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A Philosophical Survey

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Contents

Introduction

Fiction is a central ingredient of our cultural life, which thus seems to be populated with fictional characters, such as Pinocchio, Sherlock Holmes, Moby Dick, and Anna Karenina, to name only a few. We may seriously engage with them; they may stir our emotions and affect our existence in many ways. We talk of them, or so it seems, when we purport to refer to them with proper names, as in the examples we have just provided, or with definite descriptions such as "the White Whale" and "the Lady of the Lake," or "the Ulysses of the *Odyssey*" and "the Ulysses of the *Divine Comedy*," in which we explicitly refer to a story wherein the character in question makes its appearance. There is a vast, exciting and growing philosophical literature on the existence and nature of fictional characters, as amply testified by the entry on this topic in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Kroon, Voltolini 2023) and the 2015 collection *Fictional Objects* and its editors' introduction (Brock, Everett 2015). We offer here a survey that focuses specifically on the identity conditions of fictional characters, and thus addresses in particular identity statements such as "Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde" or "the Ulysses of the *Odyssey* is the Ulysses of the *Divine Comedy*," where the "is" here means "is identical with" or "is the same as."

In this introduction, after defining some notions, we shall set forth a number of *desiderata* that a good theory of the identity conditions of fictional characters should satisfy. A great deal of them will have to do with case studies involving identity statements. Then, we shall distinguish between three main strands of theories. Two kinds of realist approaches, according to which there are fictional characters: one in which they are

objects and one in which they are abstract entities of other sorts such as properties, kinds or roles; and then anti-realist approaches, according to which there are no fictional characters after all. We shall be concerned with them in the forthcoming chapters.

We use "entity" as neutrally as possible; thus, properties, relations, states of affairs, facts, and so on, qualify as entities. We instead restrict "object" to individual entities such as stars, planets, stones, plants and animals, ourselves and our bodies, as well as the atoms that make them up. Objects, we may say, are those entities that can have features, i.e., properties or relations to other entities, but cannot themselves be the features of anything[1]. This need *not* imply that all objects are existing or 'ordinarily' existing objects; for instance, a realist about fictional characters could say that Holmes does not exist, even though there is an entity which is Holmes, maybe *sui generis*, but still a *bona fide* entity[2]. In contrast, according to an anti-realist, there are no such entities – or, to put it otherwise, fictional characters are no entities at all, even though there are stories that seem to ascribe features to them.

A story is a collection of propositions, or a complex proposition involving other propositions as conjuncts, endowed with some sort of narrative unity (e.g., they are about – or they seem to be about – the same entities; they recall – or they seem to recall – facts that are causally interconnected; and so on). A fictional story, or simply a fiction, is a story which is not put forward with the intent of relating facts, as in doing history and writing chronicles, but for some other purpose, e.g., for the sake of entertaining, pretending or prompting imagination, and without the intent of deceiving. Accordingly, at least in typical cases, most (if not all) of the propositions constituting a fictional story are false. Thus, novels such as *The Three Musketeers* and

[1] This characterization of objects is modeled upon the characterization of primary substances in Aristotle's *Categories*.

[2] Commonsensical intuitions would presumably suggest that things such as Sherlock Holmes and Anna Karenina do not exist, even though it may be recognized a pre-theoretical sense in which they possess some sort of reality or non-ordinary existence: see Barbero *et al.* (2023).

War and Peace provide paradigmatic examples of fictional stories, while historical or journalistic chronicles and judiciary investigative reports provide paradigmatic examples of stories that are not fictional stories[3].

Novels, chronicles and reports are texts, i.e., sequences of sentences. Texts, whether oral or written, are the traditional means of expressing stories and our case studies will usually be drawn from fictional stories coming from these sources, i.e., literary stories expressed by literary texts such as novels. However, literary texts are not the only artistic works that can convey stories. There are also comics, graphic novels, movies and theatrical performances, which convey stories by sequences of images or by acting, typically in combination with texts. We shall also occasionally consider fictional stories coming from sources of this sort[4]. As names of fictional stories, we use the same names of the artistic works that convey them, e.g., *The Three Musketeers* and *War and Peace*. There are other sorts of narrative artistic works, coming from music, painting and architecture, but we shall not be concerned with them.

A character in (or of) a fictional story is someone or something that is ascribed (or that seems to be ascribed) some features according to that story. Sherlock Holmes is a character in Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. Napoleon is a character of *War and Peace*. Note that we use "character" in a very general sense, to cover not only Holmes, Napoleon and Moby Dick, which are meant to be animate objects in the stories

[3] Our definition of story does not rule out that all the propositions in a fictional story may happen to be true, although of course this is very unlikely. It should be noted however that it is sometimes assumed that the presence, or even a vast abundance, of false propositions is an essential ingredient of a fictional story. We certainly agree that this, if not essential, is typical and likely. If one insists that it is part of the definition of a fictional story that it contains a certain amount of false propositions, then the notion becomes rather 'fuzzy.' For it is difficult, if not impossible, to single out the relevant number or percentage of literally false propositions that sets the boundary between fictional and non-fictional stories. Alternatively, instead of a boundary, we may also concede that there are degrees of fictionality, depending on the number/value of literally false propositions. However, in this context, nothing crucial hinges on these issues.

[4] See Orilia (2010a) for an account of how texts and images can combine to express stories.

in which they occur, but also London or the sword Excalibur and the rock in which it is stuck, which feature as inanimate objects in Sherlock Holmes stories and in King Arthur stories, respectively. Others prefer to confine the word "character" to animate characters only.

A fictional character in a fictional story (or a *fictum*, for short) is a character such that it is *not* the case that it is identical with, or somehow corresponds to, any entity existing independently of any story. Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character of Doyle's stories. In contrast, Napoleon is simply a character of *War and Peace*. It is worth noting that we can take a character to be fictional and yet be unable to locate it in any specific story. Santa Claus is a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon, which Castañeda (1989: 188) called "the culturalization of fiction." It should be noted here that it is a matter of dispute whether the character Napoleon is identical with the real Napoleon in flesh and blood or it is rather the case that the former is of the same nature of fictional characters, although it succeeds in corresponding or being based on the real Napoleon. Be this as it may, since there is, or there was, a real Napoleon, we may say that Napoleon is a historical character, and similarly consider historical characters the Richelieu and the Paris of *The Three Musketeers*[5].

Characters such as Zeus and King Arthur can instead be called "mythical" and "legendary," respectively[6]. In the former case, the character first occurs in stories whose authors presumably intended to refer to a real entity, but did not succeed, or so we assume, as Zeus and the other gods and goddesses of the Olympus do not really exist. In the latter case, the character also occurs first in stories whose authors presumably intended to refer to a real entity, but it is unclear or unsettled whether they succeeded or not; historians still discuss whether or not there really was a real King Arthur.

[5] In distinguishing in this way between characters and fictional characters we are in line with Kroon, Voltolini (2023). Others may prefer to say that all characters occurring in fiction, both Holmes and Napoleon, are fictional characters, and call *merely fictional* characters such as Holmes.

[6] See Wolterstorff (1980: 162) for analogous distinctions.

Following Bonomi (1994; 2008), it is useful to distinguish three types of statements about fiction and *ficta* (i.e., fictional statements): textual, paratextual and metatextual[7]. Textual statements are part of a fictional text; for example, "Sherlock Holmes seemed delighted at the idea of sharing his rooms with me" is contained in Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*. Paratextual statements aim at recounting what is true according to the story expressed by a fictional text, what is contained or somehow implied by the story, whether it is explicitly mentioned in the text or not[8]. For example, "in *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes has a friend named 'Watson'" is a true paratextual statement, since, even though the sentence "Holmes has a friend named 'Watson'" never occurs in Doyle's text, the proposition expressed by this sentence is true according to the story expressed by the text. In contrast, "in *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes has a friend named 'Wilson'" is a false paratextual statement. We can have implicitly paratextual statements, when the reference to a story is only implicit. For instance, "Holmes is a detective" and "Holmes is an engineer" can count as true and false paratextual statements, respectively, if understood with an implicit prefix such as "in *A Study in Scarlet*," or, less specifically, "according to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories." Finally, metatextual statements aim at recounting things that depend for their truth on the existence of some stories but are true (if they are true) outside of such stories, i.e., they are neither textual nor paratextual truths. For example, "Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character," "Hercule Poirot was conceived by Agatha Christie," and "Pinocchio is famous" are true metatextual statements, whereas "Sherlock Holmes is a real detective," "Hercule Poirot

[7] See also, for example, Zalta (1983), Voltolini (2006), Sainsbury (2009), and Kroon, Voltolini (2023).

[8] Here it is worth pointing out that the implication in question had better not be based on classical logic, according to which a contradiction implies any proposition whatsoever. For, as we shall see, stories may contain contradictions, and when this is the case, given the implication of classical logic, the story would contain every proposition, which is absurd. Some sort of paraconsistent logic should presumably be presupposed. In a paraconsistent logic it is not the case that a contradiction implies any proposition whatsoever.

was conceived by Conan Doyle," and "Pinocchio is not famous" are false metatextual statements.

The identity conditions of *ficta* are typically expressed according to the following schema[9]:

> (INS) necessarily, for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* if and only if (iff) *P*.

The "necessarily" here should be understood as involving metaphysical necessity[10]. "*P*" should be replaced with a necessary and sufficient condition – or with a set of jointly necessary and sufficient conditions – for the identity between *ficta x* and *y*. When specifying *P*, one need not quantify over *ficta*. Nor need one be committed to there being *ficta* as objects or, more generally, as *bona fide* and *sui generis* entities. Sometimes one could be content with only sufficient conditions for the identity of *ficta*, or with only necessary conditions. Namely, with the following schemas:

> (IS) necessarily, for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* if *P*;
> (IN) necessarily, for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* only if *P*.

At any rate, when filling these schemas, a good theory of the identity conditions of *ficta* should satisfy the following *desiderata*:

(a) it should be as informative as possible when specifying *P* (e.g., it should avoid positing brute identity/distinctness

[9] See for example Kroon, Voltolini (2023).

[10] What metaphysical necessity amounts to is a further and complex issue. One way of characterizing it is as a necessity that 'flows from' the essence of *ficta* or, if there are no *ficta*, from the essence or the features of further entities that somehow account for the truth of statements about *ficta* (e.g., make-believe processes, as we shall see). See for example Fine (1994) and Leech (2022). In putting things in this way, one should assume that the essence of something is what that thing non-derivatively is in all the possible circumstances and at all the times in/at which it exists or is in place (see Paolini Paoletti 2024). "Non-derivatively" means that the features to be included in the essence of something must *not* derive from further features of the latter.

between *ficta*);
(b) it should favor necessary and sufficient conditions (i.e., schema INS) over conditions that are only sufficient or only necessary (i.e., schemas IS and IN);
(c) it should be immune to potential counterexamples;
(d) it should avoid circularity of identity/distinctness (i.e., it should avoid directly or indirectly appealing to identity/distinctness between *ficta* when specifying *P*);
(e) it should avoid regresses of identity/distinctness (i.e., when specifying *P*, it should avoid appealing to the identity/distinctness of further entities, whose identity/distinctness is fixed by appealing to the identity/distinctness of further entities, and so on, *ad infinitum*);
(f) it should resist introducing *ad hoc*, controversial and/or brute theoretical and ontological posits.

Moreover, a good theory of the identity conditions of *ficta* should account for the apparent truth of the statements that we are about to introduce as case studies or paradigmatic examples. When it is controversial if one of these statements, or its negation, is true, a good theory should clarify the situation and adequately motivate its results. Alternatively, when departing from the apparent truth of these statements, a good theory should depart as little as possible from their apparent truth and adequately motivate its departure. First and foremost, we shall deal with identity statements, but we shall also consider other statements somehow connected to identity conditions.

Let us start with identity statements involving a single story and which can be considered either metatextual or implicitly paratextual, such as these:

(1) Holmes is Holmes;
(2) Holmes is not Watson;
(3) Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde.

The trivial (1) should be contrasted with the informative (3). As implicitly paratextual statements, (1)-(3) appear to be true simply on the basis of what a given story (implicitly) tells us, say

A Study in Scarlet as regards (1) and (2) and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as regards (3).

We shall now move to different types of identity statements involving two stories, which can hardly be classified as paratextual and should rather be seen as metatextual. First of all, there are identity statements across two stories that belong in the same series of stories, coming from the same author. For example, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are in the series of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, and the following identity statement appears to be true:

> (4) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

A series of stories, however, can also be generated with the contribution of a different author, who intends to connect to the story (or stories) of a previous author. Sherlock Holmes stories again offer a typical example, as many of them are conveyed by movies produced way after Conan Doyle's stories with the clear intent of connecting to them. There are thus identity statements across two stories that belong in the same series of stories, but come from different authors, such as the following one:

> (5) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie *Sherlock Holmes*.

These are meant to be cases in which the two stories in question appear to attribute the same salient features to the same character; e.g., both in *A Study in Scarlet* and in Guy Ritchie's movie, Sherlock Holmes is a nearly infallible detective with cunning intelligence who lives and operates in London in the years around 1900.

However, there are also cases of stories that seem to be intentionally connected by a new author to a previous story, in which however this author attributes to a main character salient features which are largely different from the salient features of a corresponding character of the previous story, so that the issue arises as to whether they are the same character or not. A case in point is offered by Thom Eberhardt's movie *Without a Clue*,

a comedy in which Holmes is rather stupid and only seems very clever, because Watson secretly gives him the solution for all the crime cases that he is called to solve. Thus, there is an identity statement such as this to be assessed:

(6) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *Without a Clue*.

Perhaps in this case Eberhardt has not explicitly made up his mind as to whether the Holmes of his story is to be identified with the original Holmes, or so we shall assume. Hence, there is not an explicit identification intention, although there is the intention of a connection.

We can also imagine, however, a case of deviance from the original character, even more dramatic than the one we just considered, coupled with an explicit intention to identify the character of the subsequent story with a character of a previous story. For instance, there may be a rapper unable to solve murder cases living in Atlanta in the XX Century, in a story written by an author distinct from Conan Doyle. This rapper character, despite his radically deviant features, is intended by its author to be identified with the Holmes of Conan Doyle's stories[11]. We may call him "Rapper Holmes" and consider whether the following is true or not:

(6a) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as Rapper Holmes.

The deviance from the original character may also be unintended, however, if we admit that there is such a thing as "inadvertent creation" (Zvolenszky 2016). Let us consider the following case. There is a storyteller who wants to memorize word by word Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* in order to recite it. He tries hard and then he thinks he completely succeeds. But, in fact, he does not fully succeed, and only gives voice to a text similar to Doyle's text, in which, as a result of some changes in the text, we read of a Sherlock Holmes with many salient features that

[11] See Pautz (2008).

differ from the ones of the original Holmes. One may say that this storyteller has inadvertently created a new story, *A Study in Scarlet II*, in which there is a Holmes character[12]. One may then wonder whether

> (6b) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II*.

In this case, there is no identification intention, because the second author is not aware of having invented a new story.

In Borges' *Pierre Menard, Author of the* Quixote, Pierre Menard, centuries after Cervantes, tries hard and wants to make it the case that he is in such a state of mind that he writes *Don Quixote* again, word by word identical to the original, as if he were Cervantes. Currie (1990: 42) and Voltolini (2006: 33) imagine a different Pierre Menard, someone who knew nothing about Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and yet accidentally happens to write word by word the same text. Let us call him "Unaware Pierre Menard." The issue arises then if Cervantes' text and Unaware Pierre Menard's text express the same story and more specifically whether we have two distinct Don Quixotes or only one; that is, the following identity statement should be assessed:

> (7) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Unaware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*.

Assuming that "Cervantes' *Don Quixote*" and "Unaware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*" refer to different stories, or at least leaving this open, we may say that we have in this case an identity statement across two totally similar stories with different authors unaware of each other; the characters in question have the same salient features, but the author of the second story does not intend to identify the character of his story with the character of the previous story[13].

[12] Zvolenszky (2016: 326) discusses inadvertent creation and considers a case analogous to this one, where the text to memorize is a Shakespeare's sonnet.

[13] On the issue raised by Currie and Voltolini see also Lewis (1978), Fine (1982: 107) and Thomasson (1999: 56).

We can go back, however, as in Borges' story, to a Pierre Menard who is aware of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, whom we may call "Aware Pierre Menard." Aware Pierre Menard intends to write a story distinct from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, with a character that is not the same as Cervantes' Don Quixote. As it happens, however, he produces a text that differs only slightly from Cervantes' text, and thus expresses a story with a Don Quixote character whose salient features are exactly the same, or nearly the same, as the ones we find in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The issue arises whether

> (8) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Aware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*.

Here the identity statement involves two very similar stories with different authors, with the second author who is aware of the story of the first author. The characters in question have the same salient features, but the author of the second story has the explicit intention that the character of his story is not identified with the character of the previous story. There is rather the intention to create a new story and a new character, but it is not clear that anything new is in fact created.

The latter two cases may be usefully compared and contrasted as follows. In both cases, a distinction of two characters could be suggested by facts having to do with the intention, or lack thereof, of the second author. These facts are however of a different nature: Unaware Pierre Menard does not intend to identify his Don Quixote with Cervantes' Don Quixote (he is not even aware of the latter), whereas Aware Pierre Menard intends to distinguish his Don Quixote from Cervantes' Don Quixote (of whom he is perfectly aware). Moreover, in both cases, the convergence of the salient features of the characters in question may suggest that there is just one character after all.

It is also worth comparing and contrasting these two Don Quixote cases with the three preceding examples involving Sherlock Holmes. In the latter, it is the divergence in salient features that may suggest a distinction of two characters, whereas facts about the intention of the second author may suggest an

identity. Such facts are again of different sorts; there can be just the intention of a connection to a character of a previous story, without the explicit intention of an identification, or there can be such an explicit intention.

We now come to metatextual identity statements involving historical, legendary or mythical characters. Here are three paradigmatic examples:

(9) the real Napoleon is the same as the Napoleon of *War and Peace*;
(10) the legendary King Arthur is the same as the King Arthur of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*;
(11) the mythical Zeus is the same as the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*.

Here it is worth noting that "the mythical Zeus" is meant to refer to a character occurring in Greek myths which we may well be unable to specify, as in the culturalization of fiction. Such myths were taken to recount truths, or largely truths, by ancient Greeks, whereas Rick Riordan, as we all his contemporaries, has of course no belief in them. Thus, something like (11) may perhaps be put as this other identity statement to be assessed:

(11*) the Zeus of believers is the same as the Zeus of non-believers.

In fiction, one often finds talk of groups, such as crowds, mobs or armies, which are meant to be constituted by distinct members. All of these members are different characters, one may presume, although they are indiscernible according to the story in question. Thus, for example, the following metatextual statement appears to be true:

(12) each orc of Sauron's army in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is distinct from the others[14].

[14] See Parsons (1980: 56), Yagisawa (2001), Sainsbury (2009: 66), Priest (2011), Everett (2013: 194), Kroon (2013; 2015).

A very specific case of this situation is a story in which there are two twins, but no individuating feature that differentiates them is specified in the story. We may put it as follows:

> (13) each fictional twin in a pair of indiscernible fictional twins is distinct from the other[15].

We have just seen cases of distinctness accompanied by indiscernibility. It has been argued that in fiction there can also be indeterminate identity. Many concepts, such as *tall*, *obese*, and, most famously, *heap*, appear to have borderline cases and accordingly generate vagueness, as one may ask, e.g., when there are enough grains of sand for something to count as a heap of sand. There seems to be no obvious answer. This phenomenon has been hotly debated in philosophy since antiquity and in the last few decades it has been tackled with sophisticated logical tools, typically involving notions such as determinateness (definiteness) or indeterminateness (indefiniteness). This has been cashed out in many ways, going beyond classical logic, which admits only the truth values *truth* and *falsehood*, and accepts the principle of excluded middle, according to which every statement is either true or false. The thought is, e.g., that it may be indeterminate that something is a heap, where this is taken to mean that it is neither true nor false that this something is a heap, or else that this statement has a third truth value *indeterminate*, other than truth and falsehood, or even in other related ways (see Keefe, Smith 1997 and Sorensen 2022).

With this logical background, there has been much discussion on whether vagueness is merely a semantic phenomenon or it may rather be also ontic, so that there would be indeterminacy in the real world and even indeterminate identity. Evans (1978) famously argued that it is incoherent to admit, for any entity x and y, that it is indeterminate that x is the same as y, and thus attempted to rule out any indeterminate identity in the world. Evans' argument has been questioned (see the replies to Evans

[15] See van Inwagen (2003: 151; 2014: 111), Priest (2011), and Kroon (2013; 2015).

in Keefe, Smith 1997), but that there is no ontic indeterminacy is presumably the majority's opinion.

Everett (2005; 2013) has argued that fictional stories may involve cases of indeterminate identity and that when this happens there are troubles for realist views of *ficta*, for they seem to be forced to admit ontic indeterminacy. As examples of stories with indeterminate identity, he offers Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (2013: 209) and Haruki Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (2013: 210)[16]. Two sorts of cases are distinguished.

There is type-A indeterminacy when the story depicts a world pretty much like ours, in which, let us assume, things are determined, but leaves it open whether a certain character *a* is, or is not, the same as another character *b*. As Everett puts it, in this case, it is indeterminate that, in the story in question, *a* is the same as *b*. Although Everett is not quite explicit on this, such a claim is to be understood as follows: it is not the case that, according to the story, *a* is the same as *b*, and it is also not the case that, according to the story, *a* is not the same as *b*[17]. As an example, Everett suggests Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, wherein there is a Shade character and a Kinbote character, without it being settled whether or not Shade is Kinbote. We may then assume that it is true that

> (14a) it is indeterminate that, according to *Pale Fire*, Shade is the same as Kinbote,

and we may wonder whether or not

> (14b) the Shade of *Pale Fire* is the same as the Kinbote of *Pale Fire*.

Everett argues that, given a plausible identity condition regarding *ficta* occurring in one given story, neither (14b) nor

[16] Everett (2005) also made up his own example of a story with indeterminacy, *Frackworld*, and so did Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009) in their reply to Everett with their *Bah Tale*.

[17] Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009) provide this interpretation, and Everett (2013: 216) discusses it, without rejecting it.

its negation can be asserted and we should thus conclude that (14b) is indeterminate, which, problematically, seems to give rise to ontic indeterminacy – i.e., indeterminacy in the world, not merely within a fiction, even if it regards fictional objects.

The identity condition in questions is as follows (Everett 2013: 211): "If a fiction *f* is such that, (i) in that fiction *a* exists and *b* exists, and (ii) no real thing is identical to *a* or *b*, then the fictional character *a* is identical to the fictional character *b* iff in fiction *f a* = *b*."

Further, according to Everett, there is type-B indeterminacy when a fictional story represents a world with indeterminacy, and in particular in such a way that it is indeterminate whether a given character *a* is the same as a certain character *b*. Everett leaves it deliberately open how this indeterminacy is to be understood: it could be in terms of lack of truth value, or indeterminacy of truth value, and so on (Everett 2013: 210, fn 2). Moreover, he claims that there are, or can be conceived, both stories in which the nature of the indeterminacy is similarly left open, and stories in which the nature of the indeterminacy is specified, say in terms of lack of truth values. As an example, Everett proposes Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, wherein there is no fact of the matter as to whether Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room are identical or not[18]. Thus,

> (15a) according to Murakami's *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, it is indeterminate that Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room,

and, again, we may wonder whether

> (15b) Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room.

[18] Everett makes a further distinction between type-B1 and type-B2 indeterminacy (2013: 211): the former implies type-A indeterminacy, whereas the latter does not. However, he does not provide examples of either, and of the type-B case that he considers, Murakami's story, he says that it is not clear whether it is a type-B1 or a type-B2 case (2013: 210, fn 3).

According to Everett, in this case as well, and still in the light of the above truth condition[19], this is indeterminate, and thus, problematically, appears to bring about ontic indeterminacy[20].

Worse still, some *ficta* may seem to be characterized by inconsistent identity in the relevant stories. To argue for this, Everett (2005) has made up a story, *Dialethialand*, in which two characters, Jules and Jim, are both identical with, and distinct from, each other. We need not consider, however, stories made up by philosophers; there is a sophisticated piece of literature, which appears to convey a story involving an inconsistent identity, namely *Un drame bien parisien* by Alphonse Allais[21]. The story features two characters, Raoul and the Templar, such that it seems to be the case both that Raoul is the same as the Templar, and also that they are distinct. Accordingly, the following paratextual statement seems to be true:

(16a) according to *Un drame bien parisien*, the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul.

Just as in the case of indeterminate identity, this may suggest that, absolutely speaking, outside of fiction, the following holds:

(16b) the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul.

Yet, one should think, inconsistent identity in the real world should be avoided[22].

There also seem to be cases of fusion and fission between *ficta*[23], which bring about perplexities concerning the identity

[19] Actually, especially to deal with type-B indeterminacy, Everett prefers a more sophisticated version of the above truth condition, in which there is an explicit appeal to the notions of truth and falsehood. However, we need not consider these details for present purposes.

[20] For some replies to this problem, see Schnieder, von Solodkoff (2009), Thomasson (2010), Voltolini (2010), Cameron (2013), Murday (2015), Woodward (2017), and Paganini (2023).

[21] Eco (1979) discusses it and reports it entirely in an appendix.

[22] For some replies to this problem, see Schnieder, von Solodkoff (2009), Voltolini (2010), and Murday (2015).

[23] See Kroon, Voltolini (2023).

of *ficta*. As regards fusion, we may focus on a case considered by Bonomi (1994: 66) and Voltolini (2012: 565): in the 1912 version of Proust's *Recherche*, there are two characters, Berget and Vington, who appear to fuse and become one as the Vinteuil character of the final version of the *Recherche*, since the latter encompasses the salient features of both of the former characters, and presumably Proust himself intended this fusion. Accordingly, the following metatextual identity statement seems to hold:

> (17) the Berget and the Vington of the 1912 *Recherche* are the Vinteuil of the final *Recherche*.

The problem is that, in accounting for the apparent truth of (17), one should presumably prevent the following: Berget is not the same as Vington, but they are both identical with Vinteuil, so that (by the transitivity of identity) it is also the case that Berget is the same as Vington.

As regards fission, an example is offered again by Voltolini (2012: 565), namely the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, who, in the final version, appears to split into two distinct characters: the Queen of Hearts (still so called) and the Ugly Duchess. Each of them has in fact, in different ways, salient features of the original character, and presumably Carroll intended this fission. Hence, the following seems to be true:

> (18) the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Queen of Hearts and the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*.

As in the case of fusion, in accounting for the apparent truth of (18), one should prevent the following: the Queen of Hearts of *Alice in Wonderland* is not the same as the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*, but they are both identical with the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland*, so that (by the transitivity of identity) it is also the case that the Queen of Hearts of *Alice in Wonderland* is the same as the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*.

There are also some case studies which seem to involve relations weaker than identity. First of all, it is worth focusing on the fact that fictional characters appear to bear relations to real entities, the thinking subjects who think of them, and it may well be the case that one and the same character is related to different subjects. For example, the following is presumably true:

(19) Odysseus inspired both Dante Alighieri and James Joyce.

