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Abstract

According to the artefactual theory of fiction, fictional characters are contingently existing abstract entities. One comparative advantage of artefactualism over their rivals is its conformity with our pre-theoretic views about the createdness of these entities. However, it is not entirely clear what it means to say that Sherlock Holmes, Anna Karenina and their likes are 'created abstracta'. This paper gives a relatively detailed review of the artefactualist theory of literary characters and argues that 'being created' and 'being abstract' are not incompatible properties.
Keywords: literary discourse, fictional characters, authorial creation, artefactualism, reference

1 Introduction

Competent speakers are normally fully aware of what kind of everyday experiences they have when they are reading a detective mystery novel like *A Study in Scarlet*. They know that they are engaged in the prosaic activity of text reading, they know that the novel before their eyes has been written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a famous author of detective mysteries, and perhaps most of them also know fairly well that the main protagonists portrayed in the novel – Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson – are not real people. From the point of view of everyday experience there is nothing at all mysterious about detective mystery novels. Indeed, it would be remarkably difficult for anyone brought up in our western cultural traditions to cast doubt on the fact that *A Study in Scarlet* is a piece of well-written fictional prose. And given that fictional prose works are products of artistic imagination, no one thinks seriously that Conan Doyle's crime story has to be interpreted as a faithful representation of reality. The common core of our cultural knowledge concerning detective mystery novels consists of such truisms, but this is rather an advantage, not a drawback: without accepting these simple truisms we would hardly be able to share our private reading experiences with each other.

The situation alters dramatically, however, when someone makes an attempt to organize our common pre-theoretical reading experiences into a systematic theory of detective novels. Any such attempt will face a number of fundamental questions immediately. Is there a self-evident experiential difference between reading fictional detective stories and non-fictional detective stories? Can one safely say that the proper names 'Sherlock Holmes' and 'Dr Watson' as they occur in the text of the novel refer to nothing? Is there any acceptable truism concerning the metaphysical status of such novels? Is there a consensus that authorial imagination has to be regarded as an ontologically noncommittal activity? A quick survey of the current

debates on the metaphysics and semantics of literary fiction reveals that the uniform answer to these questions is "no".

The case of detective mystery novels generalizes to all genres of fictional prose. Systematic theories of literary fiction are based today on a very thin common ground. Perhaps the only widely accepted theoretical truism is that novels and short stories necessarily and essentially involve words, sentences and other kinds of linguistic expression. As a basic theoretical claim, this cannot mean more than an agreement about the proper characterization of the object of investigation: if formulated in general enough terms, fictional prose works can be identified with a certain kind of linguistic construct. But it is one thing to say that at a suitably general level of systematic reasoning fictional prose works may be conceived as linguistic constructs and quite another to specify the nature of these constructs. The disagreement between rival theories of literary fiction starts precisely at this pivotal point.

With respect to the question of the "real" nature of fictional prose works, the theoretical terrain is dominated by two competing families of views. On one side of the divide are views which endorse a *realist* metaphysical viewpoint and thus accept the existence of fictional entities. Realists, whether they are concrete or abstract realists, combine their metaphysical stance typically with a classical framework of truth-conditional semantics. They hold that fictional entities – characters, properties and events mentioned in novels and short stories – belong to the overall inventory of what there is and at least certain sorts of statements about these entities can be evaluated with respect to truth and falsity.

On the other side of the divide are views which adopt an *antirealist* stance in metaphysics and therefore deny the reality of fictional entities. In thinking about the nature of fictional prose works, antirealists may embrace either a pretense theoretic or a fictionalist framework. Both frameworks are devised to treat the semantics of fictional works in a non-truth-conditional fashion. Since antirealists are deeply convinced that our actual world does not contain any fictional entities, they maintain that statements occurring in fictional works and statements about the putative entities mentioned in these works have no real truth value.

It is occasionally said that both the realist and the antirealist approaches to fictionality are in a position to save some features of the phenomenology of our ordinary literary experiences, but neither view adequately explains the phenomenology in its entirety. It is thought that both views must come into conflict with our stock of common knowledge somewhere. This diagnosis seems to me exactly right. Most adherents of realism make a sharp conceptual distinction between two interpretative perspectives. On the one hand, they hold that statements of internal fictional discourse ought to be interpreted as pretend-statements. This is so, because writing down or entering into a computer a fictional sentence requires to perform a distinctive speech act: authors of literary works do not want to convey anything factual, they merely pretend to make statements. On the other hand, realists acknowledge that external fictional discourse involves factually interpretable statements about existing fictional entities. In talking about the aesthetic qualities of particular works or about the properties authors attribute to their characters, readers and critics may perform locutionary speech acts. The problem is that the ordinary phenomenology of literary appreciation does not seem to reflect such internal/external dividedness. As mixed statements nicely illustrate – 'Sherlock Holmes and Pinkerton are detectives' –, readers and critics attribute quite routinely the same properties to fictional and real entities without feeling any pressure to change their epistemic or ontological perspective.

Antirealist views have also their own counterintuitive consequences. Pretense theorists and fictionalists both deny the existence of fictional characters, properties and events. Adherents of these views are seemingly in a better position with respect to the overall interpretation of

fictional discourse for they reject from the start the distinction between internal and external perspectives. According to antirealists, what others think of as an autonomous form of external discourse is nothing else than an incidental expansion of internal discourse. When readers and critics say, for example, that 'Sherlock Holmes has been created in 1887' they extend in some manner the original pretense mandated by the novel *A Study in Scarlet* and this make it seem as if it would be intelligible to claim that fictional characters like Holmes can be created. But this should be regarded as an appearance, since fictional characters do not really exist. Although the idea of extended pretense may help to resolve the main difficulties generated by incompatible interpretive perspectives, it has the troubling consequence of excluding the possibility of making factual statements about fictional matters. If this were so, however, then no one could be in a position to know anything about the nature of literary phenomena that play a central role in our appreciative and critical practices. Yet this cannot be the case. When we assertively utter, for example, that the character of Sherlock Holmes was induced into literary history by Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887, then we assert a proposition that is knowable in the ordinary manner. Neither the utterance nor the expressed proposition manifests signs of indirectness. In the light of this observation, the antirealist's thesis that we merely *pretend* to assert that fictional characters, places and events have certain properties sounds very strange indeed.

