder or on a leg (see *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*). Upholders of Neo-Meinongianism claim that the incoherence would be unproblematic because these properties would be among the characterizing properties of fictional objects. According to Parsons (1980, pp. 49-60, 228-23) a fictional object to which the story ascribes incompatible properties is an impossible object, but this is unproblematic because the object does not exist. (Howell 1979 criticizes Parsons’ theory and recommends an

alternative approach construing fictional objects as non-actual objects in fictional worlds, which can be either possible or impossible.) According to Zalta (1988, pp. 123-29) a fictional object that encodes incompatible properties is unproblematic because it does not exemplify them.

One important drawback of the theory however is that it cannot account for one important feature of fictional characters, namely their being created entities. It seems fundamental to a correct comprehension of the notion of what a fictional character is that it is created. We say things like Agatha Christie created Miss Marple in *The Murder at the Vicarage* and James Bond is a fictional character created in 1953 by Ian Fleming. But if fictional characters are non-spatiotemporal entities then it seems that their authors cannot create them. Parsons (1980, p. 188) appeals to a notion of creation consisting in a mechanism of selection of preexisting objects through stipulative descriptive reference fixing (see Deutsch 1991 for a development of this idea). Yet, picking out a preexistent object via descriptive stipulation is certainly not a way of genuinely creating an object in the sense of bringing something new into existence. And this is the idea involved in the intuitive notion of creating a fictional character.

1.2 Fictional possibilism

Fictional possibilism can be characterized by the two following theses:

*Ontological Thesis*_(Realism): There are fictional entities.

*Metaphysical Thesis*_(Possibilism): Fictional entities are possible objects.

According to this version of the metaphysical thesis, fictional entities do not exist in the actual world but they do exist in some other possible world. Fictional entities are objects that exist at those possible worlds that realize the story. For example, although at the actual world Conrad told *Heart of Darkness* as fiction, there is a possible world in which everything that is explicitly told in the story is realized, and hence where Marlow, Kurtz and the other characters exist and are and do as the story tells.

Possible objects are objects whose existence is metaphysically possible. Upholders of possibilism hold that there are possible objects, which do not exist at the actual world but that could exist at some other possible world. The view is usually contrasted with *actualism*, according to which there are only actual objects, namely those objects that exist at the actual world. Suppose that animals of any given species could exist only as members of that given species. Because animals of some other species than those existing could have existed, animals that actually do not exist could have existed. If there are these possible animals, then possibilism is true. According to actualism, in this context the expression ‘these possible animals’ is empty because it has no referent. Yet, if these animals that do not actually exist could have existed, then the expression ‘these possible animals’ might have referred. Thus, similarly to Meinongianism, possibilism distinguishes two senses of being, actual existence and possible existence or actual non-existence. Differently from Meinongianism however, possibilism is not committed to the view that any referring or denoting expression refers or denotes something. Upholders of possibilism can deny that the expression ‘winged horses’ refer because the description is simply empty. If there could have been winged horses then, according to possibilism, something could have been a winged horse. But it does not follow from possibilism that if there could have been winged horses then something is a winged horse.

Three familiar problems arise from the application of this picture to fictional entities as non-actual possible objects. The first is the problem of *non-uniqueness* or *ontological indeterminacy* (Kaplan 1973, p. 505-6; Kripke 1972/1980, pp. 156-8). There is more than just one possible world that realizes *Heart of Darkness*. In each of these worlds there is a man called Marlow who accepts an appointment as captain of a steamboat and is and does everything that is recorded in Conrad’s novel. These Marlow-candidates are all distinct individuals; yet they match exactly the way in which Marlow is described in the story. However, they may differ in some crucial aspects, e.g. they may be born from different parents in different places and under different circumstances. And when characters are only roughly sketched there might even be more candidates in the same possible world that fit what the story says. Hence one might legitimately ask: which one

of those Marlow-candidates is Marlow? There are two standard answers to this question. The first is offered by Lewis' (1986) theory of *possibilist realism*, which is based on his counterpart theory. The second is offered by Priest's (2005) theory of *noneism* and Berto's (2011) theory of what he calls *modal Meinongianism*, which are both based on a variable domains notion of what there is. Let us briefly consider each solution.

According to Lewis, non-actual possible objects are genuine objects just as actual objects are. Both non-actual possible objects and actual objects exist, although the first are not included in the realm of existence that we call *actuality*. Yet, they are included in some other possible realm of existence, which is metaphysically on a par with the actual realm of existence. According to Lewis' (1970) indexical theory of actuality, actuality *for us* is the realm that includes *us*, while actuality for any object *x* is the realm that contains *x*. All possible worlds, like all possible objects, are concrete in the sense that they are spatiotemporal objects. And every possible object bears no relation to any actual object or to any world where it does not exist. This is the sense in which, according to his counterpart theory, possible objects are world-bound. Lewis (1978) takes a possible individual to be a Marlow-candidate if it has Marlow's properties in a possible world in which Conrad tells *Heart of Darkness* as known fact. Given that each Marlow-candidate is world bound, Lewis can offer a principled way to identify a Marlow-candidate as Marlow in terms of *acquaintance*. Suppose you are a reader of *Heart of Darkness*. Each Marlow-candidate is a counterpart for you of every other Marlow-candidate. For even if they should differ substantially in terms of overall qualitative similarity, the various Marlow-candidates are all counterparts by *acquaintance* for you (and your counterparts), they are all, in their respective worlds, the person called 'Marlow' whom you or your counterparts learn about by reading *Heart of Darkness* told as known fact (cf. Lewis 1983b; Currie 1990, pp. 136-9; Kroon 1994, pp. 211-212).