Next, let us turn to the fact that for characters such as King Arthur, Don Juan, and Faust, for which there is a long tradition of stories which appear to feature somehow the same character, we may perhaps distinguish between a general character which indeed occurs in all the stories in the tradition, and the specific character that occurs in one of the stories. When things are viewed in this way, it may seem appropriate to treat the specific character as merely an aspect of the general character[24]. Thus, e.g., the following may be accepted:

(20) the Faust of Goethe's *Faust* is an aspect of the Faust general character.

Finally, let us conclude with this phenomenon: it seems that some features are ascribed to the same *fictum* by necessity, whereas others only contingently. And it seems that some features can be acquired by the same *fictum* over time, whereas others cannot. For instance, the following statements may seem to be true:

(21) Holmes could have been ascribed according to some story the feature of having a friend named "Wilson" (instead of having one named "Watson");
(22) Holmes could not have failed to be ascribed according to any story the feature of being a detective;
(23) Holmes acquires (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of having an enemy named "Moriarty";

[24] See Wolterstorff (1980: 148-149).

(24) Holmes could acquire (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of moving to Birmingham;
(25) Holmes could not acquire (according to any subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century.

Here it may be worth underlining that, whenever we claim that a feature (i.e., a property or a relation) is ascribed to a *fictum* according to a story, we only mean that, according to that story, that *fictum* has that feature, and this need not imply that that *fictum* is a *bona fide* and *sui generis* entity. Nor that it is *really* characterized by that feature. Nor that that *fictum* entertains with that feature any further relation distinct from characterization.

As anticipated, we can distinguish between three main strands of theories. First, there are two strands of realism. According to both of them, *ficta* are *bona fide* and *sui generis* entities. Moreover, according to objectual realism, *ficta* are objects, i.e., entities that can have features and that cannot be the features of anything else. According to non-objectual realism, *ficta* are not objects, but they are entities of other kinds. According to anti-realism, *ficta* are not *bona fide* and *sui generis* entities. Namely, they should be eliminated in favor of further entities that we shall call "*ficta*-surrogates." These may include make-believe processes, linguistic practices and norms (when it comes to the use of fictional names), and so on. Following anti-realism, apparently true statements that seem to be about *ficta* should be accounted for by only appealing to *ficta*-surrogates.

In the following, we shall be first concerned with the main theories within objectual realism (Chapter 1). We shall then move to non-objectual realism (Chapter 2) and to anti-realism (Chapter 3). Finally, in Chapter 4, we shall be concerned with the connections between the identity conditions of *ficta* and the practice of literary interpretation – as well as the determining factors of the latter[25].

[25] This Introduction was first drafted by Michele Paolini Paoletti and then finalized in cooperation by him, Francesco Orilia, and Jansan Favazzo. Michele Paolini Paoletti is the author of Chapter 1 and Chapter 4. Francesco Orilia is the author of Chapter 2. Jansan Favazzo is the author of Chapter 3.

Chapter 1

Objectual Realism

Objectual realism holds that *ficta* are *bona fide* and *sui generis* entities and that they are objects, i.e., entities that can have features (i.e., properties and relations) and that cannot be the features of anything else. In this Chapter, we shall examine two main strands of objectual realist theories: Meinongian theories and creationist theories.

1. *Meinongian Theories*

Meinongian theories of *ficta* are based upon Alexius Meinong's theory of objects. According to Meinong, the realm of objects extends far beyond ordinary existing objects. It also includes non-existent objects. More precisely, Meinong holds that (at least) all possible definite descriptions and proper names stand for objects which have their features independently of their own ontological status (e.g., their existence or non-existence) and independently of the activities of minded subjects such as ourselves. Thus, there are objects that do *not* exist[26].

From this standpoint, *ficta* such as Holmes are non-existent objects. Namely, *ficta* are objects and have specific features (e.g., being a detective, having a friend named "Watson," and so on). And this happens in spite of their non-existence

[26] On Meinong's theory of objects, see for example Marek (2023) and, on Meinongianism, Reicher (2024). Interestingly enough, Meinong's original account of fictional objects may be reconstructed as slightly different from the neo-Meinongian ones: see Raspa (2001; 2006) for a critical assessment.

and independently of the activities of minded subjects – even independently of the activities of their authors and readers (e.g., independently of the activities of Conan Doyle). This view is affected by some problems that we shall briefly present.

The Problem of 'Real' Features: if one were to solve a real murder case, one would never look for Sherlock Holmes. If one were to visit 221B Baker Street, one would never meet Sherlock Holmes – or the remains of his house. Thus, is it *really* the case that Sherlock Holmes is a detective and that he lives at 221B Baker Street? More generally, there are some features (such as that of being a detective and that of living at 221B Baker Street) that seem to require the existence of their bearers. No one can really be a detective without existing. These are 'real' or 'existence-entailing' features. How can they be had by *ficta*, if the latter do not exist?[27]

The Problem of Relevant Stories: what are the relevant stories one should take into account when singling out the features that are had or not had by *ficta*? Only their native stories, i.e., the stories in which they first appeared? But what if a native story is very poor, i.e., if it ascribes a low number of features to a *fictum*? And what if the features that crucially matter to a *fictum* are ascribed to it in subsequent, non-native stories?

The Problem of Non-Native Stories: relatedly, what happens when further features are ascribed to a *fictum* in a non-native story? Does that very *fictum* turn out to acquire new features? But how can this happen if the stories we should take into account when ascribing features to *ficta* are only the native ones? Alternatively, does a new *fictum* with a higher number of features 'come up'? But how can this preserve the apparent identity of *ficta* across different stories (e.g., across native and non-native ones)?

The Problem of Implicit Features: there are some features that seem to be had by Holmes even if they are never explicitly ascribed to him within the relevant stories. For example, we may reasonably surmise that Holmes has a nose – even if the feature of having a nose is never explicitly ascribed to Holmes in his

[27] See for example Lewis (1978).

stories. What principles of entailment guarantee such inferences? Are they the very principles that hold in the real world (e.g., if one is a human being, one typically has a nose)? But what guarantees that such principles also hold in the fictional worlds connected with fictional stories?

*The First Problem of Creation**: Holmes is not literally created by Conan Doyle. First of all, Holmes never comes into existence: he is a non-existent object. Secondly, he is an object and he has certain features independently of the activities of minded subjects such as his author (i.e., Conan Doyle). However, Conan Doyle still entertains some special relation similar to creation with Holmes. Call it "creation*." What does creation* consist in? Does it consist in picking out (on behalf of Conan Doyle) the 'right' object (i.e., the 'right' Holmes with the 'right' features) among an indefinite number of mind-independent candidate objects (i.e., among other 'Holmeses' with slightly different features)? But how can an existing author be 'in touch with' a plenitude of non-existent objects? This looks implausible or – at best – ontologically controversial[28].

*The Second Problem of Creation**: suppose that Conan Doyle, in order to create* Holmes, has to pick out a certain object. Presumably, he has to pick out one and only one object. Otherwise, there would *not* be one and only one Holmes. Yet, *which* object does he pick out? How can he pick out one and only one object and – in addition – the 'right' object?

To stress the relevance of this problem, consider the following scenario. At time t_1, Conan Doyle only writes that Sherlock Holmes is a human being. At time t_2, he adds that Holmes is a detective and that he lives in London. What object does Conan Doyle pick out at t_1? Does he pick out a human being called "Sherlock Holmes" that is only a human being, with no further detail about his job and the place where he lives? Does he pick out an object that is already a detective and that already lives in London? Does he pick out an object that is a plumber – and not a detective – and that lives in London? There are many candidate objects at t_1. And there are many such candidates at t_2 as well.

[28] See for example Thomasson (1999: 14-17).

For, at t_2, many features of Holmes are still left unspecified. Moreover, what guarantees that Conan Doyle picks out the very same object at t_1 and at t t_2? Alternatively, does he shift from one object to another when he adds (or deletes) features? And what happens if Conan Doyle decides to change one of the features he first ascribed to Holmes? Does he pick out another object?[29]

The Problem of Existence: Sherlock Holmes does not exist. Yet, according to Conan Doyle's stories, he *does* exist. If we follow such stories when ascribing the relevant features to Holmes, we should also ascribe to Holmes the feature of existing. Thus, Holmes both exists and does not exist[30].

The Problem of Exoticity: all *ficta* are incomplete, i.e., for at least one feature, it is neither the case that they have that feature, nor that they lack it – at least if we take into account the features that are explicitly ascribed to *ficta* within stories. Moreover, some *ficta* such as round squares and the Templar and Raoul in *Un drame bien parisien* are inconsistent, i.e., for at least one feature, it is both the case that they have and lack that feature. Further *ficta* such as Shade and Kinbote in Nabokov's *Pale Fire* are A-indeterminate, i.e., it is indeterminate whether, according to *Pale Fire*, they are the same or not. And some *ficta* such as Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room in Murakami's *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* are B-indeterminate, i.e., according to the story, it is indeterminate whether they are the same or not. This seems to introduce in the realm of objects (if not in the real world) 'exotic' and possibly dangerous logical and ontological phenomena, i.e., incompleteness, inconsistency and indeterminacy.

We shall now examine three main varieties of Meinongianism. We shall show how they try to cope with these and other

[29] See for example Sainsbury (2009: 57-63).

[30] One related problem we shall not deal with here is the *Problem of Fiction Within Fiction*. Consider a fictional story that is recounted within another fictional story. And consider a character that exists/is not a *fictum* within the former fictional story, but does not exist/is a *fictum* within the latter fictional story. Is that character characterized by existence or by non-existence? See Sainsbury (2010: 66).

problems. These are Predication Meinongianism, Feature Meinongianism and Modal Meinongianism.

1.1. *Predication Meinongianism*

According to Predication Meinongianism, there are two ways in which objects may have features. Objects may either be constituted by or exemplify features[31]. Or they may have features either internally or externally (or have them according to further and more complex types of predication)[32]. Or they may either encode or exemplify features. The latter terminology is adopted by Edward N. Zalta. We shall focus here on Zalta's theory of objects, which provides the most developed theory of *ficta* in the field of Predication Meinongianism[33].

According to Zalta, objects may either encode or exemplify features (i.e., properties and relations). Real, existing objects only exemplify features. For example, a real detective only exemplifies the feature of being a detective. Abstract objects fail to exemplify existence. But abstract objects, though non-existent, encode features and they also exemplify at least some features. For example, Holmes encodes the feature of being a detective and exemplifies the feature of being abstract.

Ficta belong in the category of abstract objects. Each *fictum* originates in some story (i.e., is native to a story), insofar as it encodes features according to that story for the first time and it encodes no feature in any previous story. One terminological note: whenever a *fictum* is native to a story, we shall also claim that the story is native for that *fictum*.

Zalta accepts the following identity conditions for objects:

> (INS-1) necessarily, for any objects x and y, x is identical with y iff they both exist and, necessarily, they exemplify all and only

[31] See Rapaport (1978).

[32] See Castañeda (1989: 176-205). Zalta (1983: 11) also recalls Ernst Mally's distinction between being determined by a feature and satisfying it. See also Perszyk (1993).

[33] See Zalta (1983; 1988; 2000).

the same features or they are both abstract and, necessarily, they encode all and only the same features[34].

The features that matter for the identity of *ficta* are all and only those features encoded according to their native stories – either explicitly or implicitly, i.e., following some form of relevant entailment. Namely,

> (INS-1.1) if a *fictum x* originates in a story *s*, then, necessarily, any object *y* is identical with *x* iff *y* encodes according to its native story all and only the same features encoded by *x* according to *s* (either explicitly or implicitly, i.e., according to some form of relevant entailment from the propositions explicitly included in *s*)[35].

Zalta also assumes that features are identical if and only if they are encoded by exactly the same objects and that, for every expressible condition on features, there is an abstract object encoding just the features in that condition[36].

When it comes to the *Problem of 'Real' Features*, Zalta claims that Holmes only encodes – and does *not* exemplify – the feature of being a detective. This seemingly explains why Holmes is not able to solve any real murder. In a similar vein, with the *Problem of Existence*, Holmes only encodes – and does *not* exemplify – existence.

The distinction between encoding and exemplifying is a primitive one. But its adoption is motivated by Zalta by appealing to its ability to account for some data about objects and to account for such data better than another rival theory, i.e., Parsons' Meinongianism (see below)[37]. Yet, *ceteris paribus*, it would have been better to have a non-primitive distinction between these two ways of having features[38]. Moreover, this solution introduces systematic ambiguity in the use of copulas and predicates: when we use "is a detective" with a real

[34] See Zalta (1983: 13).
[35] See Zalta (1983: 91-99; 2000).
[36] See Zalta (1983: 12-13).
[37] See Zalta (1983: 3-14).
[38] See for example Berto (2013a: 133-137).

detective, "is" stands for exemplification, whereas, when we use "is a detective" with Holmes, "is" stands for encoding[39].

Predication Meinongianism does not solve the *First* and the *Second Problem of Creation**. It copes with the *Problem of Relevant Stories* by holding that only native stories matter for the features that are encoded by *ficta*. But it does *not* cope with the possibility of having poor native stories, nor with the possibility of having crucial features encoded by *ficta* according to subsequent and non-native stories. Moreover, the boundaries of native stories are far from being determinate. For example, with respect to Holmes, is there only one huge native story which includes all and only Conan Doyle's novels about Holmes? Is the only native story the one recounted by *A Study in Scarlet*, i.e., the first novel about Holmes?

With the *Problem of Non-Native Stories*, further features are added in subsequent, non-native stories. Thus, the very same *fictum* may still be in place and also encode these additional features. Yet, this falls prey to some additional problems that we shall examine below.

The *Problem of Implicit Features* is faced by accepting that some features encoded by *ficta* are only implicitly ascribed to them by their native stories. Namely, such features are ascribed to them following some form of relevant entailment from what is explicitly claimed in such stories. But it is far from clear what principles of relevant entailment can hold or not hold in stories. One can only guess to a reasonable extent that, in the world of Holmes' stories, if someone is a human being, then one also has a nose. But this is far from obvious, especially when it comes to non-realistic fictional stories. In sum, principles of relevant entailment can only be guessed to a reasonable extent. But, on the other hand, such principles may ground some of the features encoded by *ficta*. If such features partake in the identity conditions of *ficta* (following INS-1.1), then one can only guess to a reasonable extent if Holmes is identical with or distinct from certain *ficta*.

[39] See Everett (2013: 174). Even if they affect Predication Meinongianism, we shall not discuss here Clark (1978)'s and McMichael, Zalta (1980)'s paradoxes.

Finally, all *ficta* are incomplete, some of them are A-indeterminate, B-indeterminate and/or inconsistent (*Problem of Exoticity*). True: following Zalta, this only concerns the features encoded by *ficta*, and not those exemplified by them. Yet, incompleteness, indeterminacy and inconsistency still affect the realm of objects.

Following (INS-1) and (INS-1.1), the truth of statements such as

(1) Holmes is Holmes,
(2) Holmes is not Watson,
(3) Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde,

is accounted for by appealing to the features encoded by Holmes, Watson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in their native stories.

The truth-value of

(10) the legendary King Arthur is the same as the King Arthur of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*

is fixed by holding that such *ficta* would be identical if and only if they encoded all and only the same features according to their native stories. Suppose now that there is only one native story and that it is the original legend about King Arthur. Cornwell's King Arthur encodes further features not encoded by the legendary King Arthur according to the original legend. There are two options: either they are the same *fictum* and Cornwell's stories are not native for that *fictum*, or Bernard Cornwell's stories are native for Bernard Cornwell's King Arthur, so that the legendary King Arthur and Bernard Cornwell's King Arthur are not the same *fictum*.

In both cases, the fact that a story is native for a given *fictum* is fixed by the fact that *that very fictum* gets ascribed certain features in that story for the first time and it has no feature in any previous story. Namely, the fact that a story is native for a given *fictum* is fixed by the fact that that *fictum* gets ascribed certain features in that story for the first time and the very same *fictum* does not get ascribed any feature in any previous story. Thus, the possibility of singling out a story as native for a *fictum*

hinges on the possibility of providing identity conditions for that *fictum*. This opens the door to a vicious form of circularity.

To avoid these problems, we may surmise that there is only one native story and it is a story that includes both the original legend and Bernard Cornwell's stories. In this case, the legendary King Arthur and Cornwell's King Arthur may turn out to be identical. Still, everything hinges on the identity conditions of stories. Namely, the identity of such objects is fixed by also fixing the identity or distinction between the relevant stories. But the identity conditions of stories are fixed by the propositions that are included in them. In turn, the identity of such propositions also seems to be fixed by the objects they are about: [King Arthur is a hero] is distinct from [Alexey Navalny is a hero] just because the former proposition is about King Arthur and the latter is about another object, i.e., Alexey Navalny. Thus, the identity conditions of propositions (and of stories) is fixed in turn by also fixing the identity/distinctness of the objects they are about, such as King Arthur. This results in another vicious form of circularity. For stories partake in turn in fixing the identity conditions of *ficta*[40].

As regards

> (9) the real Napoleon is the same as the Napoleon of *War and Peace*,

Zalta holds that these are distinct objects. For the real Napoleon is an existing object, whereas the Napoleon character in *War and Peace* is a non-existent one. At best, the Napoleon character may be a fictional correlate of the real Napoleon, insofar as the former encodes all and only the features exemplified by the latter[41]. But this cannot be taken for granted. For the Napoleon character in *War and Peace* may presumably encode features that are not exemplified by the real Napoleon. And the real Napoleon may exemplify features that are not encoded by the Napoleon character.

[40] This argument is used by Voltolini (2006) to argue for the existence of *ficta*.
[41] See Zalta (1983: 35).

The truth of

(4) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*,
(5) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie *Sherlock Holmes*,

hinges on the nativity/non-nativity of the relevant stories, on the identity conditions of stories and on their boundaries. We have already seen that the first two factors open the door to two forms of vicious circularity. And that the third factor opens the door to some kind of indeterminacy.

Something similar happens with:

(6) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *Without a Clue*,
(6a) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as Rapper Holmes,
(6b) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II*,
(7) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Unaware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*,
(8) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Aware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*.

Recall that: in *Without a Clue*, Sherlock Holmes is dumb and Watson actually solves crime cases; Rapper Holmes is a rapper unable to solve murder cases living in Atlanta in the XX Century but his author wants to identify him with the Holmes of Conan Doyle's stories; *A Study in Scarlet II* is recounted by its storyteller with the intention of reciting *A Study in Scarlet* but some salient features of Holmes involuntarily turn out to be different. And recall that Unaware Pierre Menard accidentally happens to write the same text as Cervantes' Don Quixote, whereas Aware Pierre Menard intends to write a story distinct from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, with a character that is not the same as Cervantes' Don Quixote, but actually writes a story with a Don Quixote character whose salient features are exactly

the same, or nearly the same, as the ones we find in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

Even in these cases, everything depends on which stories are native or non-native and therefore on the identity conditions of stories and on their boundaries. True, one may intuitively hold that:

- the Holmes of *Without A Clue* and Rapper Holmes are distinct from Conan Doyle's Holmes, since they encode radically distinct features according to their (different) native stories;
- *A Study in Scarlet II* is not native to Holmes, thus Conan Doyle's Holmes (that very character) may well partake in that story;
- Unaware Pierre Menard produces the same native story as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and therefore his story is about the selfsame Don Quixote;
- Aware Pierre Menard writes a non-native story that is about Cervantes' Don Quixote, insofar as the features are exactly the same and in spite of his own intentions.

However, everything hinges on the possibility of singling out the relevant native stories and of distinguishing them from the non-native ones. Indeed, and in contrast with what I suggested above, one may hold that:

- the Holmes of *Without A Clue* and Rapper Holmes are not distinct from Conan Doyle's Holmes, since the relevant stories are not native to Holmes;
- *A Study in Scarlet II*, being different from *A Study in Scarlet* and in spite of the intentions of its author, is a new story that is native for a new Holmes *fictum*; and so on.

In turn, deciding on the nativity or non-nativity of the relevant stories may result in the forms of vicious circularity pointed to above.

With respect to Unaware Pierre Menard and Aware Pierre Menard, what matters is the content of that story. If Unaware Pierre Menard and Aware Pierre Menard turn out to ascribe to their *ficta* all and only the same features that have been ascribed to Don Quixote within Cervantes' native story, then Unaware Pierre Menard and Aware Pierre Menard turn out to write something about Cervantes' Don Quixote, i.e., about that very

fictum. But an interesting question arises for Unaware Pierre Menard: does he happen to write a new non-native story that is nevertheless indiscernible from Cervantes' native story? Or does he write a *new occurrence* of that very native story?

With

(11) the mythical Zeus is the same as the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*,

two options are available: either *The Lightning Thief* is not native for Zeus and therefore it may be about mythical Zeus (whose native story is the myth), or *The Lightning Thief* is native for some Zeus *fictum* that is distinct from the mythical Zeus – provided that the features encoded by Zeus according to the myth and those encoded according to *The Lightning Thief* do not coincide.

And, in the case of

(11*) the Zeus of believers is the same as the Zeus of non-believers,

one may hold that they are the same object, insofar as they encode all and only the same features (according to the native story) and insofar as one does not take the distinct intentions of believers and non-believers as features that are encoded by Zeus (according to the native story).

With

(19) Odysseus inspired both Dante Alighieri and James Joyce,

Predication Meinongians may hold that distinct *ficta* are in place: Homer's Odysseus, Dante's Odysseus/Ulysses and Joyce's Odysseus/Ulysses. Such *ficta* share relations of similarity, that are grounded on the features encoded by them. But this happens only if we assume that there are three distinct stories that are native for those *ficta*. On the contrary, if only Homer's *Odyssey* were native for Odysseus, one may suggest that actually Dante and Joyce wrote about Homer's Odysseus/Ulysses. *Mutatis mutandis*, something similar may happen with (20) for the identity/distinctness between each single Faust character in each

work and the general Faust character. Thus, there are at least two ways to cope with (19) and (20).

Indiscernible orcs in Sauron's army and fictional pairs of indiscernible twins in

> (12) each orc of Sauron's army in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is distinct from the others,
> (13) each fictional twin in a pair of indiscernible fictional twins is distinct from the other,

can be dealt with by claiming that only the fictional crowd/the fictional pair of twins is a *fictum* and that their members are not *ficta*. But this runs against one principle of entailment that holds in the real world and, tacitly, in many (if not all) fictional worlds: if there is something like a plurality of objects (e.g., a crowd and pair), then there are also its members as *bona fide* objects.

Recall now:

> (14a) it is indeterminate that, according to *Pale Fire*, Shade is the same as Kinbote,
> (15a) according to Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, it is indeterminate that Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room,
> (16a) according to *Un drame bien parisien*, the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul.

The indeterminate identity of Shade and Kinbote and of Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room (in 14a and 15a) and the inconsistent identity of Raoul and the Templar (in 16a) only concern the features encoded or not encoded by them according to the story. More precisely, such *ficta* encode (without exemplifying) indeterminate/inconsistent identity, or they do *not* encode determinate identity, as it happens with Shade and Kumiko. But it is far from obvious that identity is a feature that can be encoded by objects without being exemplified. Moreover, it is not established if Shade and Kinbote (as well as Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room) exemplify determinate identity or determinate distinctness. Nor is it established if Raoul and

the Templar exemplify determinate identity or determinate distinctness. And it seems that every object should either exemplify determinate identity or determinate distinctness.

When *ficta* undergo fusion and fission, this presumably results in there being distinct *ficta* encoding distinct features. But recall our case of fusion:

> (17) the Berget and the Vington of the 1912 *Recherche* are the Vinteuil of the final *Recherche*.

Again: with fusion, everything depends on which story is native. If the only native story is the earlier version of the *Recherche*, then Berget is not the same as Vington. But, in the subsequent, non-native story (i.e., the later version of the *Recherche*), Berget and Vington may turn out to be identical. For they may both be identical with Vinteuil. Indeed, this latter story is non-native. Yet, it seems that, *contra* (INS-1.1), this non-native story *does* settle the identity/distinctness of *ficta*. Otherwise, one should deny that Berget and Vington ever turn out to be identical. This opens the door to inconsistency[42].

On the other hand, if the only native story is the later version of the *Recherche* (which is rather implausible!), then there is only Vinteuil. And he may be identical with both Berget and Vington in the former, non-native story. But Berget and Vington are distinct. Thus, again, the door is open for inconsistency.

If there is only one native story that includes both versions, then in this story Berget and Vington are both identical and distinct from each other and from Vinteuil. This story is obviously inconsistent. Fine. But it is rather controversial that two versions of the same story do count as parts of the same, larger and inconsistent story.

Finally, if there are two native stories (i.e., the early version of the *Recherche* and the final version of the *Recherche*), then these three *ficta* are distinct. And this seems to be the most reasonable solution. However, one should then defend the claim

[42] To avoid inconsistency, one may hold that, in the later story, the transitivity of identity does not hold. But, again, it is far from clear that this is automatically the case.

that the early version of the *Recherche* and the final version of the *Recherche* are two distinct stories – and not two distinct versions of the same story.

Mutatis mutandis, something analogous happens with fission in

(18) the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Queen of Hearts and the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*.

When it comes to the features that could and could not be had/lost/acquired by objects, i.e.,

(21) Holmes could have been ascribed according to some story the feature of having a friend named "Wilson" (instead of having one named "Watson"),
(22) Holmes could not have failed to be ascribed according to any story the feature of being a detective,
(23) Holmes acquires (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of having an enemy named "Moriarty,"
(24) Holmes could acquire (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of moving to Birmingham,
(25) Holmes could not acquire (according to any subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century,

our choices still hinge on singling out the relevant native stories. For example, in a non-native story, Holmes can acquire the feature of having an enemy named "Moriarty" (as in 23) and he could acquire the feature of moving to Birmingham (as in 24). But he could also acquire the feature of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century (*contra* 25). Indeed, given (INS-1.1) and the non-nativity of the story, what would prevent the latter possibility?

On the contrary, in his native story, Holmes can/could *not* have/lose/acquire features distinct from the ones that get actually ascribed to him by that story. Thus, *contra* (21), he could not have got ascribed (according to his native story) the feature of having a friend named "Wilson" (instead of having one named "Watson"). This may look implausible.

To summarize, the identity conditions of *ficta* for Predication Meinongianism hinge on the status of stories, i.e., on the fact that they are native or non-native with regard to such *ficta*. This introduces two vicious forms of circularity when it comes to defining the nativity/non-nativity of stories and their identity conditions. And it also introduces apparently indeterminate boundaries between stories.

This points to a more general problem for Predication Meinongianism. It is the *Problem of Explanation*: in order to explain the ascriptions of certain features to the same *fictum* or to distinct *ficta*, in order to specify the relevant stories, and so on, we first need to clarify if such *ficta* are identical or distinct. Thus, on pain of circularity, we cannot explain the identity/distinctness between *ficta* by appealing to the former factors, i.e., the ascriptions of features, the specification of the relevant stories, and so on[43].