In claiming that realist views and antirealist views alike are in conflict with some of our pre-theoretical reading experiences, I do not want to suggest that the preservation of the common sense conception of fictionality is to be taken as the primary aim of a systematic inquiry. We have to be cautious in this regard. In a certain sense, what we pre-theoretically know *is* what we should be reflecting on as we identify the aim of our inquiry. The common sense conception can be considered as a prominent data source from which we may gather relevant information concerning the nature of fictional entities. It does not follow from this, of course, that every single part of the folk's conception of fictionality should be automatically preserved and incorporated into our theoretical models. Some cautiousness is justified, because it may turn out, on a closer look, that the surface phenomenology of our widely shared view conceals discrepancies, oddities or even inconsistencies. As in other domains of everyday practice, we may be committed to an inconsistent set of statements without realizing the troubling presence of the inconsistency. It would then be preposterous to reject a theory just because it departures from common sense. In such a situation, the best we can do is to adopt a methodological stance which accepts the validity of both desiderata: we should follow a research method that (i) prescribes that our theories be sensitive to the information collected from pre-theoretical data sources and, at the same time, (ii) it prescribes that we revise, if necessary, the initial reliability of these data sources.

The present paper develops a novel argument which purports to show that realist approaches to the nature of fictional entities satisfy these desiderata more easily and more fully than their antirealist rivals. The most popular realist account to be found in the literature is that fictional entities are created abstract objects which find their ontological home somewhere beyond or disconnected from the textual level of prose works. Some hold that such entities are ideas shared by the members of a cultural community at a certain period of time, while others regard them as initiated types or as multiply manifestable generic objects. This looks like an unnecessary reduplication of the object of inquiry. If it is taken into consideration that novels and short stories are constructed from linguistic expressions, a more austere account becomes available: we can argue, plausibly enough, that fictional entities are generated by specific linguistic mechanisms which are operative at the textual level. More concretely, we can maintain that fictionalia as dependent abstracta may be defined in terms of units of

linguistic representation. The most significant feature of these representational units is that they represent what they do in a *non-relational* manner. There are good prima facie reasons to assume that proper names, descriptions and pronouns can, in fictional texts, become endowed with the semantic feature of non-relationality.

In the rest of the paper I will first introduce the artefactualist framework in Section 2. Next, in Section 3, I will draw a provisional conclusion.

2 Artefactualism about fictional characters

An early articulation of the artefactualist position is to be found in Kripke (2013). Fictional prose works, says Kripke, are part of reality. Even though novels and short stories are not as concrete as manuscripts or books copies, they are existing things. It is not that such things exist in one sense but not in another. Conan Doyle's work *A Study in Scarlet* definitely exists in the actual world. The novel was written by Doyle and this is a sheer empirical fact. The same holds for fictional entities. Fictional characters (and events) definitely exist, just as novels do. This is also an empirical fact. I guess many of us would say, in agreeing with Kripke, that there is a certain point of time when fictional entities are brought into being by the creative acts of their authors and there may come a time when they simply cease to exist, perhaps, when the literary works in which they appear become physically destroyed and no one remembers them any more. We tend to suppose that Sherlock Holmes exists simply *because* in writing his novel Conan Doyle decided to introduce him into the story, and Anna Karenina exists *because* Tolstoy invented her character when he started to write his famous work. The question then arises of what kind of entities they are. The answer is fairly straightforward: because one cannot perceptually be in contact with them and there is no concrete spatiotemporal region of our actual world where one could find them, characters (and events) of literary works must be abstract entities. Kripke states his ontological position very clearly:

> A fictional character, then, is an abstract entity. It exists in virtue of more concrete activities of telling stories, writing plays, writing novels, and so on, under criteria which I won't try to state precisely, but which should have their own obvious intuitive character. It is an abstract entity which exists in virtue of more concrete activities the same way that a nation is an abstract entity which exists in virtue of concrete relations between people. (Kripke 2013: 73)

The key observation in this passage is that fictional characters exist in virtue of concrete artistic activities. Sherlock Holmes and Anna Karenina and their likes are said to be abstract entities which have a temporal beginning and a possible temporal end. In this regard, they are similar to nations and other abstract artefacts.

Interestingly, Kripke does not realize that his position is based on an unclear understanding of what abstract entities are. In the Western tradition, from Plato onwards, abstracta have been continuously thought of as eternal, mind-independent, necessary, non-physical and causally inert entities. The orthodox view is that if a thing exists without having a spatiotemporal origin, it can be properly classified as abstract. Similarly, the causal inertness of a thing is typically thought to be the clearest sign of its abstractness. I do not want to suggest that the orthodox view is invulnerable. There is no widespread consensus on the rightness or correctness of Platonism. Quite the contrary, there is a lively debate as to the most plausible way to draw the abstract-concrete distinction. Yet the Platonic characterization of abstractness is presupposed as a default assumption in the philosophy of language and in many other areas of contemporary linguistic inquiry. Elsewhere, Kripke himself seems to follow this tradition. He

writes as if such things as a "unit of length" or a "quality" were abstract objects which is in accordance with the orthodox view.[1] It is indeed tempting to think that units of length and qualities possess all of the above-mentioned features: they appear to be eternal, mind-independent (etc.) entities.