According to Priest's (2005) theory of *noneism*, inspired by Routley (1980), only concrete (past, present and future) objects exist, while abstract objects and possible or impossible objects do not exist (Routley's original theory was even more radical, holding that past and future concrete objects do not exist either). Fictional objects

pertain to the second category. Just like in the standard Meinongian framework, the domain of each world is the totality of objects. To account for the intuitively true claim that some objects that do not exist could have existed Priest introduces a predicate of existence E (or $\exists!$) and holds that some object o exists at world w_1 , but not at world w_2 , if o satisfies E at w_1 and not at w_2 . Thus, there are fictional entities in the actual world and at all other possible worlds. But at the actual world they do not exist, while they do exist (they satisfy E) at some other possible worlds. Within this framework the indeterminacy problem does not arise. For example, one might ask: When are two nonexistent objects identical? Priest's (2005, p. 87ff.) simple answer is that any objects o and e are the same if and only if they have the same actual identity. That is, if and only if they are identical at the actual world. But how do we establish which of the (nonexistent) objects among the totality of objects is Marlow? Priest's (2005, pp. 119-20) answer is that once Conrad has written the entire story (the first in which he introduces Marlow), he has imagined one particular object to be Marlow, and it is in virtue of that intentional act of imagination involved in telling the story that he picks out Marlow at the actual world and not some other fictional individual. Marlow of course does not exist at the actual world, but he does exist at those worlds where the story is realized. Conrad could go on imagining more and more things about Marlow, but this would not entail that a different object is picked out every time that a new predicate is added to the character's characterizing properties. Instead, Priest claims that once the character has been picked out after telling the first story, all that Conrad does by adding more and more properties to the character is just restricting the set of possible worlds in which those properties are satisfied by the same fictional individual. Priest (2005, pp. 93-4) himself recognizes that the actual world contains several distinct possible individuals that do not exist there but that might exist and realize *Heart of Darkness* in some other possible worlds. So, one problem that Priest does not fully answer is: how can Conrad intend just one of those objects as being Marlow rather than another?

The second problem for fictional possibilism is that of *impossible fictional objects*. Howell (1979, p. 139) considers a story according to which Sherlock Holmes is a famous circle-squarer. According to

his construal, the apparently true report ‘According to the story, Holmes squared the circle’ is necessarily false. That is, it cannot be true at any metaphysically possible world. Alternatively Lewis suggests that in the story anything would be vacuously true, including ‘According to the story, Holmes did not square the circle’. As a result, every contradictory story would generate exactly the same fictional truths. But surely different fictions generate distinct fictional worlds. Lewis (1983a, pp. 277-8) suggests that impossible fictions be divided into coherent fragments that can be realized at different possible worlds. More specifically, given a certain property F and not- F both attributed to the same character w , both $F(x)$ and not- $F(x)$ can be true in an impossible fiction but not their conjunction. Such solution might account for Doyle’s unintentional characterization of Dr. Watson as having a single war wound on one shoulder and on one leg in different stories. But it would not account for an author’s intention to produce an inconsistent fiction about an impossible object (say about the round square or about some dead-and-not-dead individual). Priest’s (2005) version of fictional possibilism, noneism, is much broader than standard possibilism and fully embraces impossible objects as existent in those impossible worlds that realize the relevant inconsistent fiction.

The third problem for fictional possibilism is that of *extra-fictional statements*. We make various assertions about fictional objects outside the stories in which they occur and some of them seem to be straightforwardly true. We say that the character of Mr. Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* inspired the character of Captain Kurtz in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. Thus, against the central metaphysical thesis upheld by upholders of fictional possibilism, it seems that fictional objects are actual objects after all. Or suppose we say that Marlow is a better storyteller than I will ever be. We seem to be saying that Marlow *actually* has this comparative property, that is, he has it in the actual world, not merely in some possible world or other. Priest (2005, p. 123) would reject this reading and hold that what we are actually saying is that Marlow is *possibly* a better storyteller than I would ever be. In a world where Marlow is as good a storyteller as he appears to be in *Heart of Darkness*, he is a better story teller than I will ever be in the actual world. But no such cross-world way of reading this statement matches the way we normally read any other

sentence involving a comparison between individuals. Conrad is a better storyteller than I will ever be, and this is straightforwardly true at the actual world. It would be incorrect to interpret this statement as involving a cross-world comparison such as Conrad is possibly a better storyteller than I am. He is a better storyteller than I am at the actual world.

Fictional possibilism further suffers of the same drawback indicated at the end of the previous section. It cannot account for the fact that one characteristic property of fictional characters is their being genuinely created (read: brought into existence) by their authors through the activity of storytelling. Our intuition is that there was no Charles Marlow before Conrad had told the stories in which Marlow was originally introduced. The third version of fictional realism that we will explore next instead starts from this datum and tries to build a coherent theory of fictional entities as created artifacts.

1.3 Fictional creationism

Fictional creationism can be characterized by the following two theses:

*Ontological Thesis*_(Realism): There are fictional entities.

*Metaphysical Thesis*_(Creationism): Fictional entities are abstract human artifacts created by authors through the activity of story telling.