Maybe we could do without native stories and only accept (INS-1). Namely, we could treat *ficta* as abstract objects whose identity is only grounded in the features they encode – full stop. Yet, without stories, it would not be possible to circumscribe the features encoded by a given *fictum*. Moreover, all the features encoded by a *fictum* would turn out to be had by the latter by necessity.

There is another, more general problem for Predication Meinongianism. It is the *Problem of Fragility*: a *fictum* turns out to necessarily have all the features it encodes (be they the features ascribed to it by the native stories or all the features ascribed to it by some story or another). Thus, *ficta* turn out to be modally fragile with respect to their encoded features. Namely, they could not fail to encode the features they actually encode. And they could not encode other features in their place. For example, Holmes could not fail to encode the feature of living at 221B Baker Street and encode the feature of living at 221C Baker Street. This looks implausible[44].

[43] See Everett (2013: 198).

[44] The *Problem of Fragility* is also raised by Sainsbury (2009: 57-63) and Everett (2013: 195-197). But these authors consider this problem also with respect to the exact time at which a *fictum* is created (or created*), the exact way it is created (or

Finally, Predication Meinongianism grants that a *fictum* may encode certain features in certain non-native stories without such features partaking in its identity conditions. But one may legitimately ask why such features do not partake in those conditions. In the end, these features are still encoded by the *fictum*. Namely, they are had by the *fictum* in the same way (i.e., by encoding) in which further features are had by the *fictum* in its native story. Why can only the 'native' features partake in the identity conditions?

1.2. *Feature Meinongianism*

Feature Meinongianism holds that there are two kinds of features that objects may have. These are characterizing and non-characterizing features[45] or nuclear and extranuclear features[46]. Paradigmatic characterizing/nuclear features of Holmes are those of being a detective, solving murder cases, being human, having a friend named "Watson," and so on. Paradigmatic non-characterizing/extranuclear features of Holmes are those of being non-existent, being incomplete, being thought of by Conan Doyle (maybe), being possible, being fictional, and so on. This distinction is then adopted in order to cope with some data and problems that affect *ficta* and non-existent objects in general, as we shall see.

The distinction between characterizing/nuclear and non-characterizing/extranuclear features has been drawn in two ways, i.e., either by introducing examples of the former and of the latter or by invoking some principles that govern the latter without governing the former.

Following the first strategy, Terence Parsons claims that there are four types of extranuclear predicates: ontological

created*), and so on. In these latter respects, Predication Meinongians may hold that such features are only exemplified by *ficta*, so that they do not come together with modal fragility. Zalta (2003) suggests that, in order to single out the features encoded by an object, we should wait for the completion of the story-telling process. For some criticisms of this move, see Priest *et al.* (2020).

[45] See Routley (1980).

[46] See Parsons (1980) and Jacquette (1989; 1996).

(e.g., "exists," "is fictional"), modal (e.g., "is possible," "is impossible"), intentional (e.g., "is thought of by someone," "is worshipped"), and technical (e.g., "is complete"). For Parsons, these predicates do not actually stand for features of objects – or it is controversial that they do[47]. On the other hand, it is not controversial that nuclear predicates such as "is a detective" or "is human" stand for nuclear features. Following the second strategy, Dale Jacquette claims that the extranuclear features of an object supervene on the totality of its nuclear features, i.e., the former are necessitated by the latter[48]. In sum, we may conclude that extranuclear features are (at least) ontologically controversial features of objects and – if they are necessitated by nuclear features – they are somehow ontologically derivative in comparison with the latter (at least *prima facie*).

We shall focus here on Parsons' theory, which provides the most developed view of *ficta* within the field of Feature Meinongianism. Parsons holds that, for every set of nuclear features, there is at least and at most one object that has all and only those features. Consequently, no two objects have exactly the same nuclear features[49].

When it comes to *ficta* – and to objects in general – Parsons accepts the following criterion:

[47] See Parsons (1980: 23). However, Parsons (1980: 26) accepts that there are extranuclear features.

[48] See Jacquette (1989). According to Jacquette (1996: 114-116), extranuclear features can only be defined by logical operators and uninterpreted predicate symbols. Parsons (1980: 25) explores a similar solution by holding that no nuclear feature *P* satisfies the following condition: there is a set of nuclear features, not containing *P*, such that every object that has all the features in that set lacks *P*. Or such that it is possible that every object that has all the features in that set has (or lacks) *P*. Exploring Meinongianism, Reicher (2024) suggests that every feature may either 'function' as nuclear or extranuclear in given contexts. A feature functions as a nuclear feature in a given context when it is used (in that context) in order to single out the essential/characterizing features of an object. It functions as an extranuclear one in a given context when it is not used for this purpose. She then shows that this distinction is equivalent to that between modes of predication. In the same work, Reicher presents (without endorsing) a view according to which non-existent objects, including *ficta*, are actually types/universals, rather than objects (in our terminology). Therefore, this view may count as a version of Meinongian *non-objectual* realism about *ficta*.

[49] See Parsons (1980: 19). *Mutatis mutandis*, Zalta (1983: 34).

(IS-2) necessarily, for any objects *x* and *y* (including *ficta*), *x* is identical with *y* if *x* and *y* have all and only the same nuclear features[50].

Since there is at least and at most one object for every set of nuclear features and since no two objects can share the same nuclear features, this criterion may also be strengthened as follows:

(INS-2) necessarily, for any objects *x* and *y* (including *ficta*), *x* is identical with *y* iff *x* and *y* have all and only the same nuclear features.

The first problem with Feature Meinongianism is that the distinction between characterizing/nuclear and non-characterizing/extranuclear features looks controversial[51]. In the end, there may be many seemingly nuclear features that are ontologically controversial, e.g., conjunctive features such as that of *being a detective and living in Baker Street* or macro-level features such as those of *being a law* or of *having a soul*. Thus, being an ontologically controversial feature is not enough in order to be an extranuclear feature. One should at least specify what sort of ontological controversiality only characterizes extranuclear features.

Nor is being necessitated by other features enough in order to count as an extranuclear feature. Indeed, some nuclear features are necessitated by other features as well, e.g., *being a mammal* is necessitated by *being a whale*. Being necessitated by the totality of an object's nuclear features is not enough either. First, one should clarify what counts as a nuclear feature. Secondly, intentional extranuclear features do not fit well with this proposal. *Being worshipped* is an extranuclear feature of Zeus, but it is not necessitated by the totality of Zeus' nuclear features: Zeus may even be a god, without being worshipped by anyone. Finally, all of such conditions taken together (i.e.,

[50] See Parsons (1980: 28).
[51] See for example Berto (2013a: 125-128).

being ontologically controversial and being necessitated by other features and/or by the totality of nuclear features) still do not look sufficient in order to count as an extranuclear feature. Indeed, intentional features are not very ontologically controversial as such, though they may turn out to be identical with specific neural or physical features. And they are not necessitated. Yet, they are extranuclear features[52].

This problem is reinforced by Parsons' claim that extranuclear features/predicates may have 'watered-down' nuclear counterparts[53]. This is meant to account for phenomena such as existence within stories. Indeed, in connection with the *Problem of Existence*, Holmes does not have extranuclear existence. However, following Conan Doyle's stories, he seems to exist. This is the case insofar as Holmes has 'watered-down' nuclear existence, i.e., the nuclear counterpart of extranuclear existence. Yet, if extranuclear features can have nuclear counterparts, it is not clear why nuclear features cannot in turn have extranuclear counterparts[54]. Moreover, Feature Meinongianism introduces systematic ambiguity in the use of predicates, for reasons analogous to those explored for Predication Meinongianism.

There are also some counterexamples to the thesis that, for every set of nuclear features, there is at least and at most one object that has all and only those features. For example, some

[52] Moreover, the views explored by Reicher (2024) (see note 48) entail that a feature – when it 'functions' as an extranuclear one – can be had by an object without characterizing it/without being essential to it. But how can a feature be had by an object without characterizing it? If interpreted in terms of two modes of predication in line with Predication Meinongianism, these views inherit the problems of that theory. If we hold that extranuclear features are just those features that are *not* essential to an object and merely accidental to it, then it still needs to be shown that every feature whatsoever may 'function' as extranuclear/accidental in this way (e.g., the feature of being human may not). Reicher (2024: 59) suggests that *ficta qua* types/universal are identical *if and only if* they have all and the same nuclear features (by the mode of predication that is typical of nuclear features). In this case, one may hold that 'functioning' as a nuclear feature consists in being included in a type/universal (and be essential to the latter), whereas 'functioning' as an extranuclear feature consists in being had by an object (in our terminology). In this case, the views at stake could inherit the problems – or some of the problems – of the non-objectual realist theories discussed in Chapter 3.

[53] See for example Parsons (1980: 44).

[54] Against 'watered down' nuclear counterparts: see also Cocchiarella (1982).

sets of nuclear features that are presented in stories do not give rise to any object (and therefore to any *fictum*) at all[55]. (IS-2) has some counterexamples and problems too. Indeed, some nuclear features may refer to other objects (e.g., having a friend named "Watson"). This may introduce troublesome forms of circularity or regresses of identity[56]. It also seems that some extranuclear features may matter to the identity of objects. For example, a real demon existing in the world is distinct from an imaginary demon with the same nuclear features[57]. And the following scenario is troublesome: if, in a story, a given object *A* only has the watered-down nuclear feature of being a non-existent object identical with a given object *B* and object *B* only has the watered-down nuclear feature of being a non-existent object distinct from *A*, then it is unclear if there are two objects or only one[58].

Finally, there are at least two further sorts of counterexamples to (INS-2). First of all, it seems that a *fictum* may remain the same even if it slightly changes its nuclear features. And a *fictum* would have been the same *fictum* even if it had been characterized by slightly different nuclear features from the ones it actually has[59]. Namely, (INS-2) is affected by the *Problem of Fragility*. Moreover, the following scenario is troublesome: if, in a story, a given object A is an individual having no feature, then it is unclear if there is such an object or not[60].

[55] See Howell (1979) and Voltolini (2006: 32).

[56] See Sainsbury (2009: 61). This problem may also affect Predication Meinongianism, with respect to encoded features.

[57] See Priest (2016: 83) and Berto (2013a: 126). Parsons may reply that a real demon, being existent, has nuclear features that are not had by the imaginary demon, e.g., some causal powers. However, first, given Parsons' principles, it is possible to have an object such as a real demon that is *not* characterized by these further nuclear features. And, secondly, the very same powers may turn out to characterize the imaginary demon too.

[58] See Caplan, Muller (2015). Again, Parsons may reply that *A* is distinct from *B* since *A* and *B* may be implicitly characterized by *other* nuclear features. But, given Parsons' principles, it is at least possible that there is an object such as *A* that only has the watered-down nuclear feature of being a non-existent object identical with *B* and an object such as *B* that only has the watered-down nuclear feature of being a non-existent object distinct from *A*.

[59] See for example Sainsbury (2009: 57-63) and Thomasson (1999: 57).

[60] See Voltolini (2006: 26).

Let us briefly turn to the Problems that affect Meinongian theories. The *Problem of 'Real' Features* is faced by Feature Meinongianism by holding that Holmes has the nuclear feature of being a detective even if he does not exist and even if he is not able to solve real murder cases. Namely, the very same nuclear feature of being a detective is connected with further features when it comes to real detectives (i.e., existing, being able to solve real murder cases, and so on), but it is not connected with the latter features when it comes to fictional detectives. Why? Actually, this looks like a restatement of the Problem, rather than a solution.

Relatedly, Parsons holds that, in fictional stories, even some principles of relevant entailment that undeniably hold in the real world need *not* hold. For example, a round square need not be non-round. True: in the real world, if something is a square, then it is not round. But this need not be the case in the fictional story in which there is a round square. For the principles of Euclidean geometry need not hold by necessity and they need not hold in the story – as well as in many other 'fictional' contexts (e.g., during hallucinations). Moreover, even if we may never be able to intuitively apprehend round squares, this does not run against their objecthood[61]. If principles of relevant entailment are denied in fictional stories, there is no *Problem of Implicit Features*. However, *contra* Parsons, it looks reasonable to claim that at least some principles of relevant entailment *need* to hold in fictional stories. For example, it looks reasonable to claim that, in Conan Doyle's stories, if Holmes is a human being, then he also has a nose – provided that such stories are realistic.

The *First* and the *Second Problem of Creation** are left untouched. Parsons solves the *Problem of Relevant Stories* by claiming that the nuclear features of a *fictum* are those ascribed to it by its native story[62]. However, lurking behind this solution,

[61] See Parsons (1980: 39-41).

[62] Routley (1980: 574) introduces the source book of a *fictum* as the collection of propositions taken from the relevant works of fiction that are the primary sources of the *fictum plus* those including further information (often implicit) about the world of the *fictum* and its immigrant objects. Thus, Routley concedes that there are principles of relevant entailment for implicit nuclear features of *ficta*.

we still find the troublesome possibilities of poor native stories and of crucial nuclear features that may be ascribed through non-native stories. Moreover, when one appeals to stories, one may also fall into the three difficulties explored above: that the nativeness of a story for a given *fictum* seemingly hinges on the identity of that *fictum*; that the identity of stories seemingly (also) hinges on the identity of *ficta*; that the boundaries of native stories are often unclear. In a similar vein, the *Problem of Explanation* is still open.

One may reply to the first two difficulties by claiming that Feature Meinongianism does not introduce any troublesome form of circularity. For stories are needed in order to single out the nuclear features that partake in the identity conditions of *ficta*. Yet, stories do not partake in the identity conditions of *ficta* themselves. This move is an interesting one. But it presupposes the possibility of disentangling (i) the type of dependence that *ficta* have upon relevant sets of nuclear features from (ii) the type of dependence that the relevant sets of nuclear features have upon native stories and from (iii) that of native stories upon *ficta* (for their nativeness and/or identity).

On the one hand, (i) if the identity of a *fictum* depended (with a given type of dependence) upon the relevant set of nuclear features, (ii) if the latter set depended (with the *same* type of dependence) upon the relevant native story, (iii) if the nativeness and the identity of the relevant story depended (with the *same* type of dependence) on the identity of the *fictum*, and (iv) if that type of dependence were transitive, then (v) the identity of that *fictum* would turn out to depend upon itself – which is implausible.

On the other hand, (vi) if the identity of a *fictum* depended (with a given type of dependence) upon the relevant set of nuclear features, (vii) if the latter set depended (with a given type of dependence) upon the relevant native story, (viii) if the nativeness and the identity of the relevant story depended (with a given type of dependence) on the identity of the *fictum*, (ix) if at least two of such dependence relations belonged to *distinct* types that do *not* 'entail' each other, then (x) the identity of that *fictum* would *not* turn out to depend upon itself (with the same

type of dependence). This is a revisionary proposal that we shall not explore here.

The *Problem of Non-Native Stories* is not solved. Following (INS-2), the same *fictum* cannot acquire further nuclear features through non-native stories. Following (IS-2), it is unclear if it can.

Ficta can be incomplete, inconsistent and indeterminate at least when it comes to their nuclear features. And this still introduces such troublesome phenomena (i.e., incompleteness, inconsistency, indeterminacy) in the realm of objects (*Problem of Exoticity*).

The truth-values of statements

(1) Holmes is Holmes,
(2) Holmes is not Watson,
(3) Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde,
(10) the legendary King Arthur is the same as the King Arthur of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*,

are fixed by looking at the nuclear features of such *ficta*, following (IS-2) or (INS-2). As we have already seen, it is crucial to define the relevant (native) stories. This is mostly relevant with (10). We shall not rehearse the relevant discussion.

With

(9) the real Napoleon is the same as the Napoleon of *War and Peace*,

Parsons concedes that the real Napoleon is the one that figures in *War and Peace*. Namely, the real Napoleon is an immigrant object in *War and Peace* and he is identical with the relevant character[63]. In other terms, the Napoleon character in *War and Peace* is not an object native in a story, so that he is not a *fictum*: he is an immigrant, real object[64].

[63] See Parsons (1980: 57-59).

[64] In addition to native *ficta* and real immigrant objects, Parsons (1980: 57-59) also introduces surrogate *ficta*, such as the Napoleon of *War and Peace*. These do not appear as characters in stories. At best, they are introduced and examined in literary criticism.

The truth-values of

(4) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*,
(5) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie *Sherlock Holmes*,

hinge on the nuclear features of such objects and on the relevant stories to be taken into account when circumscribing the sets of such features[65]. At any rate, on (IS-2), the relevant *ficta* may still be identical without sharing the same nuclear features. But (IS-2), by itself, leaves the truth-values of (4) and (5) unspecified[66].

On (INS-2), it is false that Rapper Holmes, the Holmes of *Without a Clue* and the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II* are identical with the Holmes of Conan Doyle's stories (following 6, 6a and 6b). On the contrary, (IS-2) does not rule out the identity of such *ficta*.

On both (INS-2) and (IS-2), it is true that the Don Quixote of Unaware Pierre Menard (in 7) and that of Aware Pierre Menard (in 8) are identical with Cervantes' Don Quixote – insofar as the nuclear features are exactly the same. Indeed, the intentions of authors, the creation processes behind stories, and so on, are all *extranuclear* features of *ficta*. And there is no good reason for surmising that such features have 'watered-down' nuclear counterparts in those very objects. Namely, there is no good reason for surmising that Menard's Don Quixote has the 'watered-down' nuclear feature of being created* by Menard with a given intention. This feature is *not* included in the story. Thus, it cannot contribute to the identity of Menard's Don

[65] If such *ficta* were native to distinct stories, they would have distinct nuclear features defined by those stories. The only possibility of preserving their identity would consist in claiming that the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* already implicitly has all the nuclear features that he will turn out to have in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. But this is implausible.

[66] Parsons (2011) would add that it is indeterminate whether Holmes as a general *fictum* is identical with the Holmes of Conan Doyle's stories and the Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie, even if such *ficta* share all and only the same features they both determinately and indeterminately have.

Quixote and it cannot make it distinct from Cervantes' Don Quixote.

Following (INS-2), the mythical Zeus is the same as the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief* only if they have exactly the same nuclear features (in 11) – though this may be implausible, if they are native to distinct stories. And the same happens for the Zeus of believers and the Zeus of non-believers (in 11*), since the attitudes of people towards such objects at best count as extranuclear features that have no 'watered-down' nuclear counterparts.

With (19) and (20), we may surmise that there are distinct *ficta* characterized by distinct sets of nuclear features: the Odysseus of the *Odyssey*, Dante's Odysseus/Ulysses and Joyce's Odysseus/Ulysses; the Faust general character and Goethe's Faust. The truth of (19) and (20) is accounted for by looking at the similarity relations between such *ficta*. Such relations are grounded in their nuclear features[67].

But recall that, in all of these cases, the set of nuclear features that matter are those that are defined by native stories. Thus, it is first necessary to single out the relevant native stories and to determine if a given story is native or non-native for a given *fictum*. In this respect, Feature Meinongianism falls prey to the three problems presented above, i.e., two vicious forms of circularity and the indeterminate boundaries of stories.

Fictional armies of orcs (in 12) and fictional pairs of twins (in 13) are the only *ficta* in place[68]. Their members are not *ficta*. And this may look implausible, as we have seen.

The indeterminate identity of Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room according to the story (in 15a) – and possibly the identity between Shade and Kinbote, which is not determined by the story – is an interesting issue. Identity seemingly is a 'technical,' extranuclear feature. Thus, these *ficta* have at best

[67] Alternatively, in the footsteps of Wolterstorff (1980: 148-149), even if he is a non-objectual realist, one may hold that the general character has fewer features and it is included in the more specific characters. Or, in the footsteps of Reicher (1995), one may hold that there is only one character that has all the features ascribed to it across all the stories. For a critical discussion, see Thomasson (1999: 58-63).

[68] See Parsons (1980: 191).

'watered-down' nuclear indeterminate identity – or they lack this nuclear feature, in the case of Shade and Kinbote. These *ficta* would turn out to be inconsistent if, in addition, they had 'watered-down' nuclear identity and 'watered-down' nuclear distinctness. At any rate, what about the *extranuclear* identity/distinctness of such objects? Indeed, it seems that they must either have extranuclear identity or extranuclear distinctness. Following (INS-2) and (INS-2), one may surmise that they are identical. For they are both characterized by (and share) 'watered-down' nuclear indeterminate identity. Yet, for example, when it comes to the nuclear features of being called "Kumiko" and that of being called "the woman in the hotel room," it is not clear if such nuclear features belong to the same *fictum* or not. Thus, in the end, it is not clear if they are the same *fictum* or not.

In a similar vein, Raoul and the Templar in (16a) are both indeterminately identical and indeterminately distinct. With respect to the 'watered-down' nuclear versions of identity and distinctness, they have both. Thus, they are inconsistent when it comes to their nuclear features. However, it is not clear if they also have extranuclear identity or distinctness. Again, they share the 'watered-down' nuclear versions of identity and distinctness. But it is not clear if the nuclear feature of being called "Raoul" and that of being called "the Templar" belong to the same *fictum* or not. Thus, it is not clear if they are the same *fictum* or not.

On (IS-2) and (INS-2) and at least from the standpoint of extranuclear identity/distinctness, it is not clear if two *ficta* can fuse together and be identical with only one *fictum* – or distinct from the latter. And it is not clear if one *fictum* can 'split into' two distinct *ficta*. Namely, the truth-values of (17) and (18) are unclear. Also in this case, it is crucial to define the relevant native story that contributes to fixing the nuclear features of *ficta*.

Finally, if we follow (INS-2), Holmes could not have got ascribed the nuclear feature of having a friend named "Wilson" – instead of having one named "Watson" (*contra* 21). It is true that he could not have failed to get ascribed the nuclear feature of being a detective (as in 22). But this happens with *all* the nuclear features of Holmes. Holmes acquires and can acquire further nuclear features only according to the same native story.

Thus, when it comes to non-native stories, (23) and (24) turn out to be false – or it is not clear if the newly acquired nuclear features can be had by Holmes without partaking in his identity conditions. Finally, (INS-2) does not rule out that Holmes acquires the nuclear feature of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century – at least insofar as this happens in the same native story (*contra* 25).

(IS-2), by itself, cannot fix the truth-values of such statements.

1.3. *Modal Meinongianism*

Then comes the last version of Meinongianism. Modal Meinongianism appeals to possible (and impossible) worlds in order to account for *ficta* and for the other objects of intentionality. Following Graham Priest[69], Holmes is an object in the actual world, i.e., the world inhabited by ourselves. But he is only a *fictum* in the actual world. Thus, in the actual world, he does not exist, he does not have the features of being a detective, of having a friend named "Watson," of living in London, and so on. At best, in the actual world, Holmes only has the features of being *represented* by some agent (i.e., Conan Doyle, some reader of his stories, and so on) as existing, as having the features of being a detective, of having a friend named "Watson," of living in London, and so on. Nevertheless, this implies that, in some other possible world(s), Holmes exists, he is a detective, he has a friend named "Watson," he lives in London, and so on. More generally, whenever an agent represents an object as having a given feature and that object does not have that feature in the actual world, there is still at least one other possible world in which that object does have that feature.

In sum, in the actual world, every *fictum* has two kinds of features: the features it has non-representationally (e.g., for Holmes, being a *fictum*) and those it has representationally (e.g., for Holmes, being represented as a detective). Call the latter

[69] See Priest (2005; 2016).

features "representational." Among representational features, there are explicit representational features (e.g., for Holmes, being represented as a detective) and implicit representational features. Implicit representational features (e.g., for Holmes, having a nose) derive from explicit ones through principles of relevant entailment (e.g., for Holmes, being human). In turn, all representational features are such that there is at least one possible world (distinct from the actual world) in which an object non-representationally has the represented features. For example, there is at least one possible world in which Holmes is a detective and has a nose.

It is reasonable to hold that each story corresponds to distinct possible worlds. For each story is incomplete with respect to some features had by the objects partaking in it. For example, Sherlock Holmes' stories are incomplete with respect to the possession or lack (by Holmes) of the feature of having a childhood friend named "Carlson." Nothing rules out that Holmes has this friend according to the stories. But nothing implies it. Thus, in at least one possible world corresponding to Sherlock Holmes' stories, Holmes does have a childhood friend named "Carlson." And, in at least one other possible world corresponding to Sherlock Holmes' stories, Holmes does not have a childhood friend named "Carlson."

To single out the features had by Holmes, we suggest to introduce world-indexed-features, such as: being a *fictum* in the actual world; being (explicitly) represented by someone as a detective in the actual world; being (implicitly) represented by someone as having a nose in the actual world; being a detective in w_1 (which is a world distinct from the actual world and corresponding to Sherlock Holmes' stories); having a nose in w_1; having a childhood friend named "Carlson" in w_2 (which is a world distinct from the actual world and corresponding to Sherlock Holmes' stories); not having a childhood friend named "Carlson" in w_3 (which is a world distinct from the actual world, from w_2, and corresponding to Sherlock Holmes' stories); and so on.

It is important to stress that Holmes is still in the actual world. But he is also in other worlds. For any condition on features,

there is an object that satisfies that condition in the actual world *or* in some other world. Each condition is represented by some agent in the actual world. But nothing rules out that further agents in further worlds may represent further conditions, and thus 'single out' further objects that are not 'singled out' in the actual world. In a similar vein, nothing rules out that an object has in other worlds further features that it is not represented as having in the actual world.

At any rate, Priest accepts the following criterion of identity:

> (INS-3) necessarily, for any objects *x* and *y* (including *ficta*), *x* is identical with *y* iff *x* and *y* have the same atomic features (i.e., the same features corresponding to atomic formulas) – except for identity-involving features – in all worlds closed under entailment[70].

Francesco Berto holds that

> (INS-4) necessarily, for any objects *x* and *y* (including *ficta*), *x* is identical with *y* iff *x* and *y* have the same features in all worlds – except for extensionally impossible worlds (i.e., worlds in which extensional operators such as disjunction and conjunction behave non-standardly)[71].

To better grasp the content of (INS-3) and (INS-4), we suggest that we can collect in a certain set *all* the world-indexed features Holmes has – except for identity and distinctness-involving features, for the features he has in the worlds not closed under entailment, and for those he has in extensionally impossible worlds. Call this set "Holmes' transworld identity conditions." The idea behind (INS-3) and (INS-4) is that, necessarily, something is identical with Holmes if and only if it has all the features in Holmes' transworld identity conditions.

[70] See Priest (2016: 88).
[71] See Berto (2013a: 179-181). On *ficta*, see also Berto (2008; 2011).

Two further points need to be stressed. First, Priest and Berto admit that, in addition to possible worlds, there are also impossible worlds – both intensionally[72] and extensionally impossible ones. This accounts for impossible objects, indeterminate objects, and so on. Secondly, Berto faces the *Selection Problem*: how can one pick out at least and at most one object in the actual world when representing that object (as having certain features)? For example, how can Conan Doyle pick out at least and at most one object in the actual world when representing Sherlock Holmes – instead of a multitude of objects?