With such a notion of abstractness at hand, it is surprising to read that fictional characters exist in virtue of "concrete activities of telling stories, writing plays, writing novels, and so on...". Presumably, Kripke would take the 'in virtue of' relation as a kind of ontological dependence relation. On this interpretation, abstract characters are ontologically dependent on concrete activities. But this won't do because concrete activities occur in space, unfold in time and have causal powers, and it is conceptually impossible that Platonic abstracta be involved in such causal/temporal relations.

However, the prospects of an abstract realism are not as bad as it may at first seem. Even before Kripke, participants of the phenomenological movement have assumed that literary entities and other cultural artefacts have the same ontological status. Ingarden (1931/1973) was the first to argue that fictional characters, flags or nations, are alike in that they are artefactual objects the existence of which is determined by two dependence factors. On the one hand, says Ingarden, the existence of cultural artefacts depends on concrete objects and events. Consider fictional characters and flags. These are rather different sorts of artefactual object, but both depend on some underlying physical material: characters are existentially dependent on expression tokens which are located on sheets of paper and flags are existentially dependent on particular pieces of cloth. On the other hand, artefactual objects would not exist in the proper sense of the word without there being certain mental acts which add intentional features to their physical materials. Expression tokens become descriptions of characters through the intentional activities of authors. For example, without Doyle's storytelling activity we won't have any description of Holmes and so Holmes would not exist. Something similar can be observed in the case of flags. To see a particular piece of cloth as a flag there is a need for collective intentional acts of a given community. The members of the community have to express their agreement that they intend to use a piece of cloth with such-and-such properties as a flag. That is precisely what happened when New Zealanders proposed to change their national flag on 24 March 2016.

This line of thought may help us resolve the above-mentioned tension in Kripke's view. What Ingarden realized was that the orthodox view of abstract objects is inappropriate for the purposes of an ontology of cultural artefacts. The orthodox view presupposes that there are no contingent and mind-dependent elements among the dependence factors of abstract objects. This is not surprising given that mathematical entities are commonly thought to be paradigm cases of abstracta. Platonists maintain that numbers and pure sets inhabit an eternal realm of non-spatiotemporal entities which exists independently of the intentional activities of the agents of mathematical discourse.

Those who accept the orthodox approach to abstracta might try to argue that cultural artefacts are not abstract, but concrete particulars, for they can be reduced to spatiotemporal objects. Fictional characters are, for example, reducible to expression tokens and flags are identical with pieces of cloth. Or they might argue that cultural artefacts are indeed abstract and have therefore the same ontological status as mathematical entities. That is, they are real existents but stand outside of space and time.[2] Should we be convinced by these arguments? I

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[1] Cf. Kripke (1980: 52, 55).

[2] Although there is room in the logical space for the first option, I am not aware of anyone who actually argued in this way. The second option has been defended by Wolterstorff (1980) and, in part, by Deutsch (1991).

think Ingarden would dismiss these arguments as implausible. The idea that cultural artefacts are reducible to mere physical particulars has apparently counterintuitive consequences. The weight of my *copy* of *A Study in Scarlet* is 156 grams. It would be astonishing, however, if anyone supposed, for this reason, that Conan Doyle's *novel* weighs 156 grams. And even if my written *copy* would be completely destroyed by a fire, Conan Doyle's *novel* would surely survive. Literary works cannot be individuated on the sole basis of physical attributes. The same seems to hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for flags, nations and other similar things. The idea that cultural artefacts and mathematical entities can be characterized in terms of a common ontology has also counterintuitive consequences. Numbers or pure sets are regarded by Platonists as eternal and mind-independent entities. But, obviously, writing a manuscript or designing a national flag are mental activities. Manuscripts and flags are authored or co-authored by conscious human beings. If so, how could cultural artefacts be independent from the mind of their creators or inventors? Ingarden is insisting, rightly in my view, that cultural artefacts cannot be classified as eternal and mind-independent because they come into being as a result of a series of creative mental acts. And we might add that even if they existed eternally, authors would have to select and bring into being one particular artefactual entity from the multitude of pre-existing possibilities. Selecting something from a multitude of possibilities and give it material reality requires mental effort. This reflects that the existence of cultural artefacts relies, either directly or indirectly, on human activities which distinguishes them from mathematical entities that are essentially mind-independent.

Ingarden can be read as proposing a reformed ontology for the domain of cultural artefacts. According to the dominant tradition of ontological theorizing, every entity is either concrete or abstract. Moreover, it is assumed that there is no third possibility: the categories of concreteness and abstractness are generally thought to be not only mutually exclusive but also exhaustive. What Ingarden wanted to show was that this strict categorial dualism cannot give a tenable account of such amalgamated objects as fictional characters, flags or nations. Note, however, that the locution 'reformed ontology' is intended to mean here a piecemeal revision of the conceptual framework rather than a wholesale rejection of the orthodoxy. A key to progress is the realization that the dualist conceptual framework can be significantly improved with introducing a subcategory of abstracta that includes non-concrete but mind-dependent entities. As we have already seen, the introduction of such a subcategory does not count as an *ad hoc* or unreasonable step in the debate. The general line of argument can be summarized in the following way.

(P1) We are committed to various cultural artefact kinds – fictional characters, flags, nations, etc. – because they are part of reality.
(P2) Instances of such kinds cannot be reduced to their concrete, physical dependence factors.
(P3) On the traditional view of ontology, any non-concrete entity is abstract.
(P4) Instances of cultural artefact kinds cannot be abstract in the traditional sense because they come into being as a result of performing (creative) mental acts.