According to this version of the metaphysical thesis fictional entities are abstract human artifacts created by authors that can be thought as being social constructs or theoretical entities of criticism. Upholders of fictional creationism notice that there are apparently true utterances of sentences such as ‘The picaresque novel originated in 16th-century Spain’ and ‘Dante Alighieri created the *Terza Rima* rhyme scheme’. These utterances are usually taken as sincere assertions that entail an unproblematic inference to the existence of picaresque novels and rhyme schemes. Similarly, there are apparently true utterances of sentences that, if taken seriously, entail the existence of fictional entities, e.g. ‘James Bond is a fictional character created in 1953 by Ian Fleming’ and ‘Agatha Christie created Miss Marple in *The Murder at the Vicarage*’. Upholders of fictional creationism claim

that we cannot reject fictional entities if we admit picaresque novels and rhyme schemes (and meters, plots, poems, screenplays etc.), because they are entities of the same kind, i.e. abstract artifacts created by authors (for similar versions of the same idea see van Inwagen 1977, pp. 302-303, 307; Salmon 1998, p. 300; Thomasson 1999, p. 143; and Braun 2005, p. 609; however, Van Inwagen 2003, pp. 153-54, raises a doubt about whether there are abstract artifacts, and thus about creationism).

However, even admitting that both fictional objects and fictional works are abstract entities sharing the same type of dependence relations on the author's activity of story telling, it has been objected that they do differ in kind. For example, Iacona and Voltolini (2002) argue that while literary works of fiction are syntactical-semantic entities, fictional entities are not. Furthermore, Yagisawa (2001) argues that creationism conflicts sharply with other seemingly obvious thoughts such as the nonexistence datum (for a response see Goodman 2004). And Brock (2010) argues that the appeal to creation leaves more questions than answers. For example, when and how are fictional entities created? Upholders of fictional creationism claim that by pretending to refer to fictional people (and fictional places, events etc.) in the act of telling a story authors genuinely bring fictional entities into existence. Let us consider this last problem carefully.

Rather than focusing directly on the mechanisms of creation of fictional entities, most upholders of fictional creationism have been more interested in discussing the problem of when utterances and inscriptions of fictional names refer to fictional entities. This should come as no surprise given that the initial motivation for introducing fictional entities derives originally from linguistic arguments of the sort I have mentioned above. Thus, one can reformulate the question 'when are fictional characters created?' by asking: when do utterances and inscriptions of fictional names refer to fictional entities? Upholders of fictional creationism have offered two main different standard answers. According to what one might call the *mixed account* (Kripke 1973/2013; Searle 1974-75/1979; Schiffer 1996), fictional names are rigid *nondesignators* (Salmon 1998, p. 292), that is necessarily nonreferring, when uttered by the author of fiction in the process of story telling (cf. also Kripke 1980, pp. 157-8, Kaplan

1973, pp. 505- 8; Donnellan 1974, pp. 24-25; Plantinga 1974, pp. 159-163); they are rigid designators when used by readers and critics in sincere assertive utterances. On this view, there are two fictional names 'Marlow₁' and 'Marlow₂' corresponding to two different uses of the same syntactic name. 'Marlow₁' is a rigid nondesignator (it has no referent, neither actual nor possible) when used in story telling (i.e. in pretense). 'Marlow₂' is a rigid designator (it refers to the same abstract artifact in all possible worlds) when used in sincere assertions that entail the existence of fictional entities. The first use is ontologically foundational; the second use is parasitic on the first. Conrad uses 'Marlow₁' in the process of telling *Heart of Darkness* to pretend to refer to a particular individual, without referring to anything and hence without expressing any proposition. Readers and literary critics genuinely use the name 'Marlow₂' when they engage in sincere assertions. In this case uses of the name genuinely refer and utterances of sentences genuinely express propositions. This view has several well-known drawbacks including the problem of the indeterminacy of content (both of the author's story telling, of the story itself and of reports produced in pretense, but also asserted as embedded in the fictional operator, cf. Salmon 1998, pp. 297-8), the related problem of the indeterminacy of fictional truth-conditions (what is the case according to the story?), and the problem of the purported ambiguity in the use of fictional names (of which there seems to be no evidence, cf. Everett 2007, p. 59). But most relevantly, the mixed account offers no explanation of the creation of the abstract artifact that, supposedly, is the referent of 'Marlow₂'.

According to Salmon's (1998, p. 294) interpretation of Kripke's (1973/2013) view, Conrad tells *Heart of Darkness* in the pretense that Marlow is so and so and did such and such things. But by uttering the relevant words in the process of story telling he expresses nothing. Yet, Conrad's use of the name 'Marlow₁' in pretense *licenses a sort of metaphysical move*. At a later stage, speaking from without that pretense, engaging in serious assertions about the fictional character, our use of the name 'Marlow₂' *licenses a sort of semantic move*. That is, when performed in a sincere assertion our use of the name refers to the fictional character created by Conrad's pretense. As Salmon states Kripke's view: "The language allows a grammatical transformation of a fictional name for a person into a name of a fictional

person". According to Searle (1974-75/1979, p. 73), "By pretending to refer to people and to recount events about them, the author creates fictional characters and events. (...) once the fictional character has been created, we who are standing outside the fictional story can really refer to a fictional person". Van Inwagen (1977, p. 307) claims that discourse about fictional characters involves certain rules "for talking about fiction" according to which "a creature of fiction may be referred to by what is (loosely speaking) 'the name it has in the story'". And the same idea can be found in Schiffer's (1996, pp. 154-159) proposed distinction between a *pretending* or *fictional* use of a fictional name within fiction and what he calls a *hypostatizing* use of the name without fiction. According to his view, the connection between the two different uses gives rise to a "something-from-nothing feature" of the hypostatizing use: "whenever one of us uses a name in the fictional way (in which case one's use refers to nothing), then that use automatically enables any of us to use the name in the hypostatizing way, in which case we are referring to an actually existing fictional entity." (p. 156). Still, none of the previous claims explains the genuine creation of fictional entities. What kind of metaphysical move is the one licensed by the pretense use of language in story telling? How does a use of a fictional name automatically enable us to refer to fictional entities? How can one genuinely create some abstract artifact from nothing? Upholders of the mixed account offer no answer to these questions. One still wonders about how and when a character is genuinely created.