With possible objects that are not *ficta*, Berto appeals to definite descriptions that are able to single out specific objects in specific worlds that satisfy them[73]. With *ficta*, he invokes *de re* and non-causal mental representations: when Conan Doyle represents Holmes, he has a mental representation that is about that object and that does *not* involve conditions that can be satisfied by distinct objects. Such a representation is non-causal, because it involves no causal contact with Holmes. Indeed, in the actual world, Holmes does not exist. Thus, he cannot entertain causal relations. Alternatively, Berto suggests that, by first representing Holmes, Conan Doyle introduces Holmes in the actual world, i.e., he makes Holmes available for quantification and reference in the actual world. Before Conan Doyle's introduction, at least in the actual world, there was no object – and no plurality of objects – corresponding to Holmes. Therefore, Conan Doyle did not have to pick out the 'right' object[74].

[72] In intensionally impossible worlds, only the conditionals and the intensional operators behave non-standardly. See Berto (2013a: 160-163).

[73] Priest (2016: 225-226) claims that these definite descriptions, when it comes to non-existent objects, should only be satisfied by some non-existent object or another.

[74] See Berto (2013a: 207-229). Another solution explored by Berto consists in accepting variable domain semantics. One may object that Holmes, even when he was *not* represented, was still around in the actual world and therefore available for reference and quantification, because his status as an object in the actual world does *not* depend on his being represented. Following Berto's (2013a: 224) anti-realist stance, however, Holmes' being an object rigidly depends on Conan Doyle's first representing him, i.e., his being an object supervenes on the latter. Thus, Holmes was not an object when he was not represented. See also the discussion below.

These solutions to the *First Problem of Creation** are interesting but troublesome. First, they still entail that Conan Doyle picks out a certain object that does not exist in the actual world and that exists in other possible worlds. Thus, presumably, in the actual world, Conan Doyle (i.e., an existing object) entertains a certain relation with a non-existent entity. How can this be the case?

Secondly, and more worryingly, the *Selection Problem* is not actually solved. Consider Conan Doyle's *de re* mental representations of Holmes. And assume that, in other possible worlds, there are two distinct candidate objects that have all and only the features ascribed to Holmes in Conan Doyle's stories. Yet, they are distinct, since one of them has a childhood friend named "Carlson" in w_3 and the other does not have that feature in w_3. Conan Doyle may have distinct *de re* representations about each of such objects. Fine. But, in order to introduce only one Holmes in the actual world, he needs to have only one *de re* mental representation about only one object. What guarantees that Conan Doyle has a *de re* mental representation about one of such objects and not about the other? Or what guarantees that Conan Doyle's *de re* mental representation is about one of such objects and not about the other? Moreover, consider Conan Doyle's introduction of Holmes in the actual world. What makes it the case that Conan Doyle introduces the former candidate Holmes and not the latter?

True: these objects (i.e., our candidate Holmeses) are distinct, since they satisfy distinct transworld identity conditions. In the end, one of them has a certain world-indexed feature (i.e., having a childhood friend named "Carlson" in w_3). The other

Nevertheless, if we wish to preserve the objecthood of Holmes independently of his author, we may surmise that, before being represented, Holmes was an object and that he had features in other worlds, but he had no feature in the actual world. Having no feature in the actual world, he was not available for reference and quantification in the actual world. Was he still an object 'in the actual world'? In a way, he was, if being an object is not relative to worlds. But, in another way, he was not, if being an object in a world entails having at least some feature in it.

does not have it. However, Conan Doyle's representations cannot contain all the features included in the transworld identity conditions of objects. Such features are almost infinite, provided that the number of possible worlds is presumably infinite or almost infinite. Thus, in principle, Conan Doyle's *de re* representations are not able to select one Holmes rather than the other Holmes. In a nutshell, at least and at most one Holmes must be selected by these *de re* representations. But these *de re* representations, being unable to contain all the features in the transworld identity conditions of objects, cannot select at least and at most one Holmes.

Another reply considered by Berto (2013a: 224) consists in claiming that the 'right' Holmes includes in his own identity conditions the feature of being introduced in the actual world by Conan Doyle. And this feature individuates Holmes, so that Holmes rigidly depends on it and he supervenes upon Conan Doyle's first mental representation. However, first, this results in a theory of objects that is distant from orthodox Meinongianism. For it is now claimed that the 'right' Holmes would not have been around (in the actual world) without Conan Doyle's introducing him in the actual world. Therefore, the 'right' Holmes is not an object at all without this creative* act on behalf of Conan Doyle. Without this creative* act, the 'right' Holmes does not have all the 'constituents' of his identity conditions, so that he is not an object at all.

Secondly and more worryingly, the 'right' introduction act on behalf of Conan Doyle should still be individuated. Indeed, consider another possible world in which Conan Doyle performs an introduction act very similar to the one performed by Conan Doyle in the actual world. Assume that this act results in introducing an object qualitatively indiscernible from Holmes. Is the latter object identical with the Holmes of the actual world or not? Everything hinges on the identity conditions of the relevant introduction act: if the act performed in that world is identical with the introduction act performed by Conan Doyle in the actual world, the answer presumably is a positive one; otherwise, it is not. However, at least in this context, in order to provide identity conditions for introduction acts, it is necessary

that such conditions do not *rest* upon the objects/contents of such acts. Otherwise, a vicious form of circularity would follow[75].

The *Second Problem of Creation** is left open. In the end, *de re* mental representations, descriptions, introduction acts may take time. Thus, at first, they may be 'poor.' And they may leave indeterminate what specific objects they turn out to create*.

However, Modal Meinongianism deals with the other problems better than Predication and Feature Meinongianism. For example, with respect to the *Problem of Existence*, Modal Meinongians admit that Holmes does not exist in the actual world. He is only represented by someone as existing. Yet, he exists in other possible worlds.

With respect to the *Problem of 'Real' Features*, Modal Meinongians hold that Holmes is not a detective in the actual world. Indeed, the feature of being a detective requires existence. And Holmes does not exist in the actual world. However, Holmes is a detective in other possible worlds in which he exists[76].

Turning to the *Problem of Exoticity*, there are impossible and indeterminate objects, but only in other worlds. Such worlds are distinct from the actual one and (presumably) from any possible world (at least insofar as indeterminacy is impossible). In the actual world, impossible and indeterminate objects are only represented by someone as being impossible and indeterminate. But they are not impossible and indeterminate in the actual world. Thus, for one thing, impossibility and indeterminacy do not affect the actual world. But they do affect the realm of objects, since they affect other worlds.

[75] A similar worry is raised by Bueno and Zalta (2017): on Modal Meinongianism, the proper name "Sherlock Holmes" does not denote any unique object. In the footsteps of Priest (2016), Priest *et al.* (2020) reply that Conan Doyle, by 'creating' Sherlock Holmes, intentionally pointed to a certain object. And he successfully referred to that unique object by arbitrarily referring to at least and at most one object among those that satisfy the conditions imposed upon the identity of Sherlock Holmes as a *fictum*. However, it seems that Conan Doyle could have arbitrarily referred to another object within the latter set. In this case, following Priest *et al.* (2020), Doyle would have 'created' *another* object distinct from the actual Sherlock Holmes. This is highly unpalatable. For, in both cases (i.e., the actual and the merely possible one), Conan Doyle seems to refer to one and the same Sherlock Holmes.

[76] See Priest (2016: 59-61). Priest actually talks of existence-entailing predicates.

When it comes to incompleteness, Berto claims that objects such as Holmes are not incomplete. True: their stories leave them incomplete with regard to the possession or lack of certain features, e.g., having a childhood friend named "Carlson." But there are some possible worlds in which these objects have the relevant features and other possible worlds in which they lack them[77]. On the contrary, in the actual world, it is either the case that Holmes has a given feature or that he lacks that feature. In our example, in the actual world, Holmes lacks the feature of having a childhood friend named "Carlson." And it is either the case that Holmes is represented as having a given feature or that he is not represented as having that feature. In the actual world, Holmes is not represented (by Conan Doyle) as having a childhood friend named "Carlson." Thus, Holmes is complete even in the actual world. Nevertheless, we should add that it is *not* the case that, in the actual world and for any possible feature, it is either the case that Holmes is represented as having that feature or that he is represented as not having that feature. Indeed, in the actual world, it is neither the case that Holmes is represented as having a friend named "Carlson," nor that he is represented as not having a friend named "Carlson." But this 'representational incompleteness' is not worrisome.

The *Problem of Relevant Stories* is solved by claiming that *all* the stories about Holmes (and not just the native ones) somehow contribute to the features Holmes has. Namely, all the stories about Holmes somehow contribute to Holmes' transworld identity conditions. Thus, even the *Problem of Non-Native Stories* is solved. Since one need *not* distinguish between native and non-native stories, one does not fall into the trouble of setting the boundaries of native stories. And one does not fall into the first vicious form of circularity when it comes to defining the nativity of a story for a *fictum* and then including this notion within the identity conditions of that very *fictum*. However, if stories are collections of propositions that indirectly depend upon *ficta*, one may fall into the other vicious form of circularity we examined above. This latter problem may be dealt

[77] See Berto (2013a: 177-179).

with as suggested above, i.e., by distinguishing between different types of dependence that do not entail each other.

The *Problem of Implicit Features* is solved by allowing that certain principles of relevant entailment may hold in the worlds corresponding to the stories. And that (presumably) distinct principles of relevant entailment may hold in distinct worlds (be such worlds in correspondence with the stories or not). Therefore, the same *fictum* may have distinct features in distinct possible worlds in accord with distinct principles of relevant entailment. Thus, one need not select the principles of relevant entailment that hold for a *fictum simpliciter* and those that do not. At best, one needs to select the principles of relevant entailment that hold in the worlds corresponding to the stories and those that do not.

Finally, Holmes is not fragile (*Problem of Fragility*). For example, in another possible world, he has other features. Or the very same features may have been ascribed to Holmes by someone else or at other times. These possible features may still be included in Holmes' transworld identity conditions. Yet, the *Problem of Explanation* is still open, as we shall see. Indeed, in order to account for Holmes' transworld identity conditions, we may need to appeal to Holmes itself. Thus, Holmes' transworld identity conditions do not explain the identity of Holmes.

Some counterexamples have been proposed against Modal Meinongianism. For example, in the actual world, people admire Gandalf (i.e., a certain *fictum*) because he is good, not because he is *represented* as being good. Modal Meinongianism also results in attributing very few non-representational features to *ficta* in the actual world. And it does not adequately clarify the non-existence of *ficta* in the actual world. Indeed, *ficta* seem to be abstract objects and abstract objects do exist. Yet, if one appeals to their existence only in other possible worlds, one only provides an *extrinsic* characterization of their non-existence. Additionally, one cannot know for sure that Holmes does not actually exist. For Holmes, in the possible worlds in which he exists, may have the modal feature of possibly being an existing boxer. And this feature may be realized by an object in the actual world. This object may then turn out to be identical with

Holmes. Finally, as we have seen, the *Problem of Selection* is far from being solved[78].

But we think that there are three deeper problems for Modal Meinongianism. First of all, it is ontologically underdetermined. Indeed, when it comes to non-actual possible worlds, different ontological views may be held. Maybe possible worlds are mental constructs of epistemically limited minds such as ourselves. Or of omniscient minds. Maybe they are abstract entities. Maybe they are worlds as concrete as the actual world[79].

Each solution affects the nature of possible objects – including *ficta* – and the features they may have or lack. For example, if non-actual possible worlds were mental constructs of epistemically limited minds such as ourselves, *ficta* would be mind-dependent objects and they would only have the features they are represented as having by epistemically limited minds. If non-actual possible worlds were mental constructs of omniscient minds, they would still be mind-dependent objects, but they would have further features represented by omniscient minds. Yet, it would be troublesome for us to 'get in touch with' these minds and their contents.

If non-actual possible worlds were abstract entities, *ficta* would be contingently abstract objects (in the actual world). But they would turn out to be concrete in other possible worlds, by acquiring features such as that of being a detective, which is concreteness-entailing. If non-actual possible worlds were as much concrete as the actual world, *ficta* would turn out to be existent and concrete objects. And they would be distinct from the non-existent and non-concrete objects we represent in the actual world. At best, the latter could only be counterparts of the former. And this would be troublesome. Indeed, imagine that, in the actual world, there are two objects: a non-existent and fictional Holmes that is only represented as having the features

[78] For these and other objections, see Kroon (2008; 2012; 2019). For Priest's replies, see Priest (2008; 2016: 216-231). Sauchelli (2012) argues that Modal Meinongianism is threatened by representational relational features that also involve entities of the actual world (e.g., Holmes' being represented as living in the actual London). For a reply, see Berto (2013b).

[79] On the ontology of possible worlds, see for example Menzel (2016).

of Holmes; an existing and concrete object that (*per accidens*) truly has those very features. Imagine that, in another possible world, there exists a concrete Holmes that truly has those very features. Presumably, the counterpart of the latter object in the actual world would be the existing and concrete object, and not the non-existent and fictional Holmes, against the idea that it is the non-existent and fictional Holmes that has a counterpart in the non-actual, possible world.

Secondly, consider Holmes' transworld identity conditions. Question: do they include all and only the world-indexed features that Holmes is implicitly and explicitly represented as having according to the relevant Holmes' stories? Call the set of all of such features "Holmes' *narrow* transworld identity conditions." The trouble with the latter set is that it does not guarantee the individuation of Holmes – especially if the stories are poor. Indeed, in a given possible world, there may be two distinct objects that satisfy Holmes' narrow transworld identity conditions.

Therefore, Modal Meinongians should appeal to Holmes' *broad* transworld identity conditions. Such conditions include all the world-indexed features had by Holmes – even those that are neither explicitly, nor implicitly ascribed to him according to Holmes' relevant stories. Yet, we do not know the entire content of Holmes' broad transworld identity conditions. Therefore, we cannot guarantee that, for any given object, that object is identical with (or distinct from) Holmes. And we cannot rule out that, in the actual world, when it comes to representing Holmes, Conan Doyle actually turns out to represent multiple objects. Or that he turns out to represent only one object, even if it is indeterminate which object he represents.

Thirdly and finally, in order to specify Holmes' transworld identity conditions (be they narrow or broad), one would have to look at Holmes' relevant stories. Otherwise, one would run into the risk of specifying the transworld identity conditions of another *fictum*. In sum, specifying Holmes' transworld identity conditions hinges on singling out Holmes' relevant stories. Yet, singling out Holmes' relevant stories presumably hinges on specifying that such stories are *about* Holmes. And specifying that such stories are about Holmes hinges on specifying that

they are about a certain *fictum* with certain identity conditions – and no other *fictum*. And specifying that such stories are about a certain *fictum* with certain identity conditions hinges on… Holmes' transworld identity conditions. There is a vicious form of circularity here. Maybe we can escape by invoking the solution presented above, i.e., by distinguishing between different types of dependence that do not entail each other.

Let us now turn to the truth-values of (1)-(25). The truth values of statements:

(1) Holmes is Holmes,
(2) Holmes is not Watson,
(3) Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde,
(10) the legendary character King Arthur is the same as King Arthur in Bernard Cornwell's novels,

are fixed by looking at the transworld identity conditions of such *ficta*. Indeed, even in order to determine if two *ficta* are the same in one of the worlds relative to a story, we would need to determine if they share the same transworld identity conditions. Otherwise, one would be able to stipulate the identity between Holmes and Watson – the very characters of Conan Doyle's stories – just by assuming that there is a story – and therefore a possible world – in which they are identical.

The same happens with

(4) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*,
(5) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie Sherlock Holmes.

With respect to (9), the real Napoleon may appear in the worlds corresponding to *War and Peace*. And he may have other features in those worlds, while being merely *represented* as having those features in the actual world.

Modal Meinongianism is consistent with the truth of

(6) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *Without a Clue*,

(6a) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as Rapper Holmes,
(6b) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II*.

Indeed, the Holmes of *Without a Clue*, Rapper Holmes and the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II* may be identical with Conan Doyle's Holmes. For Conan Doyle's Holmes may have other features (possibly, radically divergent ones) in the worlds of the relevant stories not authored by Conan Doyle. However, with (6a), this solution looks counterintuitive: what if there were, in the worlds of the stories about Rapper Holmes and in addition to Rapper Holmes, another object with most of the features that are possessed by Holmes according to Conan Doyle's stories? Why would Conan Doyle's Holmes be identical with Rapper Holmes, and not with the latter object? In other terms, does the identifying intentions of the author of Rapper Holmes truly matter more than the features had by the relevant objects? Why? Similar issues arise for (6). Moreover, it may also look reasonable to claim that Conan Doyle's Holmes and the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II* are distinct. For the latter Holmes, in the actual world, is inadvertently created* by someone, whereas Conan Doyle's Holmes is not. In sum, the position of Modal Meinongians may not be univocal on this point. Again, everything hinges on the transworld identity conditions of such *ficta* and on the features to be included in them.

Something similar happens with (7) and (8). Cervantes' Don Quixote and Unaware Pierre Menard's Don Quixote may either be identical (i.e., one and the same Quixote has the same features in the worlds of such distinct stories, authored by distinct authors), or distinct (because they are created* by distinct authors). In a similar vein, Cervantes' Don Quixote and Aware Pierre Menard's Don Quixote may either be identical (i.e., one and the same Quixote has the same or nearly the same features in the worlds of distinct stories, authored by distinct authors), or distinct (because they are created* by distinct authors and because of the intentions of Aware Pierre Menard).

Opposite interpretations also arise for

(11) the mythical Zeus is the same as the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*,
(11*) the Zeus of believers is the same as the Zeus of non-believers.

Again, these *ficta* may either be identical (even if Zeus has in the world of *The Lightning Thief* more features than the ones he has in the worlds of the myth – and possibly different ones) or they may be distinct *ficta* (because of the incompatible creation* relations they entertain in actual world, e.g., being created* by Greeks and being created* by Rick Riordan, and/or because of the distinct intentions of their creators*, e.g., of believers and non-believers).

In all of these cases, everything hinges on the features to be included in the relevant transworld identity conditions.

Regarding (19) and (20), there may be the same Ulysses/Faust *fictum*, with: a given number of features in certain worlds (e.g., those corresponding to Goethe's *Faust*); a higher number of features in other worlds (e.g., those corresponding to some story about Faust that puts together all the features of all Faust characters); a low number of features in still other worlds (e.g., those corresponding to some 'minimal' story about Faust that puts together all and only the common features of all Faust characters). Or the same Ulysses/Faust *fictum* may have slightly different features in distinct worlds (e.g., those corresponding to the myth, those corresponding to Dante's story and those corresponding to Joyce's story). Alternatively, there may be distinct *ficta*. In sum, distinct solutions may be based on distinct transworld identity conditions.

The indiscernible orcs of Sauron's army and the fictional twins in

(12) each orc of Sauron's army in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is distinct from the others,
(13) each fictional twin in a pair of indiscernible fictional twins is distinct from the other,

are made distinct by further features that such objects may turn out to have or lack in worlds *not* corresponding to the worlds of their stories. For example, in a world not corresponding to *The Lord of the Rings*, a given orc may have a feature not possessed by another orc. This would make the former orc distinct from the latter. In these cases, it is crucial to appeal to broad transworld identity conditions. This implies that we cannot rule out that an object identified through certain narrow transworld identity conditions may actually turn out to 'split into' distinct objects (even in the actual world!) when it comes to its broad transworld identity conditions[80].

In a similar vein, turning to

> (14a) it is indeterminate that, according to *Pale Fire*, Shade is the same as Kinbote,
> (15a) according to Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, it is indeterminate that Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room,

these objects may be distinguished through further features possessed/lacked in other possible worlds *not* corresponding to *Pale Fire* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Moreover, Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room may be indeterminately identical with each other in some impossible world – at least if indeterminate identity is inconsistent or entails inconsistencies.

Recall now

> (16a) according to *Un drame bien parisien*, the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul.

Raoul and the Templar may be distinguished through further features possessed/lacked in other possible worlds *not* corresponding to *Un drame bien parisien*. And they may be both identical and distinct in some impossible world. Can they be made identical in any possible world? It seems that they cannot. Otherwise, by transworld identity, they would actually turn out to be identical in *every* possible world.

[80] See Berto (2013a: 177-179).

If transworld identity/distinctness is in place, there are three distinct *ficta* with (17), i.e., Berget, Vington, and Vinteuil. And there are three distinct *ficta* with (18) as well, i.e., the first Queen of Hearts, the second Queen of Hearts, and the Ugly Duchess. Again, this is based on the features possessed/lacked in other possible worlds *not* corresponding to those of the relevant stories or on what happens/does not happen in the possible worlds of the relevant versions of the stories (e.g., that Berget and Vington do not exist in the world of the final version of the *Recherche*, whereas Vinteuil does).

For example, the distinctness between Berget and Vington in the possible worlds corresponding to the 1912 version of the *Recherche* entails that only one of them can be identical with Vinteuil in the possible worlds corresponding to the final version of the *Recherche*. Which one? It is indeterminate. But we cannot introduce indeterminate identity in possible worlds. Thus, Vinteuil is distinct from Berget and Vinton. *Mutatis mutandis*, a similar reasoning may apply to the first Queen of Hearts, the second Queen of Hearts, and the Ugly Duchess in

> (18) the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Queen of Hearts and the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*.

But a problem arises for the Queen of Hearts. Indeed, one may object that it is determinate – or at least highly probable – that the first Queen of Hearts is identical with the second Queen of Hearts. They have the same name. They share some relevant features – though the first Queen of Hearts is 'richer' in the features she has. This alternative solution looks as plausible as the one that denies the identity between the first and the second Queen of Hearts. In sum, at least with the Queen of Hearts, it is difficult to come up with an uncontroversial solution.

Finally, the truth of statements (21)-(25) may be accounted for by appealing to the transworld identity conditions of *ficta* – which need to be specified.

And this points to another, more general problem for Modal Meinongianism. As we have seen, we need to specify the *broad* transworld identity conditions of *ficta*. Each *fictum* has multiple

candidate broad transworld identity conditions that are incompatible with one another (e.g., for Holmes, some include having a childhood friend named "Carlson" in w_3, whereas others do not include that world-indexed feature). In the end, how can one choose between these candidates?[81]

2. *Creationist Theories*

Creationists hold that *ficta* are *bona fide* and existing objects that get created by their authors.

For example, John Searle claims that an author creates a *fictum* when she pretends to refer to something using a proper name or a definite description. Afterwards, the *fictum* exists and one could *really* refer to it[82]. Stephen Schiffer takes *ficta* as pleonastic entities that are created through pretended uses of fictional names. Upon such uses, further hypostatizing uses supervene. Hypostatizing uses result in really referring to *ficta qua* pleonastic and abstract entities[83]. Peter van Inwagen holds that *ficta* exist, since they are required in order to account for the truth of statements of literary criticism. *Ficta* truly *have* certain features, e.g., Holmes truly has the feature of being a *fictum*. And they *hold* further features according to stories, even if they do not truly have such features. For example, Holmes only holds the feature of being a detective according to Conan Doyle's stories but he is not a detective[84]. We may also include Saul A. Kripke in the creationist camp. Indeed, according to Kripke (2013), *ficta* are existing objects[85].

[81] In addition to Meinongian theories, there are also possibilist theories of *ficta*, according to which *ficta* are merely possible objects (see for example Lewis 1978, Howell 1979, Deutsch 2000, and Lycan 2015). Non-existents in general are treated as merely possible objects by Russell (1903), even if he does not address *ficta*. However, these views are affected by at least some of the problems that affect Meinongian theories. In the neighborhood of Meinongianism, it is also worth mentioning Fine (1982)'s internalism.

[82] See Searle (1979).

[83] See Schiffer (1996; 2003).

[84] See van Inwagen (1977), (2000) and (2003).

[85] Tatjana von Solodkoff (2019) holds that *ficta* exist, but they are not ontologically fundamental.

In this Section, we shall mostly focus on two creationist theories, i.e., those developed by Amie Thomasson and by Alberto Voltolini. Such theories are equipped with the most developed criteria of identity for *ficta*.

According to Thomasson[86], *ficta* are abstract artifacts that contingently exist in the actual world. They are abstract, since they lack spatial location. They are artifacts, since they are created by their authors. They are included in the actual world. But their existence is contingent upon the creative acts of their authors. Were the latter not in place, *ficta* would not exist.

More precisely, Thomasson holds that *ficta* have rigid historical dependence upon the creative acts of their specific authors, i.e., in order for them to start existing, they must be brought about by specific creative acts of specific authors. Holmes, in order to start existing, must be brought about by one specific creative act performed by Conan Doyle. Different creative acts and authors would have brought about other *ficta*. However, the creative acts may spread over time. And their locations, their times and their authors may have partially indeterminate boundaries (at least epistemically). According to us, this may introduce partial indeterminacy (at least of the epistemic sort) in the identity of *ficta*.

Ficta also have constant and generic dependence upon the existence of some literary work or another about them and upon the existence of capable readers/interpreters of such a work. Namely, in order for *ficta* to continue to exist, there must exist some literary work or another and some capable reader/interpreter of that work.

To single out the identity conditions for *ficta*, Thomasson first introduces the identity conditions of book-types, of compositions, and of literary works. Necessarily, two books are of the same type if and only if they contain the same types of symbols in the same order. Necessarily, x and y are instances of the same composition if and only if x and y are books of the same type and either $x = y$ or x is a copy of y or y is a copy of x or there's some z such that x and y are both copies of z. Finally,

[86] See Thomasson (1999; 2003a; 2003b).

x and *y* are instances of the same literary work if and only if they are instances of the same composition and require the same background and the same capacities on behalf of their readers.

Finally, Thomasson provides only sufficient conditions for the identity of *ficta* within the same literary work and only necessary conditions for the identity of *ficta* across distinct literary works:

> (IS-5) necessarily, for any *ficta* *x* and *y*, *x* is identical with *y* if *x* and *y* appear in the same literary work (i.e., some feature is ascribed to both in that work) and *x* and *y* get ascribed the same features in the same literary work;
> (IN-5) necessarily, for any *ficta* *x* appearing in work *K* and *y* appearing in work *L* (where *K* is distinct from *L*), *x* is identical with *y* only if the author of *L* is competently acquainted with *x* in *K* and wants to import it as *y* in *L*[87].

Please note that, following Thomasson, the identity of *ficta* is (directly or indirectly) fixed by the following foundations: the identity of book-types; the identity of symbol-types and orders of symbols (which presumably includes what they are symbols of, i.e., their referents/referent-types); the identity of compositions (*qua* types with instances); the identity of copies of books; the identity of literary works; the identity of backgrounds and capacities (on behalf of readers); the identity of features and of sets of features; the identity of authors; the identity of acts of competent acquaintance (with objects in literary works). Moreover, as we have seen, it seems that the identity of *ficta* is also fixed by the identity of the specific creative acts of their specific authors and, therefore, by the identity of such authors as well. In sum, the identity of *ficta* (directly or indirectly) depends on the identity of all of such foundations. Call them the "identity-foundations" of *ficta*. More on this in what follows.

Voltolini holds that story-telling processes partake in the identity of *ficta*. Therefore, he starts with the identity of types of story-telling processes. According to him, necessarily, *x* and *y* are tokens of the same type of story-telling process if and only

[87] See Thomasson (1999: 55-70).

if they are causally-intentionally related and they are either *de dicto* or *de re* identical in involving the same instructions to imagine (i.e., they are the same instructions either to imagine that there is an individual with certain features or to imagine, with respect to some individual, that s/he has certain features). Story-telling processes may spread over time and space, they may be discontinuous and involve distinct authors. They may also have indeterminate boundaries (at least epistemically). Again, for us, this results in introducing indeterminacy (at least of the epistemic sort) in the identity of *ficta*.