(C) In order to account for such entities, a subcategory of abstracta should be introduced into our ontological conceptual scheme; that is, we have to allow for entities that are both non-concrete and mind-dependent.

Wolterstorff claims that authors of literary works select their protagonists from a pre-existing abstract realm. Deutsch disagrees on this point. He claims that authors stipulate their protagonists and argues further that the process of stipulation accords well with Platonism.

(P1) and (P2) should be at the centre of any realist theory of artefacts. To profess (P1) and (P2) is, after all, to be a realist. (P3) expresses the traditional account of the concrete-abstract distinction in a theory-neutral manner. (P4) articulates the central insight of the Ingardenian conception of artefacts. Artefactualists who find in Ingarden a precursor of their work ought to agree with (P4). Of course, the argument from (P1)-(P4) to (C) is not necessitated. The theoretical status of these premises is too diverse and variable. Nonetheless, (C) is strongly supported by (P1)-(P4). The argument sheds light on how artefactualists can give reasons for their mild departure from the ontological orthodoxy.

Thus, in echoing Kripke's words, we can maintain that a fictional character is an abstract (i.e. non-spatiotemporal) entity that has *some* common properties with concrete (i.e. spatiotemporal) entities.

One of these common properties is the property of coming into being. Kripke is aware that the apparent conflict between the interpretive perspectives of fiction-internal and fiction-external contexts does not allow us to say, without further qualification, that fictional characters come into being as a result of artistic activities. It is true that fictional characters are in some sense invented or created by the authors of literary works in which they occur. Hence, in uttering the sentence 'Sherlock Holmes has been invented or created by Doyle's imaginative activities', we can make a true statement. The problem is that Holmes is described in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* as being a concrete individual, a flesh-and-blood person, but, according to the artefactual theory at hand, he (or it) is an invented or created abstract entity. So what does it mean that a character comes into being? What has actually happened when Conan Doyle has written his manuscript?

Kripke's answer is that fiction-internal contexts have to be explained in terms of pretense. Nearly all artefactualists have later followed him in this regard. In Kripke's usage, the technical term 'pretense' denotes a certain kind of imaginative mental state. 'Pretending that *p*' is intended to mean something like 'acting as if it were the case that *p*' or 'asserting *p* non-seriously'. He regards the latter as a constitutive feature of literary storytelling. Authors make various statements about their protagonists, but their speech acts lack genuine illocutionary force. They make only pretend statements. The propositions that occur in literary works are therefore only pretend propositions. For example, when Tolstoy writes that "Anna had the faculty of blushing", he makes a non-serious assertion. He merely pretends that there is a person, called Anna, to whom one can attribute the property of having the faculty of blushing. In Tolstoy's own context, 'Anna' does not refer to a concrete individual. It merely seems as if 'Anna' had a bearer, but in fact it is an empty name.

The same conditions govern the first occurrences of character names. When Conan Doyle has written down the proper name 'Sherlock Holmes' at the first time in his oeuvre, he has made a pretend statement. There was no concrete individual to which the name could have referred. In 1887, at the very start of its long historical career, 'Sherlock Holmes' was an empty name.

It does not follow from this, however, that Doyle's artistic activity was ontologically inert. According to Kripke, one should differentiate here between two levels of language use. One of these is the level of initial storytelling. The activity of authorial storytelling is necessarily connected to fiction-internal contexts where, as mentioned above, every assertion falls into the scope of pretense. At this level of language use, proper names and other referring singular terms function as empty expressions. Being an empty expression, a newly introduced fictional proper name, *N*, does not stand for anything concrete or abstract, so *a fortiori* it does not name a fictional character c_N. Nevertheless, it is not incorrect to say that the introduction of *N* creates a character c_N.

On Kripke's view, reference to fictional characters occurs only if we begin to use an extended level of language. Although Kripke did not provide an explicit definition, we might understand his occasional term 'extended level of language use' as comprising fiction-external contexts. In these contexts, we can make such statements as 'there is a fictional character called *N*' or '*N* is the main protagonist of the work *W*' without engaging in pretense. We should not pretend anything about *N*s because our language supplies referents to these originally empty expressions. By now it is clear why this is so. If there is an authorial manuscript which contains an initial token occurrence of the proper name *N*, then there is a corresponding character c_N. Thus, in fiction-external contexts, *N* can be treated semantically as a referring expression: it is like any other ordinary proper name with the only difference that it does not refer to a concrete individual but to an abstract artefact.

Although Kripke's line of thought in his Locke Lectures represents a rather immature version of the artefactualist view, it incorporates a couple of basic insights. The most important of these are the following: (i) one can develop a suitably general theory of literary discourse without employing an extraordinary ontology, (ii) fictional characters and fictionalia in general are part of reality, (iii) they are dependent abstract entities, and (iv) the proper names with which such entities are introduced into their respective works are semantically ambiguous (i.e. they have both empty and referring token uses).

Drawing on the works of Ingarden and Kripke, Thomasson (1999) worked up a more detailed version of the artefactualist view. From the present perspective, Thomasson's most significant contribution to the debate concerns the issues mentioned under (iii) and (iv), so my comments on her ideas will be confined mainly to these topics.

Thomasson contends – rightly in my view – that unless we know how the relevant ontological dependence relations work, we cannot adequately determine the theoretical status of fictional entities. Once Ingarden had defended a view according to which cultural entities are dependent both on concrete objects and human intentionality. More recently, Kripke has pointed out that fictional entities exist in virtue of certain artistic activities. Despite their ingenious arguments, the fine-grained structure of these dependence factors remained somewhat shadowy. It is not entirely clear, for example, whether there is a type-difference between the ways cultural and fictional entities are related to concrete objects on the one hand and to intentional acts on the other hand. It is also unclear whether dependence relations exhibit a temporal aspect or not.