One might object that there is nothing puzzling about this idea since many social and cultural entities such as marriages, promises and obligations are created via the use of language. But there are two kinds of considerations that should make us suspicious of this comparison. First, it is not clear that these are genuine entities. Van Inwagen (2005) himself expresses a similar doubt: "It seems to me to be much more plausible to say that in such cases "all that happens" is that things already in existence acquire new properties or come to stand in new relations: the property *having promised to teach Alice to drive*, for example, or the relation *is married to*" (p. 154). Second, even if one were to accept the idea that marriages, promises and obligations are real entities, there seems to be a radical difference between the creation of these entities and the creation of fictional

entities. While the first are introduced via the *serious* use of language, fictional characters would be introduced in pretense as concrete individuals that (metaphorically) exist in works of fiction and only later (through some mysterious ontogenetic mechanism) would pop into existence via the serious use of language, but this time as abstract artifacts existing in the actual world. Far from being obvious and intuitively clear, this comparison seems to obscure the specificity of fictional entities.

According to what one might call the *uniform account* (Salmon 1998; Thomasson 1999), fictional names are rigid designators referring to fictional characters already when used in story telling. This view has several advantages over the mixed account, including the fact that it offers a uniform semantics for fictional names. There is only one name 'Marlow' and this rigidly refers to the same abstract artifact when used both in story telling and in serious assertions. Utterances of sentences containing the name always express propositions. According to Salmon, this does not mean that the author of fiction refers to anything when she uses the name in story telling. It only means that once one accepts that there are fictional entities, one better interprets utterances of fictional names as referring to those entities. As he puts it: "Once fictional characters have been countenanced as real entities, why hold onto an alleged use of their names that fails to refer to them? It is like buying a luxurious Italian sports car only to keep it garaged" (1998: 298). However, this view entails no explanation of how and when fictional entities are created.

Like Salmon, Thomasson (1999) endorses the idea that fictional entities come into existence already when the author pretends to refer to some fictional individual in story telling. She suggests that the author's act is a sort of special performative speech act that immediately brings something into existence: "If there is no preexistent object to whom Austen was referring in writing her words [the very first sentence of *Emma*] (...) writing those words brings into existence the object therein described: The fictional character Emma Woodhouse" (p. 13). Once the character has been generated through the creative power of the author's acts all other references by the author in the story and by readers and critics in serious discourse refer back to the character thereby introduced. Thomasson's (1996a, 1996b, 1999, spec. Ch. 6-8) account is highly indebted to the phe-

nomenological tradition and in particular to the work of Ingarden (1931: §§15, 20, 25, 28, 38). She argues that by postulating fictional entities one can offer a straightforward account of the intentionality of thoughts and discourse about fictional characters (pp. 90-92). Thoughts about King Lear are directed towards him (not towards Edmund or Edgar) and are specifically about him (not about whoever plays the Lear-role). We can counter-fictionally imagine that he would not have descended into madness if he had not disposed of his estate between his two oldest daughters. And you and I can identify him even when we describe him in different ways. You might claim that King Lear was a fool and arrogant old man; I might argue that he was just a naïve and old-fashioned chap. Yet our disagreement is clearly about the same character. Thomasson claims that a fictional entity comes into existence as the purely intentional object of a particular mental act of an author that talks of it (pp. 5-7, 88-90) and it continues to exist if some literary works continue to exist (pp. 7, 36, 88-9). Ingarden claims that purely intentional objects are entities that survive their own creating mental acts and fictional objects are a subset of the set of purely intentional objects. This picture clearly attributes generative ontological power to thoughts. Yet, as Voltolini (2006: 49-55) forcefully notices, just like our dreams of dwarves and elves do not commit us to their existence, our *imaginings* about dwarves and elves do not commit us to their existence either. Furthermore, as Howell (2002: 283) correctly points out, Thomasson never explains how it is that by imagining a certain *concrete* individual that does not exist the author successfully brings into existence a new *abstract* entity. Moreover, she claims that the author baptizes a fictional character in the act of telling the story through a sort of ‘quasi-indexical reference’ to the character that depends upon those linguistic acts. Austen’s first use of the name ‘Emma Woodhouse’ (in the pretense that the name refers to a concrete non-existent individual) is supposed to serve as quasi-indexical reference to the abstract character thereby created as if that use were to say ‘the character founded on these very words is to be called “Emma Woodhouse”’ (pp. 47-8). But what is “quasiindexicality” *exactly*? How does the author successfully refer to the character dependent on the words used in pretense? Does the formula indicated by Thomasson work as a reference-fixing description?