Voltolini offers the following necessary and sufficient conditions for the identity of *ficta*:

> (INS-6) necessarily, for any *ficta* x and y, x is identical with y iff x and y are connected with the same sets of features – that correspond to the features that are directly or indirectly mobilized in the relevant portions of the relevant story-telling processes – and x and y are also connected with the same types of (portions of) story-telling processes that mobilize those features.

A *fictum* gets created when there is a reflexive stance on behalf of its author, i.e., when its author sees that a given make-believe process (involved in or identical with a story-telling process) mobilizes certain features – at least with respect to an imaginary individual, i.e., with respect to that *fictum*[88]. For example, Holmes got created when Conan Doyle saw that a given make-believe process (i.e., the one at the basis of his stories) mobilized certain features (e.g., being a detective, living at 221B Baker Street, etc.) – at least with respect to an imaginary individual, i.e., that very *fictum*.

Thus, following Voltolini, the identity of *ficta* is (directly or indirectly) fixed by the following foundations: the identity of types of story-telling processes; the identity of the relevant types of causal-intentional relations between story-telling processes; the identity of the instructions to imagine included in story-telling processes; the identity of features and sets of features; possibly, the identity of portions of story-telling processes.

[88] See Voltolini (2003; 2006: 65-100; 2012; 2015).

Therefore, the identity of *ficta* depends on the identity of all of such foundations. And these are the identity-foundations of *ficta*.

We shall now introduce some general problems for creationist theories.

The Problem of Non-Existence: in one way, Holmes exists (as a *fictum*). Yet, in another way, being a *fictum*, Holmes does not exist. How can one reconcile these data? By distinguishing between different meanings of "exists"? By distinguishing between existence and concreteness/reality or between non-spatio-temporal and spatio-temporal existence? By qualifying existence (e.g., existence-as-a-*fictum*, existence-as-a-human-being, and so on)? By just claiming that Holmes is not a human being? All these options are controversial[89].

The Problem of Double Predication: in one way, Holmes is *not* a detective. He does not really have the feature of being a detective. Yet, in another way, Holmes is a detective according to certain stories. How can one account for these data? Presumably, one needs to introduce two distinct kinds of predication. Or some distinction between predication *simpliciter* and predication relative to a story. Or some distinction between genuinely having a feature and having that feature *qua* included in the set of the defining features of an object. But these moves – if they are not adequately justified on independent grounds – may look *ad hoc*/brute/controversial. For example, consider Voltolini's theory. If *ficta* were objectual correlates of the sets of their defining features, one could legitimately ask whether, how and to what extent they would 'have' the features included in the relevant sets. On the one hand, Sherlock Holmes is not 'really' a detective, even if this feature is included in his defining set. On the other hand, he *must* somehow 'be' a detective or 'include' the feature of being a detective in his own essence. Otherwise, he would not be able to be the correlate of a set of features that also includes the feature of being a detective. How so? The best option we can think of is the following. Maybe Holmes does not essentially 'have' the feature of being

[89] See for example Sainsbury (2009: 108-114) and Everett (2013: 148-163).

a detective. He essentially 'has' the following feature: including the feature of being a detective in the set of features mobilized for his own creation (and of which Sherlock Holmes is an objectual correlate). This feature is distinct from that of being a detective. Fine. However, even if we conceded that this feature is *not* ontologically controversial, it would look like a special ontological posit of the theory at stake. Presumably, if one were *not* to believe in the theory of *ficta* at stake, one would *not* have any reason for holding that there can be features like this and/or that features like this can be essential to certain objects. Thus, this ontological posit runs the risk of being *ad hoc*[90].

The First Problem of Creation: *ficta* are created, since they are brought into existence by their authors. Yet, *how* do they get created? Namely, what are the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for the creation of *ficta*? Many options have been explored: the first uses of fictional names/descriptions; the creative intentions of authors under pretenses; completed and successful make-believe processes; institutional practices connected with make-believe; rules that are meant to solve problems of communication coordination when talking of the contents of stories; and so on[91]. Call these factors "the existential foundations" of *ficta*. The existential foundations of a *fictum* need not coincide with its identity-foundations. At any rate, all of these options may be troublesome (and most of them *are* troublesome), insofar as they may/do not actually provide necessary and/or sufficient conditions for the creation of *ficta*[92].

The Second Problem of Creation: if *ficta* are abstract objects, can they be created by concrete objects such as authors? How can a concrete object cause the existence of an abstract object? How can the former be causally connected with the latter? From this perspective, even if concrete mental acts performed by

[90] In this respect, Paolini Paoletti (2016) introduces a family of ascription relations holding at least between an object (be it existent or not), a feature, and a minded subject. Such relations solve the *Problem of Double Predication*. But they may also account for all intentional relations between objects and minded subjects. Thus, they do not look like *ad hoc* posits.

[91] On these options, see Kroon, Voltolini (2023).

[92] See for example Yagisawa (2001).

concrete authors were to constitutively create *ficta*, it would still be legitimate to ask how a concrete act performed by a concrete entity could cause the existence of an abstract object such as a *fictum*[93].

The Third Problem of Creation: *when* are *ficta* created? Namely, when does the process of creation successfully result in the existence of *ficta*? At its beginning? But, in this case, nothing guarantees that one may come up with the 'right' *ficta* with the 'right' features. Indeed, at the very beginning of Conan Doyle's artistic activities, Holmes had very few features that would have made him indistinguishable from other *ficta*. At the end of the process of creation? But when does a creation process end? Can the same process come to an end and then be resumed (possibly by another author)? If creation processes are discontinuous, do they really come to an end? What if an author dies before revealing that, in a story, two *ficta* are actually one and the same *fictum*? What if an author does not believe in the existence of *ficta* and thus does not intend to create *ficta*?[94] Finally, if the creation process successfully results in the creation of a *fictum* at some mid-point, where is the relevant mid-point?[95]

The Problem of Relevant Foundations: what are the relevant foundations of a *fictum*, be they their identity or existential foundations? Maybe the native ones, e.g., the first make-believe process that resulted in the creation of the *fictum*? Yet, for some *ficta*, native foundations may have been very poor in content.

[93] See for example Deutsch (2000) and Brock (2002).

[94] On these problems, see Brock (2010). For some replies, see Sackris (2013), Friedell (2016), and Zvolenszky (2016).

[95] Voltolini may reply that a *fictum* gets created when some relevant reflective stance on behalf of the author is performed. Yet, reflective stances may presumably take time. Thus, during the reflective stance, when is the *fictum* created? If it gets created when the reflective stance is completed, we run into the same problems that concern the completion/end of creation processes. Moreover, what if an author does *not* perform any reflective stance at all and inadvertently 'creates' a *fictum*? One related problem is the problem of distinguishing between changes in features that involve the same *fictum* and changes that result in the creation of another *fictum*. For example, if Sherlock Holmes turns into a crocodile in a given story, is he still the same *fictum*? Does another *fictum* come into existence? See Lebens, von Solodkoff (2023: 74-75).

And crucial features of such *ficta* may have been added through further, non-native foundations.

The Problem of Non-Native Foundations: what happens when further features seem to be added to the same *fictum* through further, non-native (identity or existential) foundations, e.g., through non-native make-believe processes resulting in other stories about Holmes? Does one still cope with the same *fictum* or with other *ficta*?

Finally, there is the *Problem of Overgeneration*: the existential foundations for *ficta* may actually result in generating further controversial types of entities[96]. And the *Problem of Explanation*: in order to grasp the identity conditions of *ficta*, one already needs to grasp the identity/distinctness between *ficta*.

To appreciate the *Problem of Explanation*, we shall now show that (IS-5), (IN-5), and (INS-6), *mutatis mutandis*, are also affected by the same troubles that affected Meinongian theories, i.e., two vicious forms of circularity and the problem of indeterminate boundaries.

Let us start with the latter. Singling out the boundaries between relevant/native foundations (be they identity- or existential foundations) and non-relevant/non-native foundations is very complicated. Worse still, one and the same foundation may be discontinuous in time and scattered in time, space, and in its participants. And foundations may be open, at least in principle: further portions of such foundations may arise at future times, in other places, and/or with further participants. Therefore, appealing to temporal and spatial locations and/or to participants is *not* enough in order to set the boundaries of foundations. In sum, the boundaries of foundations are indeterminate (at least epistemically). As we anticipated, when it comes to the boundaries of identity-foundations, this also results in the identity of *ficta* being indeterminate (at least epistemically).

Moreover, let us focus on identity-foundations. How can one distinguish between relevant/native identity-foundations

[96] See Kroon (2011) and Everett (2013: 136-139).

and irrelevant/non-native ones? At some point or another, one may presumably fall into the risk of appealing to the identity/distinctness of *ficta*. For example, a given set of features may turn out to be relevant only insofar as it is mobilized within a given type of make-believe process in order to create a certain *fictum*. Or a given set of instructions may turn out to be relevant for the constitution of a story-telling process type (instead of another story-telling process type or of no story-telling process type at all) – and therefore indirectly relevant for the reflective stance performed by the author – only insofar as that set concerns a certain *fictum*. Indeed, the instructions have a certain propositional content and are relevant because of their content. And the propositional content also involves the relevant *fictum*. This implies that one should already be able to distinguish that *fictum* from all the other possible *ficta*. There is vicious circularity here.

In reply, one may introduce the author's intention of mobilizing such features for the sake of creating at least and at most one *fictum* – without presupposing what specific *fictum* the author points to. Such an intention does *not* hinge on the identity conditions of that *fictum*. In a similar vein, one may suggest that the relevant instructions have a propositional content that involves at least and at most one *fictum* – without involving the specific *fictum* the author points to. For example, they may be the instructions to imagine that there is at least and at most one imaginary individual (i.e., one *fictum*) that is a detective, and so on – and *not* the instruction to imagine Sherlock Holmes (i.e., the very imaginary individual/*fictum* they are about) as being such-and-such.

However, consider the author's intention to create at least and at most one *fictum*. First, such an intention may be absent in some cases. Authors may create certain *ficta* without the intention of creating them by mobilizing certain features. Secondly, authors may also fail in realizing this intention and/or the relevant intention may change over time. Indeed, an author may wish to create a *fictum* through a given set of features. But – unbeknownst to her – she may actually point towards an already existing *fictum* with its own identity conditions

(as it may happen with Unaware Pierre Menard and his Don Quixote). Or an author may first wish to create a *fictum* and then change her mind. Thirdly, in a story, two or more distinct *ficta* may turn out to satisfy the relevant set of features (e.g., indiscernible *ficta*). Thus, in that story, it is only a matter of stipulation that there is only one *fictum* satisfying the set.

Fourthly and finally, the *Problem of Fragility* resurfaces. Indeed, *ficta* turn out to be necessarily connected with certain features – and not others. And this may look implausible. In reply, one may deny such a necessary connection and allow that the same set of features may be 'elastic' (i.e., it may increase or decrease in size). But, in this case, nothing (if not a mere stipulation) guarantees that only one specific *fictum* will turn out to satisfy such an 'elastic' set of features. Maybe two *ficta* satisfy the relevant set and then turn out to be distinct in virtue of other features not included in that set. Or in virtue of other features that *will* turn out to be included (or not included) in that set.

When it comes to the instructions that involve (in their propositional content) at least and at most one *fictum*, they may be immune to the first three problems: they are effective only if they are adopted by the author and the author cannot unintentionally adopt them; by stipulation, they concern an imaginary individual and they concern at least and at most one such an individual – but the stipulatory aspect may look troublesome. At any rate, these instructions still suffer from the *Problem of Fragility*. For every *fictum* is rigidly tied to a given set of instructions.

Another form of vicious circularity arises if we focus on the identity conditions of identity-foundations. Indeed, some identity-foundations may need to (directly or indirectly) appeal to *ficta* in order to define their own identity conditions. Take for example instructions to imagine. These are propositional in character. Therefore, their identity conditions may involve the objects they are about, i.e., *ficta*. Take make-believe/story-telling processes. These are endowed with specific contents that partake in their identity conditions. Such contents, in turn, may involve in their identity conditions the objects they are about, i.e., *ficta*.

Or, at best, they may involve the feature of being about only one *fictum* rather than about two or more than two *ficta*. Or such processes may be or involve certain intentional states. And these intentional states may turn out to include in their own identity conditions the very objects they are about, i.e., the *ficta*, or at least the fact that they are about at least and at most one *fictum* (and not about two or more than two *ficta*), so that they include in their own identity conditions at least the category of *ficta*. Or take fictional proper names. Fictional proper names are always 'of' something. Thus, they 'point towards' specific objects, i.e., *ficta*.

To avoid these forms of vicious circularity, there are two possible solutions. First, one may deny the dependence of identity-foundations upon *ficta*. For example, one may claim that the intentional states involved in the identity-foundations are *not* about specific *ficta* and they are *not* about at least and at most one *fictum* (rather than two or more than two). But this move is quite difficult. Take the instructions to imagine. These instructions are not merely to imagine certain features (e.g., being a detective, living in London, and so on). They are instructions to imagine that there is at least and at most one imaginary individual (who turns out to be a *fictum*) that is such-and-such. Thus, they also include and depend upon the very category of imaginary individuals – and that of *ficta*[97].

[97] One may reply that the instructions do *not* include and do *not* depend upon the category of *ficta*, but only on that of imaginary individuals, provided that not all imaginary individuals are *ficta*. But the problem is now merely postponed. Indeed, on the one hand, imaginary individuals indirectly depend on the instructions to imagine. Yet, on the other hand, instructions to imagine depend on the very category of imaginary individuals. An alternative reply is that this consequence is not worrisome. For it only entails that there is a category such as that of *ficta* and that instructions and other intentional states include and depend upon it. It does *not* entail that instructions and other intentional states depend upon *ficta*. Yet, the category of *ficta* itself presumably depends for its own existence upon the existence of *ficta*. Thus, by transitive dependence, the circularity threat persists. Otherwise, one would need to embrace some form of Platonism about categories, according to which categories exist independently of their instances. Thus, the category of *ficta* exists and it does not depend on its instances, i.e., on *ficta*. But this Platonic stance is in tension with creationism. Indeed, if one embraces this form of Platonism about categories, why should one not directly embrace Platonic possibilism or Meinongianism about *ficta*

The second solution is that one may introduce distinct types of dependence that do not entail each other, as we suggested above. For example, one may claim that *ficta* (indirectly) depend for their existence upon the relevant instructions to imagine and that the instructions to imagine depend for their identity upon the *ficta* (i.e., they include *ficta* or the category of *ficta* in their own identity-conditions). But *ficta* do *not* depend for their identity upon the instructions to imagine (i.e., *ficta* do *not* include the instructions to imagine in their identity-conditions). And the instructions to imagine do *not* depend upon the *ficta* for their existence. These types of dependence may also be invoked in order to set the boundaries of foundations without introducing indeterminate identity in the corresponding *ficta*. But we cannot dwell on this option here.

There are further problems that seemingly affect Thomasson's theory. For example, if *ficta* are generated through specific mental acts of specific authors, how can they actually survive when these acts come to an end? And how can they be 'shared' among distinct authors? Moreover, such acts seem to tie the identity of *ficta* to their own contents and times. Indeed, an act seemingly includes in its identity conditions its own content (with certain features ascribed to certain *ficta*) and the time at which it is performed. Thus, if the identity of *ficta* rigidly depends on the identity of specific acts and therefore also on the very contents of such acts, *ficta* could not have been endowed with different features from the ones they actually have. And they could not have been created at slightly different times from the times at which they were created. Otherwise, *ficta* would have turned out to rigidly depend on other acts and they would have been other *ficta*[98].

Contra (IS-5), two distinct *ficta* may also turn out to rigidly depend on the same mental acts and generically depend on the same works and readers – and yet be distinct. Moreover, even

themselves and thereby reject creationism? Why should one be a creationist about *ficta* and not a creationist about categories such as that of *ficta*?

[98] See Voltolini (2006: 43-64).

objects in dreams and hallucinations may satisfy the antecedent of (IS-5), without turning out to be *ficta*[99].

Thomasson's criteria also entail author-essentialism, i.e., that a *fictum* could not have had any other author distinct from the one it actually had. And author-essentialism is at least controversial. Finally, Thomasson's criteria do not provide necessary *and* sufficient conditions for the identity of *ficta*[100].

When it comes to Voltolini's (INS-6), it seems to entail author-essentialism (even if the time at which the story-telling process and/or the reflective stance occur may change – provided that they do not rigidly depend on the times during which they occur). And (INS-6) seems to be affected by the *Problem of Fragility*. For (INS-6) appeals to specific sets of features and to the contents of specific instructions[101].

Let us now dwell on the truth-values of (1)-(25).

Statements (1)-(3) are made true by Thomasson's criterion (IS-5) and Voltolini's criterion (INS-6). Regarding

> (10) the legendary King Arthur is the same as the King Arthur of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*,

Thomasson only offers necessary conditions for the identity between these *ficta* – through (IN-5). Yet, such conditions do not fix the truth-value of (10). Something similar happens with

> (4) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*,
> (5) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie *Sherlock Holmes*.

Interestingly enough, Voltolini deals with statements such as (10), (4), and (5) by distinguishing between the resumption of a story-telling/make-believe process and its revival[102]. Recall that story-telling processes may be discontinuous and scattered in

[99] See Voltolini (2006: 43-64).
[100] See for example Motoarca (2018).
[101] On these and other difficulties, see Everett (2013: 126-130).
[102] See Voltolini (2006: 101-117; 2012).

space and time – and maybe also with respect to their authors. A story-telling process gets *resumed* by an author insofar as the same process just continues at some subsequent time. Therefore, with resumption, new features get added to the set of features that are mobilized in order to ground the identity of a *fictum*. With resumption, the same *fictum* is in place within the same process. Indeed, when a process gets resumed, that process is not over. Thus, in a resumed process, the set of features mobilized for a *fictum* has not been circumscribed yet. On the contrary, one and the same story-telling/make-believe process is *revived* if and only if the author (be her the 'old' author or a new one) has some special intention to protract the process and that intention is recognized and accepted by the other participants in the same game, i.e., by the audience. In this case, there is only one protracted story-telling process. But, through that revived process, distinct sets of features and distinct corresponding *ficta* come up.

Suppose that, in (5), by meeting such conditions for revival, the story-telling process in Guy Ritchie's movie protracts that of Conan Doyle. In this case, three distinct *ficta* come into existence. There is one *fictum* with some relevant set of features that are mobilized in Conan Doyle's portion of the process, i.e., the 'original' Sherlock Holmes. There is another *fictum* with another relevant set of features that are mobilized in Guy Ritchie's portion of the process, i.e., Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes. And there is still another *fictum* with one more inclusive set of features, i.e., those mobilized in Conan Doyle's portion *plus* those mobilized in Guy Ritchie's portion, i.e., the cross-fictional Sherlock Holmes. Voltolini claims that the cross-fictional Sherlock Holmes transfictionally includes Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes. The latter are distinct *ficta*. Thus, (5) is literally false insofar as "is the same as" means "is identical with." Yet, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes are transfictionally the same by being included in the same cross-fictional Sherlock Holmes. Thus, (5) is true insofar as "is the same as" means "is transfictionally the same." Something similar happens with (10). One may guess that, when it comes to (4), the same

process gets *resumed* by the same author (i.e., Conan Doyle) in the subsequent story, i.e., *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Thus, (4) is literally true when "is the same as" means "is identical with." But Voltolini does not agree: when it comes to different works belonging to the same series/cycle, actually the process is *revived* in the new work of the series by the same author. Therefore, (4) should be treated in the same way as (5) and (10), by appealing to distinct *ficta* and to transfictional sameness[103].

There are some problems with Voltolini's distinction between the resumption and the revival of a story-telling process. First of all, the distinction is not so sharp. This distinction is also or only based on the idea that a special intention on behalf of the author to continue a story-telling process is in place in revival, but not in resumption. In this case, some apparent counterexamples come up. What if Conan Doyle first believes that the story-telling process of *A Study in Scarlet* is over and he then restarts it in order to add new elements to the story? On the one hand, it seems that Conan Doyle is just resuming an old process: the story is not over yet. But, on the other hand, it seems that he is reviving an old process: he first believes that the process is over and he then has a special intention to protract it. What if Conan Doyle intends to conclude the story-telling process of *A Study in Scarlet* and he intends to start a new process with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, without the special intention to revive the former process? On the one hand, he seems to write two stories belonging to the same series/cycle. On the other hand, this is *not* the case, as he does not have the intention to protract the story-telling process of *A Study in Scarlet*.

And what if a new author is very faithful to Conan Doyle's process and he intends to narrate what happens immediately after *A Study in Scarlet* by adding new features to those mobilized by Conan Doyle? This new author has no special intention to protract an 'old' process that he believes to be over. Why does this not count as a resumption?

[103] See Voltolini (2012) and also (2025).

One may try to invoke the boundaries of portions of processes. Roughly, with resumption, the same portion of a process is involved, whose boundaries just get extended. With revival, another portion of the same process is involved, with different boundaries. Yet, what fixes the boundaries of such portions? Again, if they are fixed by the intentions and/or the intention-guiding beliefs of authors, such intentions and such beliefs may provide the wrong results.

Voltolini (2012) claims that, in resumption, the creation of the *fictum* is not over yet. On the contrary, in revival, one invokes a *fictum* whose creation is already complete and then creates a new *fictum*. There being resumption or revival respectively hinges on the presence or absence of special intentions on behalf of the author to protract an 'old' process. Yet, these intentions have contents. These contents include the *ficta* that are created through the 'old' process or – at least – the instructions included in the 'old' process. In the first case, there is a vicious form of circularity, as we have seen. In the second case, to avoid circularity, we need to add that the instructions concern *no* specific *fictum*, though they concern at least and at most one imaginary individual/*fictum* that must be imagined as such-and-such. As we have pointed out, this move still falls prey to some difficulties.

Secondly, and more generally, in revival, the intentions and/or the intention-guiding beliefs of new authors and of their audiences may get wrong or they may be absent. For example, reconsider

> (6a) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as Rapper Holmes.

The new author of Rapper Holmes may wrongly intend to protract Conan Doyle's process. And the audience may wrongly recognize and accept this intention. In this case, Rapper Holmes may turn out to be transfictionally the same as Conan Doyle's Holmes – which looks like an unpalatable result, since these *ficta* are characterized by radically different features. Something similar may happen with the dumb Sherlock Holmes mentioned in

(6) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *Without a Clue*.

On the contrary, it is possible for Voltolini to hold that the storyteller of *A Study in Scarlet II* in

(6b) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II*

still points to Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Indeed, even if the storyteller attributes to Holmes different features, she is *not* a new *author*. Thus, she cannot *create* a new *fictum*.

But, on the other hand, we may wonder if the story-telling process in *A Study in Scarlet II* is actually the same as that in *A Study in Scarlet*. Provided that the process contains mistakes, it seems to involve different instructions. Thus, it cannot be the same process. Thus, it cannot concern the same *fictum* as the first process – provided that sameness of story-telling process is at least necessary for the identity of *ficta*. However, in reply, one may point out that the process of the storyteller of *A Study in Scarlet II* is not a *creative* process at all: it is merely a retelling process. Or that what is lacking here is the reflective stance on behalf of the storyteller: she does *not* wish to create any new *fictum*, so that no new *fictum* gets created. Inadvertent creation is impossible, since there is no reflective stance on behalf of 'authors.'

Additionally, we may wonder if *A Study in Scarlet II* is actually a new version/remaking of *A Study in Scarlet*. Remakings strongly resemble revivals, following Voltolini (2025). For remakings have, as necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, that the author of the remaking has the intention to remake the 'old' work or story/to produce a new version of it, that this intention is recognized and accepted by the audience and that there is some partial overlap between the remaking/new version and the 'old' work. Thus, presumably, with remakings, authors turn out to create new *ficta*. But it is actually implausible that *A Study in Scarlet II* is a remaking of *A Study in Scarlet*. For no special 'remaking' intention on behalf of the storyteller is present: the storyteller only wishes to retell the old story. And 'remaking'

intentions are at least necessary for remakings. In sum, we may safely conclude that (6b) concerns the 'old' Sherlock Holmes.

Thirdly and finally, what if Guy Ritchie's movie does *not* intend to protract Conan Doyle's process, but is only based on the intention of representing the contents of the latter process? On the one hand, having another author, Guy Ritchie's movie cannot turn out to resume Conan Doyle's process. But, on the other hand, it cannot turn out to revive that process either. For Guy Ritchie's movie is *not* based on the intention of protracting that process, but only of representing its contents. At least in this respect, Guy Ritchie's position is akin to that of the storyteller of (6b). He has no special intention of remaking Conan Doyle's stories. Yet, if, against this suggestion, Guy Ritchie's movie counts as a new version/remaking of Conan Doyle's story, then, following Voltolini (2025), this leads to the existence of a new *fictum*. In sum, everything hinges on determining if the case at hand is one of retelling/representing or one of remaking. And the distinction between retelling/representing and remaking is not very clear-cut. Maybe retelling/representing is the lowest limit case of remaking[104]. But, in this case, there would be a distinction of degrees between retelling/representing and remaking: where would retelling/representing end and remaking begin? In the end, retelling/representing is consistent with small differences between the represented work/story and the representing/ones, as we have seen with (6b). On the contrary, there is no distinction of degrees between there being the same *fictum* (which seemingly happens with retelling/representing) or two distinct *ficta* (which seemingly happens with remaking and also with reviving)[105].

[104] This suggestion is reinforced by Voltolini (2025)'s claim that one necessary condition for remaking is some partial overlap between the remaking and the 'old' work/story. Yet, it is weakened by another necessary condition for remaking, i.e., that the author must have the intention to remake the 'old' work/story.

[105] A sharp distinction between retelling/representing and remaking may be based on the respective absence and presence of a remaking intention. But this leads back to the first option, i.e., that Guy Ritchie's movie counts as a retelling/representing. Please note that one cannot hold that sameness comes in higher or lower degrees in this case. Maybe transfictional sameness in revivals and remakings

In sum, transfictional sameness may be appealed to with respect to (10) and (5) and, following Voltolini, also with respect to (4). It is controversial – and possibly undesirable – that it may be appealed to with (6) and (6a). Voltolini's theory does not rule out the transfictional sameness of Conan Doyle's Holmes and Rapper Holmes, as well as that between Conan Doyle's Holmes and the Holmes of *Without a Clue*. As we have seen, matters are more complicated with (6b).

Regarding (6a), Thomasson's (IN-5) is met. But, in this case, what is met is only a necessary condition for the identity between Conan Doyle's Holmes and Rapper Holmes. Thus, (IN-5) is only compatible with the truth of (6a). If one wishes to fix the truth of (6a), one should specify what other necessary condition is *not* met for their identity. Thus, (IN-5) is at least incomplete. Something similar happens with (6).