As a first step to fill this gap, Thomasson distinguishes constant dependence from historical dependence.[3] The most general form of constant dependence is when two distinct objects, o_1 and o_2, are so related that o_1 requires the existence of o_2 at every time it exists. An object may also constantly dependent on one or more of its own parts. The existence of a three altar painting is constantly dependent on the existence of its three canvasses and on their being put together in the right way. When o_1 and o_2 or their parts are concrete particulars, this kind of dependence relation is rigid. There is no room for alternatives. The object o_1 is dependent on that very objecto_2, or, to say the same thing, o_1 rigidly necessitates o_2. A three altar painting is thus rigidly constantly dependent on its parts and on their being put together in the right way. When o_1 depends on o_2, but o_2 is merely a placeholder for the existential relation, constant dependence is generic. A national flag does not exists without there being a piece of cloth with

[3] For the analysis of the dependence factors of fictional entities, see Thomasson (1999: 24-34). Although it may seem self-evident, it is worth stressing that fictional prose works and fictional characters can be analysed with respect to their dependence factors only if we limit our attention to works of fixed-text literature. Non-fixed-text forms of literature – for example, works of oral epic – lack constant properties and thus they have a different ontology.

such-and-such properties. But the flag does not depend on a particular piece of cloth; its existence requires merely that there be at least one such piece of cloth. It can be said, then, that national flags are generically constantly dependent on pieces of cloth.

Historical dependence involves a slightly weaker type of relation. An object is historically dependent on another when the former requires the presence of the latter for coming into being. But, in contrast to constant dependence, in this case the continuous existence of the depender object does not presuppose the continuous existence of the dependee object. *The Isenheimer Altar* is historically dependent on the existence of its painter, Matthias Grünewald. After having come into being, however, the altar became existentially independent from Grünewald's presence. As above, this kind of dependence is modally rigid: *The Isenheimer Altar* is rigidly historically dependent on Grünewald. By this it is meant – in alluding to the thesis of the necessity of origin – that that altar might not have been painted by another artist as Grünewald. Perhaps, historical dependence may have also a generic variant. Thomasson says in this regard that "this may be understood as the kind of dependence an entity has on some of the necessary conditions for its creation that are not implicated in the identity of the created entity."[4] It may happen that o_1 depends historically on o_2,even though o_2 is not a concrete particular. One possible example is when someone's skin becomes tanned. The suntan requires for its coming into being some ultraviolet light, claims Thomasson, but, evidently, no particular light is required and the skin remains tanned even if no amount of ultraviolet light is present. Thus, suntans may be said to be generically historically dependent on ultraviolet light.

On Thomasson's analysis, the immediate dependencies of fictional characters comprise two kinds of relation. First, a character like Holmes is dependent on the creative storytelling activity of its author. This is rigid historical dependence. It is a rigid relation because Holmes can be thought of as being dependent on Doyle's token intentional acts, and on no one else's. And it is a historical relation because the continuous existence of Holmes does not require the continuous existence of Doyle. Second, a character is dependent on the fictional prose work in which it is mentioned or described. This is generic constant dependence. It is a generic relation because the existence of Holmes does not require that a particular copy of the novel *A Study in Scarlet* be kept in existence. If the available copies are strictly text indentical to the original, any copy will do. And it is a constant relation because Holmes remains an existing character as long as there is a physical or mental copy of the work mentioning or describing him (or it).

Realists who are prepared to allow for contingent abstract entities in their world view may summarize the Thomassonian approach to the dependence factors of fictional characters in the following way:

> *Characters as Abstract Artefacts* (CAA): Fictional characters are created abstract artefacts which are, on the one hand, rigidly historically dependent on the mental acts of their authors and, on the other hand, generically constantly dependent on the fictional prose works in which they are mentioned or described.

Compared with the early works of Ingarden and Kripke, (CAA) represents clear and recognizable progress. What earlier was only an intuitive idea, namely that characters are dually dependent on the existence of mental acts and concrete objects, have now been made entirely explicit. (CAA) is to be read as stating both the existence and persistence conditions of fictional characters. The dependence factors listed in it have to be interpreted as being jointly

[4] Thomasson (1999: 32).

necessary conditions for coming into existence and for continuing in existence of fictional individuals like Sherlock Holmes and fictional places like Middlemarch. It is a further issue whether these dependence factors provide also sufficient conditions for such things. On Thomasson's original view, an author's token creative acts and the existence of a relevant prose work are, together, sufficient for there being a character. In order to decide this issue, we have to see how the phenomenon of authorial pretense can be integrated into the ontological picture outlined by (CAA).

Kripke emphasized repeatedly that in telling stories authors pretend many things. For instance, they pretend that the criteria of naming are satisfied. If *N* is a fictional proper name, it is part of the pretense that it refers to an object, *o*, in the standard sense of singular reference. It is also part of authorial pretense that meaningful sentences occurring in literary texts express propositions. But, in fact, they do not express propositions in these contexts. What authors assert are only pretend propositions. Unsurprisingly, antirealists who deny that authorial assertions carry genuine ontological commitments sympathize with Kripke's account of fictional reference and propositionality. Prominent supporters of this doctrine such as Walton (1990) and Everett (2013) are of the opinion that authors of prose works speak continuously from within the pretense in which it is only fictionally (not really) true that proper names refer to objects and meaningful sentences express propositions.