On a conclusive remark, one might wonder why fictional creationists should really care about providing a complete explanation of when and how creation occurs. After all, there are many entities the metaphysics of which are debated despite the lack of agreement on this score, e.g. theories, literary works and persons. But asking when and how creation occurs is a legitimate question since the central thesis that distinguishes fictional creationism from other stripes of fictional realism is that fictional entities are *created* entities. Furthermore, claiming that an answer to these questions is irrelevant because others do not pose the same questions for other cases seems like a lazy attempt not to offer any real basis for what is in fact the main tenet of creationism. Fictional Meinongians and upholders of Fictional Possibilism have to account for the intuitively true claim that fictional characters are created entities. But since they hold that these are not genuinely created, they do not need to offer any explanation of their ontogenetic mechanisms. If one were to put forward a metaphysical account of theories, literary works and persons whose main thesis is that they are created entities, then one should be able to explain their existence conditions. Otherwise, any such theory would be irremediably flawed and without any real metaphysical basis.

2 The ontology of fictional entities

Upholders of fictional realism and upholders of fictional irrealism put forward two different kinds of arguments for or against positing fictional entities into our ontology. The first kind has been inspired by the linguistic data coming from our talk about fictional characters. The second and most recent kind builds on genuine ontological considerations.

2.1 Linguistic arguments

Consider the following sentences involving apparent reference to fictional entities:

- (1) Medardo was Viscount of Terralba.
- (2) Medardo is a fictional character.

- (3) The character of Medardo was created by Italo Calvino.
- (4) Medardo is as realistic a character as Zaphod Beeblebrox.
- (5) There are fictional characters that could never have been depicted prior to the creation of Miss Marple.
- (6) Mary Shelley first thought about Frankenstein in Switzerland.
- (7) Conrad was a better sailor than Marlow.

Evans (1982, Ch. 10) originally distinguishes two different uses that speakers can make of sentences such as (1)-(7). When performing what he calls a *conniving* use, the utterer engages in pretense or make-believe (cf. Walton 1973). When performing what he calls a *non-conniving* use, the utterer engages in serious assertion with real truth-conditions and hence real truth-values. When Calvino utters (1) in telling *The Cloven Viscount* he engages in an act of pretense and therefore performs a conniving use of the sentence. But when a student utters (1) in answering a question during an exam in Italian Literature she engages in a genuine act of assertion, hence in a non-conniving use, for she says how things are according to the story (alternatively, Currie 1990 and García-Carpintero 2007 argue that Calvino's utterances are instances of a genuine speech act characterized by a special intention to make the audience imagine that Medardo was such and such). Thus, when analyzing discourse about fictional characters it is more appropriate to talk about *utterances* or *uses* of sentences that seem to make reference to fictional entities rather than to talk just about sentences.

According to Russell's (1905) vulgate, Meinong's (1904) idea was that every denoting expression stands for something and that what a denoting expression stands for is the meaning of that expression. Since sentences involving denoting expressions such as 'Medardo' are clearly meaningful, the expressions must stand for something. Since Medardo does not exist, the name must denote a nonexistent individual. Russell (1905a,b) objects to Meinong's theory for the reasons that we have described in §1.1. But he also offers an alternative solution in terms of his theory of descriptions. He follows Frege (1892) in distinguishing between the meaning and the denotation of a denoting phrase. However, contrary to Frege, at the very beginning of *On Denoting* he claims that a phrase may be denoting and yet

not denote anything: a denoting phrase is denoting not in virtue of being about something, but in virtue of its *logical form*. For example, the denoting phrase ‘the present King of France’ has no denotation (because France has no King). Yet the sentence ‘The present King of France is bald’ is meaningful and should be analyzed in terms of variables, quantifiers, predicates and logical connectives. More specifically, its meaning is given by the following three propositions:

- (i) There is at least one present King of France;
- (ii) There is at most one present King of France;
- (iii) Everything that is a present King of France is bald.

In other words, the sentence means that the unique King of France is bald. Since no individual satisfies the predicate ‘is bald’, according to Russell the sentence is just false.

Russell thought that proper names are disguised definite descriptions and should therefore be analyzed in the same way. The name ‘Medardo’ is just an abbreviation for a longer phrase such as ‘the cloven Viscount’ with no denotation. Hence, the sentence ‘Medardo was Viscount of Terralba’ is to be analyzed as: there is at least one cloven Viscount; there is at most one cloven Viscount; and every cloven Viscount is Viscount of Terralba. In other words, the unique cloven Viscount is Viscount of Terralba. Again, just as before, the original statement is fully meaningful but also false because there is no unique cloven Viscount that satisfies the predicate ‘is Viscount of Terralba’.

Russell’s analysis entails that sentences containing fictional names (and non-denoting names in general) are all false, yet (1)-(7) are intuitively true. Furthermore, sentences such as ‘Medardo was a Danish prince’ are clearly false, but intuitively this is not because of failure of denotation of the subject expression, but because according to Calvino’s *The Cloven Viscount* Medardo was not a Danish prince. Reports of how characters are described in stories can be interpreted as utterances produced from a perspective internal to the fiction or they can be interpreted as utterances produced from a perspective external to the fiction. Call the first *intrafictional statements* and call the second *metafictional statements*. Intrafictional statements are to be analyzed as conniving uses performed by the author of fiction in

story telling (or as instances of a special speech act) or as a natural continuation of the reader's imaginative engagement with the story. Metafictional statements are usually analyzed as non-conniving uses of a sentence involving an implicit "according to the fiction" operator.