For Thomasson, Conan Doyle's Holmes and the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II* in (6b) are presumably distinct. For (IN-5) is not met. Therefore, Conan Doyle's Holmes is distinct from the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II*. This may look implausible. First, the storyteller of (6b) wishes to retell a story about Conan Doyle's Holmes: the storyteller does *not* want to *import* Holmes in a new story. Secondly, the two *ficta* still mobilize almost the same set of features – or some relevant/salient portion thereof. Alternatively, Thomasson may suggest that (IN-5) is not about cases such as the one described by (6b). For (IN-5) concerns authors and their creative acts. On the contrary, the case described by (6b) only concerns storytellers and their retelling stories. And these are distinct from authors and their creative acts. Thus, with (6b), no new *fictum* gets created.

Similar results are in order with (7) and (8), i.e., with the Don Quixotes of Unaware Pierre Menard and Aware Pierre Menard[106]. Both authors lack the intention to protract Cervantes' process or to import Cervantes' Don Quixote.

may come in degrees (see below). But identity – i.e., the 'sameness' that figures in representing/retelling – does not come in degrees.

[106] This is explicitly recognized by Voltolini (2006).

Thus, given Thomasson's (IN-5), their Don Quixotes cannot be identical with Cervantes' Don Quixote. And they do not meet Voltolini's criteria for resumption. Interestingly enough, they do not meet Voltolini's criteria for revival either. For they do not intend to protract Cervantes' process. Thus, for Voltolini, not only are the Don Quixotes of Unaware Pierre Menard and Aware Pierre Menard distinct from Cervantes' Don Quixote, but they cannot be transfictionally the same as the latter either. This is counterintuitive, since the features of both Don Quixotes are the same as – or almost the same as – those of Cervantes' Don Quixote. They are only made distinct by the fact that they are based on distinct unconnected processes. But this is a difference that makes little to no difference to their sameness – at least to their qualitative sameness, i.e., the sameness of their features.

Regarding

(11) the mythical Zeus is the same as the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*,

Thomasson's (IN-5) is clearly compatible with the truth of this statement, insofar as Rick Riordan has the intention to protract the process at the base of the myth. But (IN-5) does not fix the truth of this statement. Turning to Voltolini, a process of revival is clearly at stake. Thus, (11) is false as far as "is the same as" means "is identical with." But it is true as far as "is the same as" points to transfictional sameness.

When it comes to

(11*) the Zeus of believers is the same as the Zeus of non-believers,

presumably there is only one Zeus, i.e., the mythical and non-existent object. What makes the difference between believers and atheists is their attitudes towards the mythical story-telling process upon which the existence of Zeus as a mythical object is grounded. However, a general problem arises if this solution is compared to the cases of Cervantes, Unaware Pierre Menard, and Aware Pierre Menard. Indeed, can there really be distinct attitudes by distinct participants/authors towards one and the same story-telling process, as suggested by there

being only one Zeus?[107] If this can be the case, why cannot Cervantes, Unaware Pierre Menard, and Aware Pierre Menard (in 7 and 8) partake in the same story-telling process – though having distinct attitudes –, so as to generate one and the same *fictum*? On the other hand, if attitudes are enough in order to distinguish between story-telling processes (and types thereof) – even between story-telling processes that mobilize the same sets of features –, then the Zeus of atheists and that of believers are distinct *ficta*, grounded in distinct processes.

Voltolini's transfictional sameness may be invoked in order to account for the truth of (19) and (20). Indeed, with (19), the Odysseus of the myth may inspire Dante's Odysseus/Ulysses and Joyce's Odysseus/Ulysses by being included (together with the latter) in the same cross-fictional Odysseus/Ulysses and by being produced in the first portion of the same protracted story-telling process. Nevertheless, there is one problem with this option. Indeed, Dante and Joyce may not intend to resume or revive the process that gave rise to the original Odysseus, i.e., the myth. They may wish to construct a new *fictum*, which somehow resembles the original Odysseus. Or the relevant audience may rightly deny the existence of that intention. In this case, transfictional sameness should be ruled out. For there is no protracted story-telling process. Thus, how can the truth of (19) be accounted for?

With (20), things look easier. There is one cross-fictional Faust that transfictionally includes Goethe's Faust. However, even in this case, the intentions of resuming or reviving the same processes may be absent. Thus, transfictional sameness may fail to be in place[108].

[107] One reviewer suggests that one and the same story-telling/make-believe process is in place, though this process is only *unconsciously* entertained by the believers. Yet, if story-telling/make-believe processes are mental states, it is difficult to grant that one and the same mental state may be unconscious for someone and conscious for someone else (i.e., for the author or for the atheist – see below). Presumably, being conscious or unconscious are necessary features of mental states.

[108] Following Voltolini (2025), one may try to hold that (19) and/or (20) point to distinct versions of the same work. However, in order to have different versions of the same work, it is necessary that the author of the new version intends to remake the work, that the audience recognizes and accepts this intention and that the original

Thomasson's (IN-5) does *not* have the resources to account for the truth of (19) and (20).

Let us turn back to

(9) the real Napoleon is the same as the Napoleon of *War and Peace*.

According to Voltolini, the real Napoleon is distinct from the Napoleon of *War and Peace*. More generally, *ficta* such as the Napoleon of *War and Peace* are incomplete, they may be inconsistent and indeterminate, they may undergo fission and fusion. Moreover, the real Napoleon does not have the converse relational features that correspond to the features attributed to the Napoleon of *War and Peace*. Suppose that the Napoleon of *War and Peace* is loved by some *fictum* according to the story. It does not follow that the real Napoleon is loved by that *fictum* (in reality). Furthermore, one and the same character in a story may correspond to distinct real entities or one real entity may correspond to distinct characters. And the intentions of the authors are not enough in order to introduce real entities in their stories. For authors may have wrong beliefs and/or indeterminate intentions[109].

However, to solve the first set of problems, one may recall the distinction between two modes of predication or the distinction between predication *simpliciter* and predication according to a story. Namely, the real Napoleon may be incomplete according to *War and Peace*, i.e., with respect to the features ascribed to him according to *War and Peace*. But he does not 'really' have incompleteness (outside of the story). And so on.

To solve the second set of problems, one may also take into account the implicit intentions of authors and/or the implicit contents of their intentions. Moreover, one may also claim that some intentions may fail. An intention fails when it is based on wrong beliefs. On the contrary, when the intentions of authors succeed (e.g., by being based on true beliefs about real entities),

and the new work overlap to some extent (these conditions are also jointly sufficient). With respect to (19) and (20), all of such conditions may fail to be satisfied.

[109] See Voltolini (2006: 117-124; 2013; 2020a).

this is at least one necessary condition for importing a real entity into a story.

Finally, when there is no one-one correspondence between characters and real entities, one may just claim that the importation of real entities into stories fails. In these cases, we are not dealing with real entities, but with their fictional correlates, i.e., with *ficta*.

Thomasson's (IN-5) is compatible with the identity between the real Napoleon and the Napoleon of *War and Peace*. But, obviously enough, it does not guarantee such an identity.

Indeterminate and inconsistent identity in

> (14a) it is indeterminate that, according to *Pale Fire*, Shade is the same as Kinbote,
> (15a) according to Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, it is indeterminate that Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room,
> (16a) according to *Un drame bien parisien*, the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul,

may be dealt with by appealing to the distinction between predication according to the stories and predication outside of stories. Namely, Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room get indeterminate identity ascribed according to *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. And Shade and Kinbote do *not* get identity ascribed according to *Pale Fire*. Finally, Raoul and the Templar get both identity and distinctness ascribed according to *Un drame bien parisien*. In the real world, all of these *ficta* do not have indeterminate identity. And they do not have both identity and distinctness in the real world. So far, so good. But, when it comes to the real world, are Shade and Kinbote (and Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room) identical or distinct? Are Raoul and the Templar identical or distinct?

For one thing, they get the same features mobilized in the same story-telling process. Thus, following (IS-5) and (INS-6), they may turn out to be identical. But, on the other hand, their identity is not determinately guaranteed by the story-telling process/literary work in which they partake. Thus, they may also turn out to be distinct. Or, at best, when identity is not

determinately guaranteed by the story-telling process/literary work, there is no good reason to favor identity over distinctness. Alternatively, the identity conditions of such *ficta* may need to be precisified. But how? And what are the ontological consequences of such precisifications?[110]

Consider now the indiscernible orcs of Sauron's army and the indiscernible twins in a fictional pair of twins in

> (12) each orc of Sauron's army in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is distinct from the others,
> (13) each fictional twin in a pair of indiscernible fictional twins is distinct from the other.

According to Voltolini, the only *ficta* that are in place here are the fictional crowd and the fictional pair. For the identity/distinctness of their members are not fixed by the features mobilized in the story-telling process. Or, better, there is no reflexive stance as to whether certain features are mobilized in a certain story-telling process so as to create a certain *fictum*[111]. However, first, this may look undesirable, as we have argued. Indeed, one principle of entailment seems to hold in the real world and, tacitly, in many (if not all) fictional worlds: if there is something like a plurality of objects (e.g., a crowd and pair), then there are also its members as *bona fide* objects. Secondly, to distinguish between the *ficta*, one may appeal to the features that are *implicitly* mobilized in the process, e.g., Sauron's army including distinct members[112].

Fusion and fission in

> (12) the Berget and the Vington of the 1912 *Recherche* are the Vinteuil of the final *Recherche*,

[110] See Thomasson (2010). For some criticisms, see Everett (2013: 219-224).

[111] See Voltolini (2020b).

[112] True: this distinction would be a non-qualitative one. But creationism needs non-qualitative individuation/distinctness in other contexts as well, e.g., when it comes to guaranteeing that a given set of features mobilized within a given make-believe/story-telling process is imagined to be had by *at least and at most one* imaginary entity/*fictum*. This recalls one further, potential problem for creationism, i.e., that of allowing for implicit features in the identity conditions of *ficta*.

(13) the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Queen of Hearts and the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*,

presumably give rise to distinct *ficta*. At best, Voltolini's transfictional sameness may be invoked in order to connect the relevant *ficta*. Identity should be ruled out. However, this solution is troublesome, as far as resumption of the same story seems to be in place, whereas transfictional sameness requires revival.

Following Voltolini (2025), one may plausibly suggest that these are different versions of the same work. In this case, different *ficta* come into existence in different versions of the work. With respect to (12), one may suggest that two distinct *ficta* in the first version of the work turn out to be transfictionally the same as (though numerically distinct from) one *fictum* in the second version. And that, with respect to (13), one *fictum* in the first version of the work turns out to be transfictionally the same as (through numerically distinct from) two *ficta* in the second version. But this solution would turn out to be in troubles if transfictional sameness were a transitive relation. Take Berget and Vington. According to this solution, Berget is transfictionally the same as Vinteuil. And Vinteuil is transfictionally the same as Vington. If transfictional sameness is transitive, Berget is transfictionally the same as Vington. But it is far from clear that Berget and Vington need be transfictionally the same. For they may differ in many respects.

In reply, one could either deny the transitivity of transfictional sameness, or specify that transfictional sameness can only hold across *different* versions of the same work (or across different portions of the same story-telling process when there is revival, so that it cannot concern two *ficta* in the same work/portion), or accept that Berget and Vington actually are transfictionally the same. The third option is unpalatable. Indeed, transfictional sameness would turn out to be always possible merely by stipulating that two *ficta* may get 'fused into' a third *fictum* and turn out to be transfictionally the same as the latter. The second option is stipulative. Thus, we think that the first option is the

best one. However, there are some cases in which transfictional sameness behaves as a transitive relation. This happens, for example, when three distinct *ficta* strongly resemble each other. Thus, transfictional sameness is *not* intransitive: it is merely *non-transitive*. Therefore, in order to find out whether transfictional sameness 'is transmitted' transitively or not (and therefore whether distinct *ficta* are transfictionally the same or not), it is necessary to determine the exact amount of sameness that is sufficient for transfictional sameness. And this task is hard to accomplish[113].

Besides the theory developed in Voltolini (2025), there are three further alternatives. One may hold that, in fusion, there is only one *fictum* (i.e., the fused *fictum*), since the story-telling process is not over until the completion of the later and final version of the *Recherche*. And, in fission, there are only two *ficta*, for similar reasons with respect to the later version of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Alternatively still, one may hold that there are three *ficta*, but for another reason, i.e., because identity and distinctness are *wrongly* ascribed to the relevant objects in the later and final versions of their stories. For example, when the original objects fuse together, identity with the object of fusion is wrongly ascribed to the original *ficta*[114]. But this is inconsistent with the intuition that the final and published version of the story has some authority over the preliminary versions, when it comes to the content of the story.

Or, finally, there may be only one *fictum* with inconsistent identity/distinctness. But this is at odds with the apparent consistency of such stories taken in isolation.

[113] To circumvent this problem, one may suggest that transfictional sameness always comes in degrees: it is never the case that something is transfictionally the same as something else or not, whereas it is always the case that something is *more or less* transfictionally the same as something else or not. If this is the case, however, transfictional sameness cannot work as a good surrogate of transworld identity. For transworld identity does *not* come in degrees: two *ficta* are either transfictionally identical or not – full stop. Another problem for transfictional sameness being a surrogate of transfictional identity is that transfictional sameness may be a many-one or a one-many relation, whereas transfictional identity cannot.

[114] For these options, see Sackris (2013), Friedell (2016), and Zvolenszky (2016).

There is one more dramatic version of this problem. Indeed, the original author may die before completing the story-telling process and before revealing that two *ficta* are actually the same[115]. In this case, it is not clear if there are two *ficta* – given the relevant portion of the story that has been completed – or only one *fictum* – given the intentions of the original author. For example, what if another author completes the story by remaining faithful to the intentions of the original author and claims that the two *ficta* are identical?[116]

With statements

> (21) Holmes could have been ascribed according to some story the feature of having a friend named "Wilson" (instead of having one named "Watson"),
> (22) Holmes could not have failed to be ascribed according to any story the feature of being a detective,
> (23) Holmes acquires (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of having an enemy named "Moriarty,"
> (24) Holmes could acquire (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of moving to Birmingham,
> (25) Holmes could not acquire (according to any subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century,

Thomasson's criteria do not provide compelling reasons for their truth. For Thomasson does not provide necessary conditions for the identity of *ficta* within the same literary work or within different (merely possible) versions of the same work. Moreover, she only provides necessary conditions for the identity of *ficta* across distinct works, which are only compatible

[115] See Brock (2010).

[116] One reviewer suggests that, for Voltolini, one should just check if the reflective stance on behalf of the author has occurred or not. If it has occurred before the death of the author, there are two *ficta*. Fine. But what happens if the reflective stance has *not* occurred before the death of the author? We cannot claim that there is only one *fictum*. For there is no reflective stance on behalf of the author that guarantees this conclusion. The only reflective stance that would have occurred – and that does *not* occur because of the death of the author – would have brought about the existence of two *ficta*. But, on the other hand, it is also implausible to claim that there is no *fictum* at all in this case.

with the truth of (23) and (24). But these conditions are also and implausibly compatible with the falsity of (25), i.e., with Conan Doyle's Holmes' possibly being identical with Rapper Holmes.

On the contrary, Voltolini's (INS-6) seems to be affected by the *Problem of Fragility*. Indeed, Voltolini holds that there is one specific set of features that are mobilized for the creation of a *fictum*. And such a set partakes in the identity conditions of that *fictum*. Sets of features rigidly depend on the features they include. Roughly, if a set turned out to include other features, it would turn out to be another set. Thus, in no way can (21) be true, since having a friend named "Wilson" is not included in the set of features mobilized for Holmes. At best, there may be transfictional sameness. Statement (22) – which necessarily attributes to Holmes the feature of being a detective – is obviously true. But the same happens with further, seemingly accidental features of Holmes. This looks implausible – though defining a criterion for sharply distinguishing between the essential and the accidental features of *ficta* proves very difficult.

At any rate, for Voltolini, additional features are acquired/can be acquired by the same *fictum* only within the same portion of the same story-telling process or in different portions of a resumed process (in 23 and 24). Transfictional sameness may be appealed to in order to deal with contrasting intuitions about (21)-(24). But, as we have seen, transfictional sameness is affected by some problems.

Finally, as we have seen, Voltolini is not compelled to deny transfictional sameness between Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Rapper Holmes. Thus, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes may be transfictionally the same as the *fictum* that can acquire the features of being a rapper living in Atlanta in the XX Century and of being unable to solve murder cases. In sum, (25) is false insofar as it denies the possibility of there being a *fictum* transfictionally the same as Conan Doyle's Holmes (i.e., Rapper Holmes) that can acquire the features at stake. Indeed, there can be such a *fictum*[117]. On the contrary, if (25) is read

[117] The creationist camp also includes the theories defended by Paolini Paoletti (2016) and Abell (2020). Paolini Paoletti offers a complex and disjunctive criterion

as assuming that we are talking of Conan Doyle's Holmes, it is obviously the case that Conan Doyle's Holmes cannot acquire the features of Rapper Holmes, since the former is not identical with the latter. But this would happen with all the features of Rapper Holmes and, *mutatis mutandis*, of any other *fictum* that is only transfictionally the same as Conan Doyle's Holmes.

of identity for *ficta*, to be taken as mind-dependent objects. Abell (2020: 141-146) claims that, necessarily, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* if and only if references to *x* and *y* can be traced back, via chains of representations, to perceptions of the same act (or of traces of the same act) of creating a *fictum*.

Chapter 2

Non-Objectual Realism

According to non-objectual realism, there are fictional entities, but they are not objects; they are rather entities of another sort, such as kinds, roles or denoting concepts, which are properties, or somehow correspond to properties (as we shall see). We may want to be committed anyway to the existence of these entities (e.g., as abstract Platonic beings), independently of the existence of fiction generated by our fiction-making activities[118]. As in all forms of realism, the realist could say of the relevant entities, *ficta* in this case, that they exist, since they are part of the ontological inventory, even if simply as Platonic entities[119]. If so, for example, Pinocchio and Sherlock Holmes exist. However, one can recover a sense in which *ficta* do not exist, by taking existence to be *concretely existing*, which only concrete individuals such as Donald Trump or the Eiffel Tower enjoy. With existence so understood, it is possible to truly claim, as common sense requires, that, while Donald Trump and the Eiffel Tower exist, Pinocchio and Sherlock Holmes do not exist.

We shall discuss four views of this sort. In the next two sections we shall take up the one by Wolterstorff (1980), wherein *ficta* are kinds (§ 1), and the one by Currie (1990), wherein they are roles (§ 2)[120]. The former allows for *ficta* that

[118] To the extent that the entities in question are viewed as abstract Platonic beings, this form of realism may be called *Platonic* or *Platonist* (Everett 2013: § 6.2; Kroon, Voltolini 2023: § 1.2.2). It should be noted however that versions of objectual realism, notably Zalta's abstract objects theory, may also be so called, as they regard the objects that they postulate as abstract Platonic entities.

[119] See for example Wolterstorff (1980: 144).

[120] Both kinds and roles can be seen as sets or conjunctions of properties,

are story-free, i.e., capable to migrate somehow from one story to another. The latter takes *ficta* to be story-bound, i.e., rigidly linked to one specific story. We shall then move to the standpoint according to which *ficta* are denoting, or referential, concepts (§ 3), in a Russellian terminology tracing back to Russell (1903). In one version of this, due to Cocchiarella (1982; 1996; 2007) and Landini (1986; 1990), *ficta* are story-bound (§ 3.1)[121]. In another version, due to Orilia (2012, 2025), *ficta* are story-free (§ 3.2). Finally (§ 4), we shall examine how these approaches deal with the case studies presented in the Introduction. Before going on, it is convenient to outline here, with our own notions and terminology, a common background that all these theories somehow share, and that will be appealed to in the following.

or at least as corresponding to such sets or conjunctions, as it will be clear in the forthcoming presentations of these views. After Wolterstorff and Currie, other approaches analogous to theirs have been proposed, although those by Currie and Wolterstorff still appear to be the most detailed and representative, and we have thus focused on them. Among the further proposals there are those by: Bonomi (1994; 1998), with *ficta* as sets of salient properties; Glavaničová (2020), with *ficta* as hyperintensional individual concepts, understood as constructions within Tichy's (1988) transparent intensional logic; Lamarque (2023; 2010: Ch. 9), with *ficta* as types (understood as sets of properties), which are "initiated" and thus are ontologically dependent on there being some act of creation by an author; Stokke (2021; 2023), with *ficta* as roles understood within a formal semantics based on Kamp's (1984) discourse representation theory (in order to make clear how a *fictum* develops as a story unfolds); Terrone (2017), with *ficta* as types that have tokens in fictional worlds. Castañeda (1989) bases an interesting and original account of fiction on his peculiar guise theory, an ontological framework, according to which objects are guises, i.e., bundles of properties, which may exist (be consubstantiated with other guises) or not exist, but may be thought of as existent (consociated with other guises). In his account, *ficta* are non-existent guises (see Dolcini (2014), for an interesting discussion). Since Castañeda takes guises to be concrete individual objects, his guise theory is commonly taken to be a form of Meinongianism, and accordingly his approach has been mentioned in Ch. 1. However, guises may well be viewed as abstract general entities and, if so, Castañeda's account could be considered a form of non-objectual realism. More generally, if Meinongian objects are viewed as abstract universals (Reicher 2024: sect. 5.2), Meinongian approaches can be considered forms of non-objectual realism. However, these approaches are treated at length in Ch. 1.

[121] As we shall see, denoting concepts can be viewed as properties of properties, in a way that makes this approach distinctively different from the other forms of non-objectual realism. It should be noted that Cocchiarella's conception of properties and relations is conceptualist, rather than Platonist, but for present purposes we need not emphasize this aspect of his position.

Authors or storytellers in their creative activity produce works (literary texts, movies, comics, etc.), which express fictional stories, such as *War and Peace* and *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (we typically use the same name for both the story and the work that expresses it). A story is a proposition or a sequence of propositions[122]. We can view a sequence of propositions as a single complex proposition of which the members of the sequence are conjuncts. Thus, we may simply say that a story is a proposition[123]. Precisely which proposition is expressed by a certain work may well be a matter of interpretation, possibly involving an ideal reconstruction[124].

Be this as it may, we can view as an entailment the paratextual relation that links a proposition to a story and that we express with locutions such as "according to the story, …," "in the story, …," "it is true in the story that …," and so on. For example, when we say that it is true in *Moby Dick* that Moby Dick is a sperm whale, or that according to *Moby Dick*, Moby Dick is a mammal, we are asserting that the proposition constituting the story in question entails the proposition that Moby Dick is a sperm whale (as this is rather explicitly asserted in the text), as well as the proposition that Moby Dick is a mammal (since being a mammal is entailed by being a sperm whale). The entailment relation in question presumably involves an appeal to a presupposed background knowledge of both a conceptual and encyclopaedic nature[125]. Moreover, it is paraconsistent

[122] Wolterstorff (1980: 127) identifies propositions and states of affairs, with true propositions identified with occurring states of affairs. Occurrences of states of affairs are events, which are the having of a property by an entity (1980: 193); events are not repeatable (1980: 192-194). It should be noted that Wolterstorff calls the story expressed by the text of an author *A*, "world projected by *A*." However, there is really no commitment to possible worlds, as in modal realism, in the way in which there seems to be such a commitment in Currie. For Wolterstorff's projected worlds are just complex states of affairs – and thus, for Wolterstorff (1980: 126 ff.), propositions.

[123] Cf. Currie (1980: 101).

[124] See, e.g., Parsons (1980: 180).

[125] See, e.g., Wolterstorff (1980: 125). The background knowledge to be assumed may well depend on assumptions regarding the writing context. For example, in saying that, according to *Moby Dick*, Moby Dick is a mammal, since it is a sperm whale, we are taking for granted that in writing its novel Melville knew that whales

rather than classical, since there are inconsistent stories (as we have seen in the Introduction), and surely we do not want to say that every proposition whatsoever is true in them (Deutsch 1985). This would be the case, if the entailment were classical, since classical logic contains the rule *Ex Falso Quodlibet*, which allows one to infer any proposition whatsoever from a contradiction. In contrast, a paraconsistent logic rejects this rule[126].

From a Platonist point of view, stories, as abstract propositions, exist independently of human activities, such as the thinking activities of the storytellers who think of the stories, and express them, through the works that they put together. However, it is in virtue of the fact that such works are produced, with appropriate fiction-making intentions, by their authors, that the corresponding abstract propositions become stories, and more precisely fictional stories, or, say, novels, tales, and the like. When this happens, we may say that the author *creates* a story, but "creates" should be understood in the sense just outlined. In non-objectual realism, once a certain proposition becomes a fictional story, and is thus thought of and entertained by the author and possibly by a more or less vast audience, it is also the case that certain abstract entities become fictional characters, and in particular fictional characters *of* the story in question, or equivalently *in* the story in question. Just like the story, such abstract entities exist independently of human activities, but in virtue of the fact that, through appropriate human activities, a certain proposition has acquired the status

are mammals. If we were to attribute to Melville the old-fashioned view that whales are fish, we should rather say that according to *Moby Dick*, Moby Dick is a fish.

126 On paraconsistent logic, see, e.g., Priest, Tanaka, Weber (2022). For present purposes we need not commit ourselves to one paraconsistent system in particular. It should be noted that, except Orilia (2012: 582), the authors that we are considering do not explicitly accept that the paratextual relation involves a paraconsistent entailment, and sometimes resort to different ideas to come to terms with inconsistent stories. For example, according to Currie (1980: 80), a proposition *P* is true in a story *S* when an informed reader can take the "fictional author" of *S* to believe *P* (more below on Currie's notion of fictional author); given that beliefs are not closed under entailment, one need not say that any proposition is true in an inconsistent story, even if the entailment were classical. At any rate, these details will be immaterial for most of the issues that we shall discuss.

of a fictional story, these abstract entities acquire the status of fictional characters, more specifically of characters of the story in question: the story *generates* the characters, as we may put it. When this happens, we may say that the author of the story has created the characters, but again this must be understood in the sense clarified above. What the abstract entities in question are – say, kinds, roles, or denoting concepts – depend on the type of non-objectual realism. In any case, there is always a sense in which these abstract entities, as characters of a story, occur, or are present, in a given story, and are ascribed (or attributed) properties by such a story (or in such a story). But, again, what this sense is depends on the type of non-objectual realism, as we shall see in the following.

1. Ficta *as Story-Free Kinds*

Wolterstorff proposes that fictional characters are "person-kinds" (1980: 144). He speaks thus, because he focuses on human being characters such as Chichikov in Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1980: 140), or Faust in Goethe's *Faust* (1980: 148), and reserves the term "character" for them, but of course he acknowledges that there are fictional entities of all sorts in stories: "fictitious countries, cities, dogs, carriages, etc." (1980: 158). He takes his approach to be extendable to them. Let us then say, more generally, that, according to Wolterstorff, characters are kinds. More specifically, kinds which are somehow delineated by the author in a certain story. For example, there is the Chichikov-in-*Dead Souls* kind (1980: 144) or the Russia-in-*Dead Souls* kind, delineated by Gogol in *Dead Souls* (1980: 143).