What is more interesting for us now is that Thomasson is also among those who favour this line of thought. Thomasson (2003) is well aware that if fictional characters are indeed abstract entities as (CAA) states, then statements of internal fictional discourse cannot concern these entities. No one can seriously think that in Conan Doyle's original sentence 'Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with' the proper name 'Holmes' refers to an abstract artefact. Artefacts are, of course, not in any sense living persons. It is sensible to suppose, then, that Conan Doyle was acting as if it were the case that 'Holmes' refers to a person, yet the name was in fact empty. Thus, authors' pretenseful use of language might explain why empty expressions are not unintelligible in literary discourse, and vice versa. As the name 'Sherlock Holmes' was introduced into the manuscript of the novel *A Study in Scarlet* at the first time, it had no bearer. So Conan Doyle had no choice but to use it in his storytelling statements non-seriously.

If the activity of literary storytelling includes a pretense component, then we have to find out what kind of pretense it is. One option is to say that when authors are telling their stories, they engage in *de dicto* pretense. Kripke's conception about differing levels of language use indicates that he conceived pretense as operating in this form. On Kripke's view, at the level of initial storytelling where a proper name *N* has no referent, the author of a prose work *W* pretends *de dicto* that there is an object, *o*, to which *N* genuinely refers. But at this level of use the name is empty and there is really no such object; there is only a pretend object. (Nonetheless, the character c_N comes into being here as a direct result or consequence of the introduction of *N*.) Later, at an extended level of language use this initially pretend object can be referred back. While in working on the manuscript of the novel *City of Glass*, Paul Auster pretended (*de dicto*) that 'Daniel Quinn' refers to a detective-fiction writer, readers or literary critics of Auster's novel can later genuinely refer to Quinn as a fictional character.

Thomasson does not straightforwardly reject this account, but she points out that the term '*de dicto* pretense' is not appropriate for all explanatory tasks. One drawback is that fictional prose works may contain proper names of existing individuals and places. For example, the proper name 'New York' occurs quite frequently in the text of the novel *City of Glass*, and it is reasonable to interpret these token occurrences as referring (or purporting to refer) to the real city. It is part of the pretense that Auster attributes a number of fictional properties to the

city – among others, that it has an inhabitant called Daniel Quinn –, but he does this in a *de re* manner. That is, Auster pretends of the city, New York, that *it* has various properties. If so, Auster's attitude cannot be interpreted, in this case, as *de dicto* pretense.

This may prompt one to think that, instead of involving *de dicto* pretense, literary storytelling falls under the scope of *de re* pretense. The defence of this view presupposes an anti-Kripkean turn. We have to give up the idea that being empty expressions proper names never refer to objects in intra-fictional contexts. We should rather say that the very first occurrence of a proper name in an authorial manuscript plays the role of an initial baptism. Inscribing the first token of *N* may be thought of as performing a specific variant of ostensive dubbing. The specificity of this dubbing can be explained by the fact that the object to be baptized cannot be perceptually identified. Authors cannot physically point to their protagonists because these protagonists are abstract entities. But it is not outlandish to say that they can mentally point to them. It is often claimed by philosophers and cognitive scientists, that one can mentally point to an object, if that object exists and one can focus one's attention to it. This criterion can be satisfied, if the act of inscribing the name *N* is, at the same time, the act of creating the character c_N. Under such circumstances, authors can focus their attention to the abstract entities they are creating. As gestures of ostensive pointing in general, these acts are performed in epistemically safe contexts: seen from their subjective point of view, authors are infallible with respect to their own intentions. It cannot happen that an author introduces the proper name *N* in her manuscript in order to create a fictional character *other* than c_N. Initial baptisms in literary texts are, so to say, automatically successful. Subsequent uses of *N* in the same manuscript may then refer back to the character c_N, so that the author of the manuscript pretends to attribute various properties to *it*. On this account, authorial storytelling is governed by *de re* pretense.

Thomasson notes that this second option has the benefit of providing a unified picture about the way authorial pretense works in the creative process of fiction writing. Authors are engaged in *de re* pretense, irrespectively whether they write about extant individuals and places or about their own protagonists. The notion of '*de re* pretense' can also explain such cases where a new author writes about an already existing character, or cases where the same author tells a new story about her former protagonist. In situations like these, the new story refers back to an earlier one and pretends that its protagonist exists.

But this option is also problematical, because it leads to the above-mentioned bad result that an author pretends about an abstract object that *it* has such-and-such properties. It seems nonsensical to suggest that Auster pretended about an abstract object, *o*, that *it* is called 'Daniel Quinn' and that *it* is a detective-fiction writer, etc. This misconstrues the psychology of fiction writing. In hoping to avoid all of these problems, Thomasson offers a hybrid explanation. She alludes to Curry's (1990) early view, according to which fictional proper names are anaphoric means rather than genuinely referring expressions. On Curry's formal approach, proper names function as labels referring back to variables bound by implicit pretense operators. These operators have complete stories in their scope. Thus, tokens of 'Daniel Quinn' refer back to a variable in the overall *de dicto* pretense of the novel *City of Glass*, and the pretend object which has been assigned to this variable has the properties of writing detective mystery novels, living in a small apartment, etc. The other part of Thomasson's hybrid explanation consists in saying that writing about extant characters involves an extra-fictional perspective. When an author borrows *N* form an earlier prose work, she can use it as a genuinely referring expression in her own storytelling. She is in a position to genuinely refer to the abstract artefact c_N without engaging in any kind of pretense. Readers and literary critics are in the same position with respect to c_N. This is due to the *de re* connection which permits cross-

reference between different prose works and between fiction-internal and fiction-external contexts and which is established on the basis of the initial *de dicto* pretense.