Predelli (1997) describes the operator view as a sort of replacement view: an utterance of (1) in its nonconniving use is to be analyzed in terms of a longer sentence in which the explicitly uttered sentence is embedded in the "according to the fiction" operator. On this view, 'According to *The Cloven Viscount*, Medardo is Viscount of Terralba' is a report of what is the case in Calvino's story. Lewis (1978) originally introduced the fictional operator as an intensional operator working as a restricted quantifier on the qualitative worlds of the story, i.e. those possible worlds in which the story is told as known fact. In an irrealist framework the fictional operator works as a restricted quantifier on certain *dicta* or propositions. In other words, what is said to be true in the fiction is a certain *dictum* or proposition and not the claim, about some particular thing or *res*, that it has a certain property (cf. Rorty 1982; Lamarque-Olsen 1994; Orenstein 2003). According to Russell's original analysis, the name 'Medardo' should be replaced by the equivalent description 'the cloven Viscount'. Russell distinguishes two different analyses of (1) depending on whether the definite description has a primary occurrence or a secondary occurrence. According to the first reading, (1) would be analyzed as: 'There is exactly one cloven Viscount, and according to *The Cloven Viscount* he is Viscount of Terralba'. Since there is no unique cloven Viscount, (1) would turn out to be false. According to the second reading (1) would be analyzed as: 'According to *The Cloven Viscount*, there is exactly one cloven Viscount and he is Viscount of Terralba'. And since this is what the story says, (1) would turn out to be true, as it should be.

One difficulty for the operator view emerges when one considers that there are many non-conniving uses of sentences about fictional characters that cannot be embedded in the fictional operator, namely the *extra-fictional statements* (2)-(7). For example, (2) cannot be understood as elliptical for 'according to *The Cloven Viscount*, Medardo is a fictional character', because according to the story he is a man of flesh and blood (cf. Lewis 1978, p. 38). Phillips (2000) and Brock

(2002) extend the operator strategy to the analysis of extra-fictional statements by introducing an operator that appeals to the realist presumption that these statements involve genuine reference to fictional entities. For example, (2) would be analyzed as: ‘according to the realist fiction, Medardo is a fictional character’. Provided that the resulting complex sentences are read *de dicto*, any apparent commitment to fictional entities seems to disappear.

However, one further difficulty for the operator view comes from worries about what *concerns* us when (thinking and) talking about fictional characters (Eagle 2007; Doggett and Egan 2007; Currie 2010). When we say that Medardo is Viscount of Terralba we do not seem to be talking about Calvino’s story (at least, not always). We are talking about Medardo, the fictional character described in that story. The subject matter of our concern is Medardo, the character described in the story as being Viscount of Terralba, not the story *The Cloven Viscount* as containing that information. The same kind of consideration could be extended to Philips and Brock’s analysis. (See originally Yablo 2001 for a similar worry concerning the interpretation of sentences containing reference to numbers interpreted within a fictionalist approach to mathematics.)

Alternatively, one might dispense with the operator view and claim that uses of apparently true sentences such as (1)-(7) involve some kind of pretense or make-believe. Conniving utterances of sentences involving fictional proper names would carry not genuine but pretend ontological commitments. For example, when Calvino uttered (1) in telling *The Cloven Viscount* he uttered a sentence in the pretense that the name ‘Medardo’ refers. This entails that, in the context of telling *The Cloven Viscount*, (1) has not genuine but merely *fictional* truthconditions and has also a *fictional* truth-value. Similarly, my utterance of (1), as a continuation of Calvino’s imaginative activity, would involve the same kind of pretense according to which there is an individual *x* to which the name ‘Medardo’ refers. Utterances of (2)-(7) would extend the relevant pretense above the original authorial pretense. According to Walton (1990, pp. 51, 406, 409), the two cases involve two different kinds of pretense. In the former case, speakers play a game of make-believe *authorized* by the story, which is a prop dictating how things are to be imagined. In the second case, they play an *unofficial* game of make-believe in which there may be

no constraints provided by the story. The obvious drawback of the pretense theory is that it cannot account for the strong intuition that utterances of (2)-(7) involve genuine truth-conditions and genuine truth-values (cf. Thomasson 1999; van Inwagen 2000).

One major problem for Russell's analysis of proper names is that it entails that they are *synonymous* with definite descriptions because every proper name is replaced with an equivalent definite description. Yet there are widely accepted arguments showing the analysis to be incorrect (cf. Donnellan 1972; Kripke 1972/1980; Evans 1973, 1982). One might tentatively restrict synonymous descriptivism to fictional names (and non-denoting names more generally) and reject it for referring names (cf. Currie 1988; 1990, pp. 158-62). But there are reasons to be suspicious of this option too (cf. Adams et al. 1997). Alternatively, one might endorse a uniform semantics for fictional proper names inspired by Referentialism or Direct Reference Theory, according to which the semantic contribution of a name to the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence containing that name is its referent, if it has any. A particularly strong version of Referentialism is Millianism, according to which the semantic content of a proper name is *exhausted* by its individual referent. This further entails that if a name has no referent then it has no semantic content or, perhaps, it is not a genuine name. One problem for Referentialism about fictional names in an irrealist framework is how to account for the meaningfulness of such names. Standard solutions usually appeal to some sort of associated information.