What are kinds? Paradigmatic examples are natural kinds such as Cat and Horse (1980: 46) , but Wolterstorff does not admit just them, but indeed all sorts of kinds, e.g., Bachelor and Red Thing (1980: 56) or even Chair In This Room (1980: 54)[127]. Kinds may have examples, e.g., Bucephalus, a certain horse, is an example of the kind Horse (1980: 46). Kinds are

[127] We follow Wolterstorff in using capital letters to indicate kinds.

distinguished from properties, but it is assumed that there is a 1-1 mapping between properties and kinds (1980: 47-51), so that, for any property, being a *k*, there is corresponding kind, *K*, called the "kind-associate of being a *k*" (1980: 47); and, *vice versa*, for any kind, *K*, there is a corresponding property, being a *k*, called the "property-associate of *K*" (1980: 56). Wolterstorff assumes an abundant conception of properties, according to which, for any predicate, there is a corresponding property[128]. As regards kinds and properties, we have these two main options (Bird, Tobin 2024: § 1): kinds just are properties, so that, e.g., the kind Cat just is the property of being a cat; or, kinds are not properties, but, in this case, we should not also admit, for any kind, a corresponding property-associate. Thus, e.g., if there is the kind Cat, it is not the case that there is also the property of being a cat. In this option, one also admits that there are properties, e.g., being red, which are not kinds and also do not have a corresponding kind. To say otherwise would conflate the ontology beyond necessity. In contrast, Wolterstorff has a conflating duplication of entities: not only the kind Cat, but also the property-associate being a cat; not only the property being red, but also the kind-associate Red; and so on. Be this as it may, as we shall see, *ficta* are among these kind-associates, so that, for each *fictum*, there is a corresponding property-associate. One could think, however, that he might just as well do without such kind-associates, by simply identifying *ficta* with the property-associates.

Wolterstorff acknowledges that, for many kinds, there is a conjunctive-analysis; that is, the corresponding property-associate is a conjunctive property involving several properties as conjuncts. For example, the kind Bachelor has the property-associate being a bachelor, which is a conjunctive property, namely, being a male and being an adult and being unmarried. Let us speak of conjunctive kinds in such cases; for example, Bachelor is the conjunctive kind Male and Adult and Unmarried. Although Wolterstorff does not put it like that, and

[128] At least if we set aside problematic predicates that may generate paradoxes such as Russell's paradox: Wolterstorff (1980: 51, fn. 12).

his terminology is more complex, we can capture his approach by saying that characters are conjunctive kinds *delineated* by a story. For reasons that we shall see, two sorts of characters are admitted, those which are *maximal* kinds delineated by a story, which we shall call *specific* characters, and those which are subkinds of a special sort of such maximal kinds, which we shall call *general* characters (here we adapt the terminology of the Introduction).

We can clarify these notions via some paradigmatic examples, by relying on Stevenson's story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (*SCJH*, in brief). Consider how it starts:

> Mr. Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary, and yet somehow lovable.

Thus, according to this story, there was an individual x such that x is a mister and x is a lawyer and x is called *Utterson* and x is a man and x is of a rugged countenance and x is never lighted by a smile and x is cold and x is scanty and x is embarrassed in discourse and x is backward in sentiment and x is lean and x is long and x is dusty and x is dreary and x is somehow lovable. This already delineates a kind, namely the conjunctive kind: Mister and Lawyer and Called *Utterson* and Man and … and Somehow Lovable, which has the following conjunctive property-associate: being mister and being lawyer and being called *Utterson* and … and being somehow lovable. It is not, however, a maximal kind. To have a maximal kind, we have to run through all the story and add further conjuncts, on the basis of all that is said in the story. For example, later on (at the beginning of Ch. 4) we read that:

> […] London was startled by a crime of singular ferocity […]. A maid-servant living alone in a house from the river had gone to bed upstairs about eleven.

On the basis of this, we can say that the story delineates a kind with these further conjuncts: Such That London Was Startled by a Crime of Singular Ferocity, Such That There Is a Maid-Servant Living Alone in a House from the River, Such

That the Maid-Servant Living Alone in a House from the River Had Gone to Bed About Eleven. By considering all the conjuncts, K_1, K_2, …, K_n, derivable in this way from the whole story, we arrive at the maximal kind, K_1 and K_2 and … and K_n, where K_1 is the kind Mister, K_2 is the kind Lawyer, etc. Each of the conjuncts in a conjunctive kind may be called a "component kind" of the conjunctive kind. Similarly, the property-associate of a component kind may be called a "component property" of the conjunctive kind. For instance, among the component kinds of our example, the "Utterson maximal kind," as we may call it, we shall find the kind Lawyer and, among its property components, the property of being a lawyer. Moreover, any conjunction of component kinds may be called a "subkind." For example, Man and Somehow Lovable is a subkind of the Utterson maximal kind[129].

According to Wolterstorff, all the maximal kinds of this sort delineated by a story are fictional characters *of* the story (1980: 145). Any such kind K is a character of the story (occurs, or is present, in the story), in that, according to the story, there is exactly one individual which is a K; or to put it in terms of properties, according to the story, there is exactly one individual which exemplifies the property of being a k. All the kind components of K, and the corresponding property-associates, can then also be called kind components, and property components, of the character in question. In the terminology of our Introduction, we may call characters so understood "specific fictional characters," so as to distinguish them from fictional characters that are not maximal kinds, which Wolterstorff also acknowledges, as we shall see. Still in the terminology of the Introduction, these other characters will be called "general characters." For the time being, we shall concentrate on specific characters.

When a proper name is used, as in the example we have considered, we can refer to the character in question by using

[129] We may note that the order of the conjuncts is relevant, since typically stories develop in time and the order with which the conjuncts are introduced may well represent a temporal succession.

a definite description that mentions the name and the story, such as "the Mister Utterson of *SCJH*." However, a story can delineate a character even without ever introducing a proper name for it. For example, from the above quotation, we can see that, according to *SCJH*, there is a maid-servant who lives alone in a house by the river, but no proper name is ever specified for this maid-servant. That is, we have in this case a maximal kind involving, among the conjuncts that compose it, no kind of the type Called *such and such*. In this case, it is natural to call the character by appealing to a definite description that does not involve a proper name and that can be somehow obtained from the story, such as "the maid-servant of *SCJH*." In any case, if "the *C* of *S*" names a kind that is a character of the story *S*, any of its component kinds can be conveniently called a "*C* attribution, according to *S*." For example, according to *SCJH*, Mr. Utterson is a lawyer, and accordingly Lawyer is a Mr. Utterson attribution, according to *SCJH*. Similarly, Living Alone in a House from the River is a maid-servant attribution, according to *SCJH*.

Famously, in *SCJH*, we also have the characters that we could call "the Dr. Jekyll of *SCJH*" and "the Mr. Hyde of *SCJH*," and we understand that they are in fact the same character. It seems we should then say that there is just one maximal kind that is denoted by both definite descriptions. Wolterstorff is not explicit on this, but presumably this result can be achieved as follows. We can distinguish a Dr. Jekyll kind made up by all the Dr. Jekyll attributions, according to *SCJH*, as component kinds, and a Mr. Hyde kind made up by all the Mr. Hyde attributions, according to *SCJH*, as component kinds. However, neither should be considered a maximal kind and thus a specific character of the story, since it is at some point conveyed by the story that the person called Dr. Jekyll is the person called Mr. Hyde; that is, according to *SCJH*, it is true that there is exactly one individual, x, with the property of being called *Mr. Hyde*, and there is exactly one individual, y, with the property of being called *Dr. Jekyll*, and $x = y$. By virtue of this, the specific character is rather the result of putting together as conjuncts, in the appropriate order, all Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

attributions. For example, since in Ch. 4 Stevenson writes "Mr. Hyde shrank back with a hissing intake of the breath," there is this Mr. Hyde attribution: Such That He Shrank Back with a Hissing Intake of the Breath. Moreover, since later on, at the beginning of Ch. 5, Stevenson writes "Mr. Utterson found his way to Dr. Jekyll's home," there is this Dr. Jekyll attribution: Such That Mr. Utterson Found His Way to His [Jekyll's] Home. Hence, both such attributions, in that order, are conjuncts in the maximal kind, *JH*, which is the Mr. Hyde of *SCJH*, as well as the Dr. Jekyll of *SCJH*. As components of *JH*, of course, we also find the subkinds Called *Jekyll* and Called *Hyde*.

Characters so understood, i.e., as maximal kinds, are story-bound: they are strictly tied to a story and can hardly migrate to another story, even a very similar one. For example, Stevenson could have written a variation on the theme of *SCJH*, call it *SCJH**, in which something different is said of a lawyer called "Utterson." For example, in *SCJH* it is said (at the beginning of Ch. 1) that Utterson had not crossed the doors of a theatre for twenty years, whereas in *SCJH** it is said that Utterson had not crossed the doors of a theatre for ten years. If so, the maximal kind, call it *U**, which is the Utterson of *SCJH**, would have as subkind the kind Such That He Had Not Crossed The Doors Of A Theatre For Ten Years, rather than Such That He Had Not Crossed The Doors Of A Theatre For Twenty Years. This would suffice to make *U** a kind different from *U*[130]. Hence, in *SCJH**, the Utterson of *SCJH*, i.e. *U*, would not occur, as it is not the case that, according to *SCJH**, there is exactly one individual that is a *U*; similarly, in *SCJH*, the Utterson of *SCJH**, i.e. *U**, would not occur, as it is not the case that, according to *SCJH*, there is exactly one individual that is a *U**.

Wolterstorff (1980:148), however, recognizes the phenomenon of one writer who writes about the same character in different works, as in the case of Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes, or even different writers who write about the same character, as in the case of Goethe and Marlowe, who write about Faust. To capture this, Wolterstorff (1980: 148-149)

[130] Wolterstorff (1980: 148).

distinguishes, among the component properties of a specific character, between its "central" and its "incidental" properties. Intuitively, the central properties are the ones that somehow capture the character in its essence, the properties that we called *salient* in many examples of the Introduction; in line with it, we shall also use this term. The *incidental* properties are instead the other component properties. On the basis of the central/incidental distinction, Wolterstorff admits that, given a maximal kind *K* delineated by story, we can view as a character of the story that subkind *K'* of *K* which has as component kinds precisely the kind-associates of the central properties of *K*, the central component kinds, as we may call them. A character of this sort is, in the terminology of the Introduction, a general character. As examples of central properties, Wolterstorff offers *being called Faust*, and *striking a pact with the devil*; they would be central properties of a Faust general character[131]. A character so understood is a story-free character, which can occur in different stories, or which "can be developed differently by different authors," as Wolterstorff (1980: 149) puts it.

In sum, there is the Faust general character, *F*, which has the component kinds, among others, Called *Faust* and Strikes A Pact With The Devil, as well as the specific Faust of Goethe's *Faust*, F_1, and the specific Faust of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, F_2, each of which has the same component kinds of *F*, along with several other component kinds[132]. Strictly speaking, *F*, F_1 and F_2 are three distinct entities. However, *F* is a subkind of both F_1 and F_2, and is present in both stories; that is, according to Goethe's *Faust*, there is exactly one individual that is an *F*, and, similarly, according to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, there is exactly one individual that is an *F*. F_1 is instead present only in Goethe's

[131] This is the "Faust character *simpliciter*," as Wolterstorff (1980: 148) puts it. It may be noted that this example is problematic, for it is questionable that being called with a certain name should ever count as a central feature of a character. If this were the case, we could hardly count as the same general character, e.g., the Zeus of Greek mythology and the Jupiter of Roman mythology. However, we may put this aside, as the issue here is that there are some central features, not which ones they are, and according to which criteria.

[132] Actually, in Marlowe there is the name "Faustus" rather than "Faust," but let us assume they are the same name, at least for the sake of the example.

Faust and F_2 only in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Similarly, to go back to our earlier example, there is the general Mr. Utterson, *U*, which presumably has (let us assume) the component kinds Lawyer, Man, and Somehow Lovable, as well as the specific Mr. Utterson of *SCJH*, U_1, which has as component kind Such That He Had Not Crossed The Doors Of A Theatre For Twenty Years, and the specific Mr. Utterson of *SCJH**, U_2, which has as component kind Such That He Had Not Crossed The Doors Of A Theatre For Ten Years; here, *U* is a subkind of both U_1 and U_2, and occurs in both stories.

We can define a notion of internal predication for characters, whether general or specific, as follows. A character *K*, a certain kind, is *internally P* if and only if its property-associate, being *k*, is such that it entails being *P*[133]. For example, both the general Mr. Utterson and the specific Mr. Utterson of *SCJH* are a kind with the component kinds Lawyer, Man, and Somehow Lovable; and, thus, they have a property-associate with these conjuncts: being a lawyer, being a man, and being somehow lovable. Clearly, this property-associate trivially entails each of its conjuncts. Moreover, e.g., it also entails being a mammal, since this property is entailed by the conjunct being a man. Hence, the general character Mr. Utterson is internally a man and also a mammal. We can also define the notion of a character's being ascribed a property by a story in which the character occurs. For a specific character *K* occurring in a story *S*, we may simply say that *K* is ascribed the property *P* by *S* if and only if *K* is internally *P*. For example, the specific Mr. Utterson of *SCJH* is ascribed being a mammal by *SCJH*, since, as we saw, it is internally a mammal. For a general character *K* occurring in a story *S*, we may say that *K* is ascribed the property *P* by *S* if and only if the specific character *K'* of *S*, of which *K* is a subkind, is internally *P*. For example, the General Mr. Utterson is ascribed by *SCJH* the property of being such that he had not crossed

[133] Wolterstorff (1980: 54) uses the notion of "essential within a kind" (as well as the related notion of analytic within a kind (1980: 56)). There is a problem for Wolterstorff, when there is an inconsistent story, since he does not assume that the entailment in question is paraconsistent. Hence, he restricts the use of this notion to possible characters (1980: 159).

the doors of a theatre for twenty years, since the specific Mr. Utterson of *SCJH* has internally this property.

On the other hand, a character, as an entity on its own, has its own properties beyond those that it has internally, or that are ascribed to it by a story. We may say that it has them *externally*. For example, the general character Mr. Utterson has the property of being considered a secondary character by literary critics, which is neither one of its internal properties, nor a property ascribed to it by a story. Wolterstorff (1980: 159-160) provides these examples. "Hamlet is neurotic" can be taken to be true, if understood as expressing an internal predication: the kind which is the Hamlet of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* has a property-associate which entails being neurotic. In contrast, "Hamlet has proved endlessly fascinating to psychoanalysts" is true, if understood as expressing an external predication: the kind in question actually has the property of being fascinating for psychoanalysts[134].

From the point of view of external predication, characters are complete and consistent just like any entity. That is, for any property *P*: either they exemplify property *P*, or they exemplify the negation of *P*, i.e., the property non-*P*, which makes them complete; moreover, it is not the case that they exemplify both *P* and non-*P*, which makes them consistent. In contrast, as we shall now see, from the point of view of internal predication, characters are incomplete and may also be inconsistent. In Wolterstorff's words, characters are "non-determinate kinds" (1980: 146-147). We may say that they are *incomplete*. We can understand this as follows: a character is incomplete in that there is a property *P* such the character is not internally *P* and it is not internally non-*P*. For example, the specific Mr. Utterson of *SCJH*, let alone the general Mr. Utterson, is not internally such that he had a toothache when he was four years old (to adapt an example by Wolterstorff (1980: 147)), since

[134] Here one could object that psychoanalysts are fascinated by the character Hamlet and not by a kind of the sort envisioned by Wolterstorff, as they never think that they have any such kind in mind when they feel the fascination. Wolterstorff could reply, however, that, if a character is a kind, they do think of a kind, even if they are not aware of it, when they think of a character.

the relevant property-associate neither entails being such that he had a toothache when he was four years old, nor entails being such that he did not have a toothache when he was four years old[135].

A story may be inconsistent and accordingly contain an inconsistent, or impossible, character. For example, as Wolterstorff suggests (1980: 156 ff.), an author introduces "a middle-aged man" of which it is first said that he is "dark," and then that he is "fair in complexion." In this case, we would have a character, a certain kind, which has a property-associate with both being dark and being fair in complexion as property components. Thus, the character in question is internally dark, since this property-associate trivially entails being dark, and also internally non-dark, since the property-associate in question also entails being non-dark (which is entailed by the conjunct being fair in complexion). In this sense, is this character impossible. In general, a character *K* is *inconsistent*, or *impossible*, if and only if, for some property *P*, *K* is internally *P*, and also internally non-*P*. Surely, Wolterstorff does not want to say that an impossible character has internally any property whatsoever. This would be implied, if the entailment relation presupposed in the notion of internal predication were the entailment of classical logic, for, as we saw, in classical logic a contradiction entails any proposition whatsoever. It is not clear how Wolterstorff would avoid this problem, but we can assume on his behalf that the result is avoided by taking the entailment relation to be a paraconsistent one, the same paraconsistent relation presupposed in the notion of a proposition's being true, according to a story.

Wolterstorff admits that concrete entities in the real world can sometimes be referred to by proper names used by writers in their works; more generally, we can say, they can sometimes be referred to by singular terms used by writers in their works. Thus, for example, when Gogol uses "Russia" in *Dead Souls*, he does refer to Russia. Hence, as Wolterstorff (1980: 141)

[135] In contrast with the kinds identified with fictional entities, the kinds to which we (and all real things) belong are determinate (Wolterstorff (1980: 147)).

puts it, *Dead Souls* is *anchored* to Russia. In addition to the real Russia to which this story is anchored, Wolterstorff (1980: 143) admits there is also the Russia of *Dead Souls* understood as a maximal kind delineated by the story, i.e., a certain specific fictional character. Presumably, there is also the Russia general character, a subkind of the Russia of *Dead Souls*, which also occurs in *Dead Souls*.

In sum, we can say that in Wolterstorff's approach *ficta* have the following identity condition:

> (INS-W) necessarily, for any *ficta* x and y, *fictum* x is identical with *fictum* y if and only if x and y are the same kind delineated by a story, i.e., x is a kind and there is story that delineates x, y is a kind and there is story that delineates y, and $x = y$.

Wolterstorff's account of the phenomenon of one *fictum* occurring in different stories has been criticized by Thomasson (1999: 59-60), as follows[136]:

> What, then, might count as such core properties? In Wolterstorff's example of Faust, he cites such core properties as striking a pact with the devil, being called "Faust," and so on […]. But could I not write a literary work in which Faust, in a less ambitious moment, decides not to make the pact with the devil and settles down to the quiet life of slow scientific inquiry? Surely it seems I could. So what are the relevant core properties? Even being called "Faust" seems inessential: I could write another play about a man very like Faust and call him "Phaust" but still be speaking of the same character. Just being a man? Then we fall into the unacceptable conclusion that all literary works about men – works about Holmes, Hamlet, Faust, and so forth – are really just expansions talking about one and the same basic character.

Thomasson's point is that, setting aside anything too poor to be distinctive (e.g., simply being a man), no sufficiently rich combination of features will do as salient features of a character, for we can in principle always have a new story with that

[136] Thomasson uses "core property" instead of "central property" or "salient property."

character as protagonist, without the character's being ascribed those features. We shall reconsider this issue in discussing Orilia's story-free, denoting-concept approach.

2. Ficta *as Story-Bound Roles*

According to Currie (1990), *ficta* are *roles*, that is, functions from possible worlds to individuals, where these functions are viewed as meanings of definite descriptions, as we shall see. A possible world semantics is presupposed, according to which, there are many distinct possible worlds, one of which is our own actual world; by taking for granted such worlds, the meanings of predicates and singular terms are specified. For example, the meaning of a predicate such as "former president of the US" is a function that, given as argument a world, yields as value the set of individuals which are former presidents of the US in that world. Thus, e.g., given the actual world as argument, the value will be a set comprising Bill Clinton and Donald Trump, whereas, given as argument a possible world in which Bill Clinton was president and then Hillary Clinton won the 2016 US elections against Trump, the value would be a set comprising Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton instead of Trump. Similarly, the meaning of a singular term such as the definite description "the president of the US in 2022" is a function that, given a possible world as argument, yields as value the unique individual, if any, that, in the world in question, has the property expressed by the predicate of the description. In our example, the predicate is "president of the US in 2022" and the property is being president of the US in 2022. Hence, if the argument is our actual world, the value is Joe Biden, but, if the argument is a possible world in which Trump rather than Biden won the 2020 elections, the value is Trump. Meanings of definite descriptions, so understood, are what Currie calls *roles*. The following convenient terminology will be useful: let us call *property component of a role* the property expressed by the predicate of the definite description which has the role in question as meaning. Thus, for example, the property component of the role meant by "the president of the US in 2022" is the property of being a president of the US in

2022. Let us now explain in simplified form what Currie has in mind when he proposes that *ficta* are roles.

Currie assumes that stories, at least if they are coherent, describe possible worlds. Many different possible worlds however can be described by the same story (1990: 54 ff.). Let us still use *SCJH* as an example. According to it, as we saw, there is a Mr. Utterson, who is a lawyer, is a man, is of a rugged countenance, etc. Let us say that F_1, …, F_n are all the features attributed to Mr. Utterson in the story. It is not true, according to the story, that Mr. Utterson weighs 75 kg, nor that he weighs 74 kg or 73 kg. Stevenson never specifies Mr. Utterson's weight. In sum, none of these specific weight properties is among the features F_1, …, F_n. On the assumption that *SCJH* is coherent, there is a possible world described by it, a world in which there is a man with all the features F_1, …, F_n. However, there is not just one such world. In a possible world in which there is a man, this man must have a specific weight. Thus, there is, e.g., a possible world in which there is a man with all the features F_1, …, F_n, and also the property of weighing 75 kg; another possible world in which there is a man with all the features F_1, …, F_n, and also the property of weighing 76 kg; another possible world in which there is a man with all the features F1, …, Fn, and also the property of weighing 77 kg; and so on and so forth. Clearly, assuming that there are possible worlds, even simply focusing on the weight of Mr. Utterson, we can see that there are infinitely many distinct possible worlds, each of which is described by, or fits, the story *SCJH*. In general, we can say that, for any coherent story, there are infinitely many possible worlds that fit the story (we shall discuss later what to make of incoherent stories).

Now consider that we could have a canonical representation of the text of a story, which uses variables bound by the existential quantifier "there is exactly …" in such a way that it is made explicit which individuals there are according to the story, and what features they have[137]. A new variable is introduced whenever the story says that there is someone or something with

[137] Currie (1990: 154).

features such and such. For example, consider this excerpt from the above *SCJH* quotations: "Mr. Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance […]. A maid-servant living alone […]." On the basis of it, we can say that the canonical description must include two distinct variables, say *x* and *y*, and include the following: "there is exactly one *x*, …, there is exactly one *y*, …, which are such that *x* is a mister and *x* is called *Utterson* and *x* is a man and *x* is of rugged countenance … and *y* is a maid-servant and *y* lives alone."[138] According to Currie (1990: 153), among the characters of a story, one should always include the fictional author or teller and thus among the variables of the canonical description there is always a distinct variable for such a teller.

From a canonical representation such as this, we can extract, for any variable that has been introduced, a corresponding definite description, that contains all the information conveyed by the story, and which, intuitively, corresponds to a character of the story[139]. For example, let us suppose that the canonical representation of a certain story is this: there is exactly one x_1, there is exactly one x_2, …, there is exactly one x_n such that $S(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n)$[140]. From it we can extract this definite description: the x_1 such that there is exactly one x_2, …, there is exactly one xn such that $S(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n)$. Similarly, from it we can extract this other definite description: the x_2 such that there is exactly one x_1, there is exactly one x_3, …, there is exactly one xn such that $S(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n)$. And similarly, for each variable that has been introduced. Let us call any such description a canonical description from the story in question. For example, from *SCJH*

[138] Currie (1990: 150) seems to say that only when there is a proper name is a variable introduced, but I think we can be more liberal, as it also seems suggested by an example regarding a lizard (1990: 157); this example also suggests that, for some variable, we may have the quantifier "there is," rather than "there is exactly," but we may leave this aside, for simplicity's sake.

[139] Currie (1990: 160).

[140] Here "$S(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n)$" is a complex sentential scheme involving the variables $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n$, such as the following one coming from *SCJH*: "x_1 is a mister and x_1 is called *Utterson* and x_1 is a man and x_1 is of rugged countenance … and x_2 is a maid-servant and x_2 lives alone … and x_n is called *Danvers Carew*." Here we are assuming, for the sake of providing a simple example, that *SCJH* introduces *n* characters and that the Utterson character is the first one to be introduced, the maid servant is the second one, and Danvers Carew is the *n*th one.

we can extract this canonical description: "the *x* such that … there is exactly one *y* … such that *x* is a mister and *x* is called *Utterson* and *x* is a man and *x* is of rugged countenance and *x* is called *Utterson* … and *y* is a maid-servant and *y* lives alone …" Similarly, from *SCJH* we can extract this other canonical description: "the *y* such that … there is an *x* … such that *x* is a mister and *x* is called *Utterson* and *x* is a man and *x* is of rugged countenance and … and *y* is a maid-servant and *y* lives alone …" Let us call them, for our convenience, *the Utterson description* and *the maid-servant description*, respectively.

We can now illustrate in which sense a character is a role. For instance, the character which is the Utterson of *SCJH* is the role which is the meaning of the Utterson description. Similarly, the character which is the maid-servant of *SCJH* is the role which is the meaning of the maid servant description. Thus, the Utterson of *SCJH* is a function that delivers as value a certain individual of a given possible world, if in such a world there is exactly one individual with the property component of the Utterson of *SCJH*, namely the property expressed by the predicate of the Utterson description. This individual uniquely exemplifies in the given world this property component; hence, in the given world this individual is a man, is a lawyer, is of rugged countenance, etc. Similarly, the maid-servant of *SCJH* is a function that delivers as value a certain individual of a given possible world, if in such a world there is exactly one individual with the property component of the maid servant of *SCJH*, i.e., the property expressed by the predicate of the maid-servant description. This must be an individual that, in the world in question, is a maid-servant, lives alone, etc.

It should be noted, however, that, according to Currie, a story can speak about entities in the real world, as it seems to be the case with Napoleon in *War and Peace*. According to Currie, this happens in particular when a referring proper name such as "Napoleon" is used in the text of a story with the intention by the fictional author to refer to the corresponding referent. When this is the case, the referent of the proper name is a character of the story, albeit not a *fictional* character of the story. As we understand Currie (1990:128-129), when there is a proper name

of this sort in the text of the story, no variable corresponding to it is introduced in the canonical representation and accordingly there is no corresponding canonical description. Hence, there is no role and not a fictional character in this case.