The hybrid account of authorial pretense seems to fit well with the ontological picture of (CAA). On the one hand, fictional characters are rigidly historically dependent on the mental acts of their authors and – as we have now seen – these acts may be thought of as falling under the scope of *de dicto* pretense. On the other hand, fictional characters are generically constantly dependent on the literary works in which they are mentioned or described but this dependence relation does not involve acts of pretense. On the contrary, this dependence relation presupposes that we may have genuinely *de re* thoughts about abstract artefacts.

Interestingly, (CAA) and the hybrid explanation of pretense are not Thomasson's final thoughts about the artefactualist view. In the past few years, Thomasson's attention has shifted away from a standard focus on the ontological status of fictional entities to a new emphasis on the metaontology thereof. The general metaontological stance she defends is rather complicated and has several ramifications that are irrelevant to our current interpretative task. The main contention of her new work is worth mentioning, though. It can be summed up with a single characteristic statement: fictional characters are entities that are ontologically minimal.

No doubt, the question is what it means to be ontologically minimal. Thomasson (2015a) develops a deflationary approach to this issue. What is at stake in first-order ontological disputes is whether a certain kind of entity exists or not. Ontological debates should be deflated, she says, because existence questions are in principle easily resolvable. Do propositions, numbers, possible worlds or fictional characters exist? In each case, there are easy arguments which show that the disputed entities do indeed exist. The easy arguments in question are deflationary, not because they attribute to propositions, numbers, etc., a lightweight ontological status, but because they omit reference to any deep facts about existence. Thomasson's deflationism is thus restricted only to our metaontological thinking.

Easy ontological arguments have an unvarying structure. The first premise consists always in an uncontroversial statement which does not contain expressions which refer (or purport to refer) to the disputed kind *K*. The next premise then is a statement which Thomasson calls a linking principle. The role of this premise is to make explicit the constitutive rule for using the term *K*. The third premise is derived from the first two statements, but the derivation is not ontologically ampliative for no new piece of information is added to the body of content that is already explicit in the uncontroversial statement and the linking principle. From these three premises a conclusion follows which affirms the existence of *K*s.

Let us see how Thomasson's argument proceeds in the case of fictionalia.

(TP1) (*Uncontroversial statement*) Conan Doyle introduced the proper name 'Sherlock Holmes' into his manuscript to pretend to refer to a detective.
(TP2) (*Linking Principle*) If an author introduces a proper name *N* into her manuscript, then she creates a fictional character c_{N}.
(TP3) (*Derived statement*) Conan Doyle created a fictional character c_{SH}.
(TC) (*Ontological statement*) A fictional character, c_{SH}, exists.

Before explaining the rationale and motives behind the premises form (TP1) to (TP3), I think it is important to stress how the easy argument for the existence of fictional characters differs form the argument presented by (CAA). In my view, the main difference is that while (CAA) makes use of statements which concern facts about ontological dependence between distinct entities, the easy argument alludes only to a certain sort of semantic dependence. So the arguments specify quite differently what needs to be taken into consideration when arguing for

the reality of fictionalia. The other, less important, difference is that, in contrast to (CAA), the easy argument does not exactly say what kind of entities fictional characters are. I shall return to this in the next section.

Viewed from the perspective of Thomasson's new argument, fictional characters are ontologically minimal in the following sense. (TP1) is to be regarded as being an empirically trivial statement about Conan Doyle's manuscript and about the proper name 'Sherlock Holmes' tokened by him at the first time in the history of literature. We need not mobilize our conceptual skills to see that this premise is uncontroversially true – at least Thomasson says so. (TP2) is based on the standard use of the kind term 'fictional character'. That authors invent or create fictional characters seems to be a fixed element of the common sense view of literature. In using the term, competent speakers of English rely on this piece of common knowledge. This is why we can fairly easily decide whether, in particular cases, the application conditions of the term are satisfied or not. Given some empirical background information, we can know with great certainty that the term 'fictional character' can be correctly applied to Sherlock Holmes, and we are also quite sure that it is inapplicable to Arnold Schwarzenegger. Kind terms of ordinary English like this are associated with co-application conditions, too. It is not enough to be occasionally applicable to an entity; a kind term must refer to the same sort of entity in different contextual settings as well. So our common knowledge extends to such cases of use where we can safely say that c_N is the same character both in contexts *C* and *C*', where *C*' differs from *C* in a respect which is relevant for the original portrayal of c_N. Note that on Thomasson's new view this does not mean that the application and co-application conditions of *K* require that we be already committed to the *existence* of *K*s. As a Linking Principle, (TP2) presupposes only that there are certain linguistic rules in force in a speech community which govern the use of the term *K*. These are the rules that specify how we should (and do) talk about fictional characters independently of the question of their ontological standing.

Given (TP1) and (TP2), one can then contend, as (TP3) does, that a particular *K* is such-and-such. The derivation leading us from (TP1) and (TP2) to (TP3) is said by Thomasson to be trivial. Presumably, she calls this derivation trivial because the first two premises imply the third without invoking any additional linguistic information concerning the standard use of *K*. Nevertheless, we are entitled to think that the term *K* occurs as a referring expression in (TP3). The basis of this entitlement may be called, for want of a better term, semantic common knowledge. We are in a position to know how *K* is to be used in ordinary English; this was the message of (TP2). Given this semantic common knowledge, we may consider ourselves entitled to apply a particular instance of *K* as a referring term. In our case, the derived statement should be interpreted so that a fictional character, c_{SH}, is such that *it* has been created by Conan Doyle. This means that the kind term 'fictional character' occurs in a referring position in (TP3). The immediate ontological conclusion drawn by (TC) from this is that a fictional character, namely c_{SH}, exists.