According to Referentialism, utterances of sentences containing proper names express singular propositions, i.e. propositions that are about a particular individual in virtue of having that individual as a constituent (cf. Kaplan 1989, pp. 512-13). An utterance of 'Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in the Alps' expresses a singular proposition that can be conventionally represented by (although is not identical to) the ordered pair <Mont Blanc, being-the-highest-mountain-in-the-Alps> having Mont Blanc itself as an individual constituent in subject position and the property of being-the-highest-mountain-in-the-Alps in predicate position. Given the assumption that there are no fictional entities, fictional proper names have no referents. And this can be taken as a basis to hold that utterances of sentences containing fictional proper names express either no propo-

sition or a gappy proposition.

Upholders of the no-proposition theory can argue that the apparent meaningfulness and truth-value of (utterances of) sentences expressing no proposition concerns what is pragmatically implicated rather than what is semantically expressed (e.g., Taylor 2000). Others appeal to the notion of pretense and claim that the apparent meaningfulness and truth-value of such sentences are merely fictional (Evans 1982; Walton 1990; Recanati 2000). One difficulty for this view however consists in specifying the relevant pretense. According to Walton (pp. 396-405), a pretend assertion of a sentence such as (1) is an act of a specific kind, which one might call *K*. When one performs a non-conniving use of (1), what one genuinely asserts is that *Heart of Darkness* is such that one who engages in a kind of pretense *K* in a game authorized for this story makes it fictional of himself in that game that he speaks truly. But how can one identify *K*? When there is no apparent reference to fictional characters, Walton indicates a purely descriptive way of specifying the relevant pretense. So, for example, if the sentence uttered is 'the cloven Viscount was Viscount of Terralba' what is said is that *The Cloven Viscount* is such that one who fictionally asserts that the cloven Viscount was Viscount of Terralba in a game authorized for this story makes it fictional of herself in that game that she speaks truly. Unfortunately, no such paraphrase is available for (1), because the longer statement retains the apparent reference to Medardo. This semantic interpretation has been strongly criticized (cf. Richard 2000). Furthermore, within this account one cannot identify *K* and hence one cannot distinguish it from any other kind of pretend assertion of sentences involving non-referring proper names. For example, one cannot distinguish a pretend assertion of (1) from a pretend assertion of 'Dr. Trelawney is Viscount of Terralba' both said in a game of make-believe for *The Cloven Viscount*. That is, within this proposal one cannot explain in virtue of what *K* is a kind of pretense about Medardo that can be distinguished from a different kind of pretense about Dr. Trelawney.

Those assuming some version of the gappy proposition theory can easily explain the meaningfulness of sentences involving empty names by claiming that they express gappy or incomplete propositions. An utterance of (1) expresses an incomplete proposition that can be conventionally represented by the ordered pair $\langle _, _ \rangle$, being-

Viscount-of-Terralba> having nothing as an individual constituent in subject position and the property of being-Viscount-of-Terralba in predicate position. Braun (1993, 2005) claims that sentences of the form ‘*a* is *F*’, where *a* is an empty name, are false (for criticisms see Adams et al. 1997; Adams and Stecker 1994; Everett 2003). Salmon (1998) and Adams and Dietrich (2004) claim that they are neither true nor false. Furthermore, Braun (2005) and Adams et al. (1997) claim that sentences such as ‘According to *The Cloven Viscount*, Medardo is Viscount of Terralba’ can be true. But they disagree about extra-fictional statements like ‘Medardo is a fictional character’. Braun upholds a mixed account of fictional names as referring and non-referring in different contexts and endorses a version of fictional creationism for extra-fictional statements. Adams et al. uphold a uniform account of fictional names as non-referring in all contexts and claim that extra-fictional statements can be true even though fictional names do not refer.

One drawback of gappy proposition theories is that different sentences directed towards different fictional characters might express the very same gappy proposition, e.g. (1) and ‘Dr. Trelawney is Viscount of Terralba’. Thus, something other than the reference of names must be relevant to their identification. Adams and Stecker (1994) originally suggest that fictional names can be used to invoke information through Gricean pragmatic mechanisms. Different utterances of different sentences semantically expressing the same gappy proposition pragmatically convey different implications involving different descriptions associated with names (for criticisms see Reimer 2001; Everett 2003; Green 2007). Braun appeals to the different *ways* in which a gappy proposition can be imagined. And yet he does not explain in virtue of what certain types of ways of imagining are directed towards Medardo while others are directed towards Dr. Trelawney if the two characters do not exist. In other words, one still needs to explain in virtue of what certain types of imagining count as Medardo-ish while others count as Dr. Trelawney-ish (cf. Friend 2011b). Alternatively, Friend (2011b, forthcoming) offers an alternative explanation in terms of participation in what Perry (2001) calls *notion-networks*, but she does not develop a full-blown account of how to individuate non-referring networks. Salis (2013) on the contrary does offer such an account in terms of participation in

Sainsbury's (2005) name-using practices individuated by their origin in a baptism (which can be empty).

Against both descriptivism and Millianism Sainsbury (2005) argues that proper names, with or without referents, have non-descriptive meanings specified in a Davidson-style truth theory. He further assumes Negative Free Logic, according to which all atomic sentences involving non-referring singular terms are considered to be just plainly false. Negative Free Logic is motivated by the fundamental assumption of bivalence. A true sentence is one for which predication itself has an extension (its corresponding set containing at least one individual of which the property can be truly predicated) and it predicates a property, which an object possesses. A false sentence is one that fails to be true (that is untrue) either because the object of which a certain property is predicated is not in the extension of the predicate ('This page is blue' when this page is not blue), or because a singular term fails to refer ('Medardo is a Viscount' where 'Medardo' is an empty name). Of course, the biggest problem for such a view would be to account for the apparent truth of sentences (1)-(7). But Sainsbury (2010) develops such an account in terms of presuppositionrelative truth.

2.2 Theoretical arguments

Upholders of fictional realism have suggested some arguments in favor of the recognition of the existence of fictional entities building on genuine ontological considerations. The first of these arguments was put forward by Thomasson (1999, p. 143), who originally suggested that we cannot reject fictional objects if we admit literary works of fiction. Since fictional objects and fictional works belong to the same kind of entities (that is abstract created artifacts) it would be false parsimony to accept the one and reject the other. However, as we have mentioned in §1.3 above, Iacona and Voltolini (2002, pp. 286-7) already notice that Thomasson's argument is disputable since it assumes that fictional objects and fictional works are entities of the same kind. Even admitting that both of them are abstract entities sharing the same type of dependence relations on other entities, Thomasson herself recognizes that they differ in kind: while fictional works are syntactical-semantic entities, fictional entities are

not. Thomasson (2003a, pp. 147-151; 2003b) further suggests that it would be false parsimony to reject entities of a given kind while admitting other entities that are logically sufficient for their existence. Fictional works are logically (that is conceptually) sufficient for the existence of fictional entities. But we have seen that her account of the existence conditions of fictional entities and similar arguments presented by upholders of fictional creationism fail to succeed (cf. §1.3).

Voltolini (2003; 2006, p. 241-245) suggests that if we admit a certain kind of entity, we cannot but admit all other kinds of entities that figure in the identity conditions of such an entity. Since we admit fictional works, and since fictional entities figure in the identity conditions of fictional works, we cannot but also admit fictional objects. He claims that fictional entities arise only once we (as readers and literary critics) reflect, from outside the story, on the fact that a certain game of make-believe determines certain sets of properties (cf. 2006: Ch. 3-4, spec. 84-89). In a nutshell, he argues that a fictional entity is an abstract compound entity whose elements are, on the one hand, the make-believe process-type in which an author pretends that there is a (typically) concrete individual that has certain (explicit and implicit) properties and, on the other hand, the set of properties of the pretend individual that have been 'mobilized' in the story. García-Carpintero (2009) already noticed that this picture has some peculiar aspects of its own, the most relevant of which being that it does not seem to fit with a realist stance on fictional characters. Voltolini argues that no genuine ontological commitment to fictional entities is involved in make-believe process-types since they are performed in pretense (pp. 76-78). He criticizes intentionalist views claiming that mental acts such as imagining or daydreaming require the existence of the entities they are about, including Thomasson's creationism. But now one might wonder why reflecting on a make-believe process-type as mobilizing a certain set of properties should commit us to the existence of a further (fictional) entity, namely the make-believe-process-type-plus-set-of-properties entity. As far as this question receives no answer, it is difficult to understand how fictional entities could figure in the identity conditions of fictional works.

Everett (2005) recently articulated a series of ontological criticisms against fictional realism inspired by Russell's (1905a,b) original objections against Meinong. Everett states two platitudinous principles based on the idea that which fictional characters we take to occur in a story depends upon what the world of that story is like:

P1: If the world of a story concerns a creature a , and if a is not a real thing, then a is a fictional character.

P2: If a story concerns a and b , and if a and b are not real things, then a and b are identical in the world of the story if and only if the fictional character of a is identical to the fictional character of b .

Since our intuitions that (P1) and (P2) are true seem at least as strong as our intuitions that sentences (1)-(7) are true upholders of fictional realism are committed to both principles.

Everett's first objection begins by considering an intelligible story according to which the nature of the world itself is indeterminate. If the world of the story is such that it is indeterminate whether an individual a is identical to an individual b , and a and b are not real things, then (P2) entails that it is indeterminate whether the character of a is identical to the character of b . This would be a case of *pernicious ontic indeterminacy* concerning the nature of the world itself that should be distinguished from what Everett calls *benign* or *conceptual indeterminacy* concerning, e.g., questions of intertextual identity such as whether Christopher Marlowe's Faust is the same character as Goethe's Faust. Everett's second objection regards the possibly vague existence or indeterminate being of a character. If according to the story it is indeterminate whether a certain character a exists, then (P1) entails that it is indeterminate whether a exists. This further entails that if fictional realism was true then human beings could generate cases of ontic indeterminacy at will, simply by writing fiction. But surely, Everett notices, we do not have this degree of control over the metaphysical nature of the world. Everett's third objection starts by considering that a story might describe an impossible world in which the laws of logic or identity fail. By (P1) and (P2) what exists in the world of a story determines which fictional characters occur in that story. Therefore various impossibilities within the world

of a story will determine various impossibilities about the fictional characters that occur in that story. Hence, upholders of fictional realism appear to be committed to the existence of logically incoherent objects. But surely we cannot be able to violate the laws of logic and identity by making up stories.

Howell (2010) recognizes the power of Everett's arguments. Schnieder and Von Solodkoff (2009) and Voltolini (2010) instead suggest that a distinction between ontic indeterminacy *in a story* and ontic indeterminacy *out of a story* may allow one to rebut the indeterminacy part of the critique. Yet this would require some alternative account of the identity conditions of fictional entities that does not appeal to how the story describes them to be. Alternatively, one might rejoin either the two Neo-Meinongian alternative distinctions between different modes of predication or different properties. As we have seen in §1.1 these distinctions seem to be obscure or just *ad hoc*. And so the debate between upholders of fictional realism and fictional irrealism still goes on.¹

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