Without a doubt, the most remarkable feature of the easy argument is that (TC) seems simply to make explicit what is already there in an implicit form in the premises. Thomasson attempts to demonstrate that deep ontological presuppositions are irrelevant for first-order questions of existence. The argument merely states that if certain linguistic and cultural practices exist – there are authors who introduce proper names into their prose works –, then fictional characters exist, too. We have to make sure that these empirical circumstances actually obtain, but nothing more is needed. No hard conceptual work is required to decide whether there is some fundamental thing or grounding relation that metaphysically necessitates the

truth of the statement of (TC). This is the sense in which characters can be said to be ontologically minimal.

The metaontological deflationary position briefly reviewed above may be summarized in the following concise form:

> *Characters as Minimal Entities* (CME): Fictional characters are ontologically minimal entities the existence of which requires only the obtaining of a certain set of linguistic and cultural practices.

Let us take stock. (CME) is the central claim of a view which classifies fictional characters as existing but ontologically minimal entities. As (CAA) made clear, the success of artefactualism hinges, to a great extent, on identifying those very factors on which the existence and persistence of fictionalia ultimately depend. We may then wonder whether (CME) can also be subsumed under the artefactualist doctrine. One reason for being uncertain about the correctness of this classification is that (CME) does not *explicitly* mention dependence factors. Although the deflationist approach alludes to a given form of existential dependence between linguistic and cultural processes, on the one hand, and fictional entities, on the other hand, it does not inform us about the fine-grained structure of this relationship. The other reason for hesitating is that it is unclear how fictional characters as minimal entities should, in more fundamental ontological terms, be categorized. Conclusions of easy arguments do not tell us much about the way protagonists of literary prose works exist. Very likely, they should be taken as belonging to a certain subcategory of abstracta, but the wording of (CME) is, again, silent about the details.

The above-mentioned doubts may be suppressed by recognizing (i) that (CAA) and (CME) target one and the same domain of reality, and (ii) that they are focusing on the same entities of that domain, but from a slightly different perspective. (CAA) states that fictional characters are created abstracta which depend for their existence both on the performance of creative mental acts and on the presence of appropriate concrete objects. Notice that neither the createdness of characters nor their abstract status, nor the reality of the dual dependence relation has been questioned by (CME). In calling characters minimal entities, (CME) just indicates that there are no deep ontological conundrums behind the statement at which (CAA) had arrived earlier. Thomasson herself explains this phenomenon in the following way:

> I have argued that we can make use of an easy argument for the existence of fictional characters (*considered as abstract artefacts*), in a way that should remove ontological worries about accepting them. (Thomasson 2015a: 263, emphasis added)

The remark in parentheses is important. It shows that we are not mistaken when we regard (CME) as being about abstract artefacts (i.e., about contingently existing minimal entities). Thus, in the end, it can be ascertained that there are two closely related articulations of the artefactualist theory: (CAA) and (CME).

3 Conclusion

(CAA) and (CME) seem to be fruitful approaches to characters. There is a point, however, about which Thomasson and her followers make implausible assumptions. The adequacy of our talk about fictional individuals, places and events is bounded by a strong epistemic constraint: we must somehow be acquainted with the texts of the novels or short stories in which

these entities are portrayed. This precondition may justly be labelled as a 'strong constraint' because it narrows down the possible ways in which we may come to know of these entities to those that involve language-based capacities.

(CAA) claims that characters are abstract artefacts which come into being as a result of the mental acts of their authors. Thomasson does not offer a detailed analysis of these mental acts, but she prefers to identify them with written assertions. She claims at a certain point, for example, that "fictional characters are created merely with words that posit them as being a certain way", and she adds to this that "characters are created by being written about by their authors".[5] To say that a character is created merely with words assumes that what has been created (i.e. a character) is distinguishable from the means with which it was created (i.e. from the words). On the one side, we have the mental acts of the authors and the corresponding written words or textual descriptions, and on the other side we have the created characters. This means that although characters have they "birthplace" in the text, they exist externally to the expressions of the text. This assumption is also present in (CME). If one claims, as (CME) does, that characters require for their existence only that certain linguistic conventions and rules be followed, then it is assumed that characters are not mere linguistic phenomena. Rather, it is suggested that after having come into being by linguistic practices, characters continue to exist externally to these practices. And since both (CAA) and (CME) construes literary figures as being abstract, we may immediately conclude that they are *not linguistic abstracta*. One might object that what stands behind this type of reasoning is merely a prejudice of favouring language-independent abstract entities.

In an accompanying paper, I will try to show that if we stay away from this prejudice, then it becomes possible to develop a more acceptable version of the artefactualist theory. More precisely, we will be in a position to argue, contrary to the implicit assumptions of the Thomassonian view(s), that fictional entities belong to the textual level of literary works. It can be said, somewhat exaggeratedly, that the way they are created is the way they really are. By this I mean not just that expressions like 'fictional character', 'fictional place', or 'fictional event' are used in a pragmatically fixed way what makes the question concerning the existence of the referents of these phrases easily decidable. I do not want to deny the primacy of these linguistic considerations. Rather, I want to argue for the claim that our linguistic practices are more closely related to the textual level of literary works than artefactualists tend to acknowledge. But it would be difficult to substantiate this claim with the conceptual apparatus which has been applied up to this point. I hope it will help the discussion forward if we introduce a new term into our interpretive tool kit. So my proposal is that we should re-evaluate the main contentions of the artefactualist theory from the perspective of *linguistic representation*.

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[5] Thomasson (1999: 12).

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