Just as in Wolterstorff's approach, in which characters are kinds, we can associate to any character understood as a role a specific property, and define the presence of the character in the story on the basis of such a property. The property associated to a character, which is a certain role, is what we have called the *property component* of the role, and the presence of the character in a story amounts to the fact that, according to the story, this property is uniquely exemplified. Moreover, we can say that a character, a certain role, has internally a property *P* if and only if the property component of the role entails being *P*, and we can add that a property *P* is ascribed to a character by the story in which the character is present if and only if the character has *P* internally. For example, the Utterson of *SCJH* is a character of *SCJH* in that it is a role with a certain property component, as we saw, and such a property component is such that, according to *SCJH*, there is exactly one individual with this property. On the basis of the Utterson description, we can say that the property component in question is something like this: being a man and being a lawyer, and being of rugged countenance, etc. Clearly a property of this sort trivially entails the property of being a man, and also the property of being a mammal. Hence, the Utterson of *SCJH* is internally a man, and also internally a mammal. Accordingly, the Utterson of *SCJH* is ascribed being a man, as well as being a mammal, by *SCJH*.

Just as in Wolterstorff, characters, *qua* entities on their own, roles in this case, have properties *externally*, independently of what they are attributed by a story. For example, we can still say that Hamlet has externally the property of being fascinating for psychoanalysts[141]. From this point of view, characters are complete and consistent entities. However, as we have done for

[141] Just like regarding Wolterstorff's approach, it could be objected that it is not a role that psychoanalysts find fascinating, and it could be replied that, if *ficta* are roles, it is in fact so, even though psychoanalysts are not aware of it.

Wolterstorff's approach, we can appeal to internal predication, to gather a sense in which characters are incomplete and could be inconsistent. Currie implicitly admits the incompleteness of characters when he explains that one story can correspond to many different possible worlds. As regards inconsistent characters, however, Currie's position is rather unsettled. On the one hand, he admits that there can be inconsistent stories (1990: 54 ff.), and thus implicitly admits inconsistent characters. For if a story is inconsistent all the canonical descriptions that can be gathered from it will involve a contradictory property component. However, since he relies on the machinery of possible worlds, he sets aside inconsistent stories and thus in the end he does not admit inconsistent characters (1990: 147). We could, however, go beyond what Currie explicitly admits and take into consideration inconsistent stories, with inconsistent characters, i.e., roles whose property component is contradictory.

It would seem that in this approach there are as many characters in a story as the numbers of distinct variables that are introduced in order to produce a canonical representation of a story, that is, as many characters as the numbers of canonical descriptions that can be obtained by the canonical representation in the way we have seen above. If so, it follows that, in a case such as that of Jekyll and Hyde, we have two distinct characters. Surely the canonical representation requires a variable, say z, in relation to when the text starts talking of a Dr. Jekyll, and then another variable, say w, in relation to when the text starts talking of a Mr. Hyde. Accordingly, two different canonical descriptions are generated; a Jekyll description, "the individual z such that z is such and such," involving "z is called *Jekyll*" as a conjunct, and a Hyde description, "the individual w such that w is called *Hyde*," involving "w is called *Hyde*" as a conjunct. Hence, there are two different roles, i.e., two different functions from possible worlds to individuals; one that assigns individuals in worlds to the former description, and another that assigns individuals in worlds to the latter description. In sum, there would be a Jekyll character and a distinct Hyde character. However, since the text tells us at some point that Jekyll is Hyde, surely an identity assertion involving these two distinct variables, i.e. "z =

w," will figure in the canonical representation. Accordingly, any world that fits this canonical representation will be a world in which there is just one individual that corresponds to both the Jekyll description and the Hyde description, and thus the two functions will always yield the same value in any world: if, for a world *W*, the role which is the meaning of the Jekyll description yields as value a certain individual, *i*, then, analogously, the role which is the meaning of the Hyde description also yields as value *i*. One could then assume that, by virtue of this, a unified description is generated, which, roughly speaking, encompasses all that is said of Jekyll and all that is said of Hyde. Such a description would stand for a unique role that counts as a single Jekyll/Hyde character[142].

If a *fictum* is a role in the way we have seen, it encompasses within itself the whole story in which it belongs, pretty much as it happens with the specific characters of Wolterstorff's approach; whatever is said in the text of a story is reflected in a property that the *fictum* has internally. For example, since the text of *SCJH* contains "A maid-servant living alone in a house from the river had gone to bed upstairs about eleven," the Utterson character has internally the property of being such that there is a maid servant living alone in a house from the river who had gone to bed upstairs about eleven. That is, characters are specific story-bound characters, and there cannot be the same character in different stories, a character that migrates from a story to another. Nevertheless, Currie admits that, if the stories make up a coherent series (even with different authors), we can view them as making up one big story. Thus, for example, we have the Sherlock Holmes of the whole Sherlock Holmes series. This Holmes is not identical to any of the Holmes of the single stories of the series. Nevertheless, each Holmes of any story of the series is a component of a larger Holmes of the series. For example, the larger Holmes is internally such that he investigates on the death of Enoch Drebber and also internally such that he spends some time in Dartmoor, since the Holmes of *A Study in*

[142] Currie has informed us in private communication that the latter alternative is his preferred line.

Scarlet has internally the former feature and the Holmes of the *Hound of the Baskervilles* has internally the latter feature. We can say, so to speak, that these two Holmes are the same in the sense that they are both components of the larger Holmes[143].

On the other hand, when we seem to speak of the same character in different stories, if we cannot coherently put together the stories, all we can say is that we simply have two distinct characters *tout court*. Currie provides as examples the Helen of Homer and the Helen of Euripides, who are ascribed incompatible properties[144]; they just are two different roles. Currie entertains the idea of carving a common core from the two roles, which may count as one role with which both characters could be identified, but rejects this idea: "don't know how this could be done" (1990: 178). He suggests that, when literary criticism seems to assume there is just one character in different stories, in fact proceeds in terms of similarity of roles (1990: 178). In sum, contrary to Wolterstorff, he rules out the idea of having general, story-free, characters, and only admits specific, story-bound, characters. In this way, one avoids at its roots Thomasson's criticism regarding the difficulty of individuating the salient features of a character, which we saw at the end of the previous section. On the other hand, the strong intuition that we may have, of one and the same character that is present in different stories, cannot be taken at face value.

In conclusion, we can provide the following identity condition for *ficta* in Currie's story-bound approach:

> (INS-C) necessarily, for any *ficta* x and y, *fictum* x is identical with *fictum* y iff if x and y are the same story-bound role, i.e., there is a story S and a canonical definite description "the F" from S, such that x is the meaning of "the F" and also y is the meaning of "the F."

143 Currie (1990: 177).

144 "Homer has Helen run off to Troy with Paris; Euripides has her spend the time in Egypt while a look-alike languishes in Troy" (Currie 1990: 177).

3. Ficta *as Denoting Concepts*

According to this approach, *ficta* are denoting concepts, more specifically, as we shall see, *definite* denoting concepts. In a sense that we shall now clarify, denoting concepts are properties of properties that can function as meanings of noun phrases such as "every cat," "some dog," "the president of Italy," and the like (Cocchiarella 2007; Orilia 2010). These meanings will be thus represented: [every dog], [some cat], [the president-of-Italy], and similarly for other noun phrases of this sort. Here, cat, dog, president-of-Italy, etc., are the properties expressed by "dog," "cat," "president of Italy," and so on. Following Montague's approach to natural language semantics (Janssen, Zimmerman 2021), for reasons that have to do with the compositionality of meanings, when these noun phrases occur in subject/predicate sentences such as "every dog is loyal," "some cat is pretty," or "the president of Italy is Sicilian," such sentences express a proposition in which the property expressed by the predicate is the item of which the property of properties expressed by the noun phrase is predicated: [every dog](loyal), [some cat](pretty), [the president-of-Italy](Sicilian). This makes sense in the light of how these properties of properties are defined, by taking advantage of the well-known language of first-order logic augmented with the variable-binding lambda operator, λ, which is read "being such that …" Through these means, for example, we define the property of being a bachelor, i.e., man, adult and unmarried, as follows: [λx man(x) & adult(x) & ~$\exists y$(married(x, y))], which can be read: being an x such that x is a man and x is adult and it is false that there is a y such that x is married to y. In a similar vein, [every dog] is defined as [$\lambda f \forall x$(dog(x) → f(x))], i.e., being an f such that, for every x, if x is a dog then x is f (i.e., being a property possessed by whatever is a dog); [some cat] is defined as [$\lambda f \exists x$(cat(x) & f(x))], i.e., being an f such that there is an x that is a cat and x is f (i.e., being a property possessed by something that is a cat); [the president-of-Italy] is defined as [λf $\exists x$(president-of-Italy(x) & $\forall y$(president-of-Italy(y) → $x = y$) & f(x))] (i.e., i.e., being an f such that there is exactly one x that is

president of Italy and x is *f*, i.e., being a property possessed by the unique thing which is president of Italy).

Now, consider that, once properties are represented in this way, that is, by taking advantage of the lambda operator, a logical principle, usually called "lambda-conversion," is taken for granted. According to it, to predicate a property [λx $A(x)$] of an item t, is equivalent to asserting $A(t/x)$: [λx $A(x)$] (t) $\leftrightarrow$ $A(t/x)$[145]. This equivalence grants that we assert precisely what should be meant in attributing the property in question, represented via the lambda operator. For example, to say that t has the property of being a bachelor, i.e., man, adult and unmarried, is to say [λx man(x) & adult(x) & ~$\exists y$(married(x, y))](t). This is equivalent, by lambda conversion, to: man(t) & adult(t) and ~$\exists y$(married(t, y)), i.e., t is man and t is adult and t is not married, which is precisely what we should expect, if we assert that t is a bachelor.

Analogously, to assert that every dog is loyal, i.e., [every dog] (loyal), amounts to asserting: $\forall x$(dog(y) $\rightarrow$ loyal(x)), i.e., for every x, if x is a dog, then x is loyal. And, in fact, since [every dog] is defined as [λf $\forall x$(dog(x) $\rightarrow f(x)$)], lambda conversion grants that [every dog](loyal) is equivalent to $\forall x$(dog(x) $\rightarrow$ loyal(x)). Similarly, that some cat is pretty, [some cat](pretty), is equivalent to $\exists x$(cat(x) & pretty(x)), i.e., there is an x such that x is a cat and x is pretty; and that the president of Italy is Sicilian, [the president-of-Italy](Sicilian), is equivalent to $\exists x$(president-of-Italy(x) & $\forall y$(president-of-Italy(y) $\rightarrow$ $x = y$) & $f(x)$), i.e., the unique thing which is president of Italy is Sicilian.

The denoting concepts which are of special interest for us here are those expressed by definite descriptions, such as "the president of Italy," or "the largest planet of the Solar system;" *definite denoting concepts*, as we shall call them. They have the form [the P], where P is the property expressed by the predicate of the corresponding definite description; P will be called the "property component" of [the P]. For instance, the property of

[145] As usual, "$A(t/x)$" stands for the formula that results from replacing "x" with "t" in A, wherever "x" is free, i.e., not bound by a quantifier or by the lambda operator.

being a planet larger than any other planet of the Solar system, expressed by the predicate "largest planet of the Solar system," is the property component of [the largest planet of the Solar system]. As we shall see in detail, it is with definite denoting concepts that *ficta* are identified in the denoting concept approach[146]. In this approach, a form of descriptivism for proper names is typically assumed (Orilia 2010a), according to which, any proper name, e.g., "John Smith," is seen as a definite description in disguise, "the John Smith," and thus expresses a definite denoting concept, [the John Smith], where "John Smith" expresses a property that is meant to individuate one object in particular. Following Orilia (2018), we may assume it is a property such as being baptized as "John Smith" at a certain specific time in a certain specific place.

A definite description may or may not refer to (or denote) one single entity; for instance, "the president of Italy" refers to Sergio Mattarella, whereas "the winged horse" does not refer to anything. Analogously, we can say that the corresponding denoting concept also refers, or fails to refer, as the case may be. This depends on whether or not the property component of the denoting concept is, or is not, uniquely exemplified: [the president-of-Italy] refers to Sergio Mattarella, since he is the unique individual that exemplifies the property of being president of Italy. On the other hand, [the winged horse] does not refer to anything, since nothing exemplifies the property of being a winged horse. Correspondingly, we say that the president of Italy exists, and that the winged horse does not, which can then be understood as the claims that [the president-of-Italy] refers to something, and [the winged horse] does not refer to anything, respectively. Let us say, in general, that a denoting concept that refers to something, e.g., [the president-of-Italy], is *referring*, and that a denoting concept that does not refer to anything, e.g., [the winged horse], is *non-referring*.

Moreover, two definite descriptions may happen to co-refer, i.e., refer to the same entity; for instance, "the winner

[146] We shall usually skip the qualifier "definite" in talking about definite denoting concepts; the context will supply it, when appropriate.

of the 2024 US presidential elections" and "the winner of the 2016 US presidential elections" both refer to Donald Trump. Correspondingly, we can also say that two denoting concepts may *co-refer*, or be *co-referring*. This happens when their property components are uniquely exemplified by the same entity. For instance, the same entity, Donald Trump, uniquely exemplifies the property of being winner of the 2024 US presidential elections, and also uniquely exemplifies the property of being winner of the 2016 US presidential elections. Hence, we say that the winner of the 2024 US presidential elections is the winner of the 2016 US presidential elections, which can be understood as the claim that there is one single entity referred to by both denoting concepts, i.e., [the winner of the 2024 US presidential elections] and [the winner of the 2016 US presidential elections].

It is important at this juncture to appreciate how the notions of reference and co-reference of denoting concepts can be deployed in relation to stories. For example, according to *A Study in Scarlet* (*SIS*, in short), Sherlock Holmes exists, and according to *SCJH*, Jekyll exists. Moreover, according to *SIS*, Sherlock Holmes is the best friend of Watson, and according to *SCJH*, Jekyll is Hyde. In the light of such truths, we can say that the denoting concept [the Sherlock Holmes] is referring in *SIS*, whereas the denoting concept [the Jekyll] is referring in *SCJH*. And, furthermore, the denoting concepts [the Sherlock Holmes] and [the best friend of Watson] are co-referring in *SIS*, whereas the denoting concepts [the Jekyll] and [the Hyde] are co-referring in *SCJH*.

We shall now focus on the story-bound and story-free views, in turn[147].

[147] These approaches based on denoting concepts take for granted a type-free logical framework, which allows for properties featuring in both subject and predicate position, without the restrictions imposed by type theory (which Russell introduced in order to deal with his and related paradoxes). Once *ficta* are identified with denoting concepts, the flexibility granted by type-freedom is instrumental in providing appropriate analyses for statements which are taken to be about *ficta* and thus about denoting concepts. For example, as we shall see below, the very same *fictum*, e.g., Sherlock Holmes (a certain denoting concept, say [the Sherlock Holmes]), can be taken to be (i) in subject position, e.g., in a proposition that attributes to it the property of being a *fictum*, i.e., the proposition *fictum*([the Sherlock Holmes]), and

3.1 Ficta *as Story-Bound Denoting Concepts*

In the story-bound approach, proposed by Cocchiarella and Landini[148], *ficta* are identified with definite denoting concepts relativized to stories, which could be viewed as meanings of definite descriptions involving a reference to a story, e.g., "the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet*." These relativized denoting concepts can be presented in abbreviated form as, for example, [the Sherlock-Holmes]$_{SIS}$, which is to be understood as the following property of properties: [λf in(*SIS*, [the Sherlock Holmes](f))], i.e., being an f such that, according to *SIS*, the Sherlock Holmes is f[149]. Thus, for example, when we predicate this property of the property of being a detective, we get the proposition [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$(detective), i.e., [λf in(*SIS*, [the Sherlock Holmes](f))](detective). This, by lambda-conversion, is equivalent, as expected, to: in(*SIS*, [the Sherlock Holmes](detective)). This is the proposition asserting that, according to *SIS*, Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

In general, a proposition of this form, [the P]$_S$(Q), where S is a story, can be seen as the ascription in a story S of a property

(ii) in predicate position, functioning as a property of a property, e.g., in a proposition such as this: according to *A Study in Scarlet*, Sherlock Holmes is a detective, i.e., in(*SIS,* [the Sherlock Holmes](detective)). (Note that the two propositions can be unproblematically conjoined: *fictum*([the Sherlock Holmes]) & in(*SIS,* [the Sherlock Holmes](detective)), which renders a claim such as "Holmes is a fictional character, although he is a detective, according to *SIS*." Landini, Cocchiarella, and Orilia, however, diverge on the kind of type freedom to be deployed. Cocchiarella and Landini have adopted an approach based on Quine's homogeneous stratification, whereas Orilia has sought other roads, including one based on Gupta's and Belnap's theory of circular definitions (Orilia 2000). For additional explanations and references on these issues, see Orilia, Paolini Paoletti (2025: § 6).

148 Cocchiarella (1982) first proposed that fictional objects could be viewed as properties of properties. Then, Landini (1986; 1990: 114) and Cocchiarella (1996: § 7; 2007: 164) took fictional objects to be denoting concepts relativized to stories of the kind to be presented in this section. It should be noted that both Cocchiarella and Landini distinguish between concepts (properties occurring in predicate position in a proposition) and concept-correlates (properties occurring in subject position in a proposition). Here we have avoided this distinction (which conflates the ontology).

149 It is assumed here that the assertion that, according to a certain story S, proposition A is the case, is formally represented as follows: in(S, A). Thus, e.g., the formal representation of the claim that according to *SIS*, Sherlock Holmes is a detective, is: in(*SIS*, [the Sherlock-Holmes](detective)).

Q to a character, [the P]$_S$; or, in other words, an internal predication of a property, Q, with respect to a character, [the P]$_S$. For [the P]$_S$(Q) is true just in case, according to the story S in question, the P is Q. Going back to the example of the Utterson of *SCJH*, who is internally a man and also internally a mammal, we can say that such claims are understood here as [the Utterson]$_{SCJH}$(man), and [the Utterson]$_{SCJH}$(mammal), which are both true, since, according to *SCJH*, Utterson is a man (it is explicitly said in the story) and also a mammal (since being a mammal is entailed by being a man). On the other hand, as in the other approaches that we have considered, *ficta* can have properties from the point of view of an external predication. For example, the Utterson of *SCJH* has, externally, the property of being considered a secondary character by literary critics. In this approach, this is understood as the proposition that attributes such a property to the denoting concept [the Utterson]$_{SCJH}$. If L is the property in question, we can formally represent this proposition thus: L([the Utterson]$_{SCJH}$).

Internal predication, as understood above, yields a sense in which fictional objects are incomplete or indeterminate, for, given the incompleteness of stories, one can always find a property Q such that it is neither the case that [the P]$_S$(Q), nor that [the P]$_S$(non-Q). For illustration, let us adapt once more Wolterstorff's example, and let T be the property of having suffered from a toothache when four years old; then, it is neither the case that, according to *SIS*, Sherlock Holmes has property T, nor that, according to *SIS*, Sherlock Holmes has property non-T. Hence, both [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$(T) and [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$(non-T) are false, and, accordingly, we can say that the Sherlock Holmes of *SIS* is incomplete. Similarly, we can have a sense in which *ficta* are inconsistent. Take again Wolterstorff's example of a story, S, in which a character is both dark and non-dark. Let us assume that this character is called "John Smith," so that, in the denoting-concept approach in question, this character is the denoting concept [the John Smith]$_S$. Then, both [the John Smith]$_S$(dark) and [the John Smith]$_S$(non-dark) are true; accordingly, the John Smith of story S is an inconsistent character.

If [the P]$_S$ is a fictional character, then [the P] is a denoting concept that is referring in S[150]. Now, typically, there are several distinct denoting concepts that are co-referring with [the P] in S. For example, as we have seen, [the Sherlock Holmes] and [the best friend of Watson] are co-referring in *SIS*. Now, consider [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$ and [the best friend of Watson]$_{SIS}$: they are two different denoting concepts, since being Sherlock Holmes and being best friend of Watson are two different properties. However, since [the Sherlock Holmes] and [the best friend of Watson] co-refer in *SIS*, we do not want to say that we have two different characters, the Sherlock Holmes of *SIS* and the best friend of Watson of *SIS*. It seems better to admit that, among the co-referring denoting concepts occurring in the story, there is only one *prominent* denoting concept, which can be associated to the story, and that corresponds to a character; it is, in other words, the character generated by the story. When a proper name is present, the prominent denoting concept associated to the story is, we may suggest, the one based on the proper name, e.g., in the example we are considering, [the Sherlock Holmes]. Thus, [the Sherlock Holmes] is the prominent denoting concept associated to *SIS*. In contrast, [the best friend of Watson] is not. Correspondingly, [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$ is a character, whereas [the best friend of Watson]$_{SIS}$ is not another character. This is not to say that, when a proper name is not present, we cannot have a prominent denoting concept; in that case it will be based on a definite description. For example, [the maid-servant living alone in a house from the river] could be a prominent denoting concept of *SCJH*. We leave it open, however, how the description is selected. On the other hand, when there is more than one name, as it is the case for Jekyll and Hyde in *SCJH*, presumably both names had better be taken into account, so as to consider prominent a denoting concept such as [the person called *Jekyll* and also called *Hyde*], in such a way that we have

[150] That is, it is such that, according to S, the P exists. In other words, according to S, there is one single entity that exemplifies the property P.

one character, namely, [the person called *Jekyll* and also called *Hyde*]$_{SCJH}$, or, in short, [the Jekyll/Hyde]$_{SCJH}$[151].

Clearly, characters as so conceived are story-bound: their very identities depend on specific stories and there cannot be the same character in two different stories. For example, since *SIS* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (*HB*, in short) are two different stories, [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$ and [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{HB}$ are two different characters. As Landini (1990: 117) puts it, the migration of a character from one story to another is simply the sameness of the denoting concept, [the Sherlock Holmes] in this case, which occurs in both stories[152]. Cocchiarella (2007: 164), on the other hand, suggests that we can appeal to Lewis' (1968) modal notion of counterpart: [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$ and [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{HB}$ are two different characters, i.e., two different denoting concepts, but they can be considered counterparts of one another, as relevantly similar things are said about them in the stories in question; for example, the following are both true: in *SIS*, Sherlock Holmes is a clever detective, and in *HB*, Sherlock Holmes is a clever detective. Similarly, according to Lewis' counterpart theory, that Socrates might not have drunk the hemlock amounts to this: there is a possible world in which a counterpart of Socrates, someone very much similar to Socrates but distinct from him, does not drink the hemlock.

As regards the issue of real objects occurring in stories, we could admit in this approach that a real object, e.g., London, occurs in a story, *S*. That is, it is a non-fictional character of S, to the extent that the denoting concept, [the London] in our example, occurs in *S*. Alternatively, or additionally, we could admit that we also have the fictional character [the London]$_S$, a denoting concept corresponding to a real object in that [the

[151] Cocchiarella does not consider this problem. Landini (1990: 116) tackles it, by stipulating that in this case we only have one character. But since the denoting concepts are distinct, it would follow that characters cannot be identified with denoting concepts.

[152] That is, the prominent denoting concept [the Sherlock Holmes] occurs both in the story *SIS* and the story *HB*, and on the basis of this one may say that the two distinct denoting concepts [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{SIS}$ and [the Sherlock Holmes]$_{HB}$ are in some sense "the same."

London] refers to a real object. Neither Cocchiarella nor Landini, however, are explicit on such issues.

In conclusion, we can assume the following identity condition for this approach:

> (INS-CL) necessarily, for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* if and only if *x* and *y* are the same story-bound denoting concepts, i.e., there is a story *S* and a prominent denoting concept [the *F*] associated to *S* such that $x = [\text{the } F]_S$ and $y = [\text{the } F]_S$.

3.2 Ficta *as Story-Free Denoting Concepts*

In the story-free denoting-concept approach defended by Orilia (2012, 2025), *ficta* are definite denoting concepts, which are *made salient* by a certain story, in a sense that we shall now explain.

Given a story *S*, there are usually various definite denoting concepts that are referring in *S*, and some of them are co-referring in *S*. Now, look at all the denoting concepts that are referring in a certain story as subdivided into distinct sets such that each set contains precisely all the denoting concepts that are co-referring, according to the story; we call them *character sets*. For example, given *SIS*, there will be a character set containing [the detective called *Sherlock Holmes*] as well as any other denoting concept that is referring in *SIS* and co-referring with [the detective called *Sherlock Holmes*], e.g., [the best friend of Watson]. Among the denoting concepts in any character set, one is maximal (2012: 584), in the sense that its property component puts together all that is said in the story about an individual; the property component of this maximal denoting concept can be seen as a vast conjunctive property. For example, as we saw, according to *SCJH*, there was an individual who is a mister and who is a lawyer and who is called *Utterson*, and … who is dreary and who is somehow lovable and … who is such that London was startled by a crime of singular ferocity … and who is such that a maid-servant living alone in a house from the river had gone to bed upstairs about eleven, and who had not crossed the doors of a theatre for twenty years, and so on and so forth.

The corresponding conjunctive property, mister and lawyer and called Utterson, etc., is the property component of a maximal denoting concept that is referring in *SCJH*: [the mister and lawyer and called *Utterson*, etc.], which we may conveniently call *the Utterson thick character*. In general, maximal denoting concepts that can be elicited from a story in the way we have seen are called *thick characters* of the story (2012: 585). They correspond to Wolterstorff's specific characters.

It is further assumed, however, that, given an appropriate interpretation of the story, only some among the conjuncts in the property component of a thick character are salient properties. Take only them as conjuncts in a conjunctive property and consider the denoting concept wherein the property component is such a conjunctive property. Such a denoting concept is, we can assume, a member of a character set of a story. It is however a privileged member, one that is made salient by the story in question[153]. Denoting concepts of this sort are, according to this approach, fictional characters (2012: 586)[154]: they correspond to the general characters of Wolterstorff's approach. In particular, they are fictional characters of the stories that make them salient (as we shall see, they can be characters of other stories as well, and thus they are story-free). For example, as regards the Utterson thick character, suppose that only these properties are salient: man, mister, lawyer, being Utterson, dreary, and somewhat lovable. Then, the denoting concept [the man and mister and lawyer and Utterson and dreary and somewhat lovable] is a denoting concept made salient by *SCJH*. We count it as a *fictum*, and in particular a *fictum* of *SCJH*, and we may

[153] Note here that we call *salient* both the denoting concept and the properties in the property component of the denoting concept.

[154] Like Wolterstorff, Orilia does not provide specific criteria that determine the salient properties. Differently from Wolterstorff, however, he admits that there may be different criteria that are equally good: "there is a conventional element in determining what the salient element of a character set is and we can imagine that there are different salient elements, depending on the selection criterion that we choose. Arguably, some criterion is better than another and perhaps literary criticism could always help us find the best one. But nothing like this seems forthcoming and we should, I think, live with the idea that different selection criteria are on a par" (Orilia 2012: 585).

further say that the properties mister, lawyer, being Utterson, dreary and somewhat lovable are the salient features of the *fictum* in question. It should be noted that this approach grants that there is one single Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde character, rather than two distinct characters, since [the Dr. Jekyll] and [the Mr. Hyde] are co-referring, according to *SCJH*, and accordingly belong in one character set (2012: 584). Intuitively, the maximal denoting concept in this character set will put together all that is said in the story about Jekyll and all that is said in the story about Hyde and then presumably the corresponding salient denoting concept will involve both features attributed to Jekyll and features attributed to Hyde.

We shall now clarify how *ficta*, as so understood, are story-free, and can thus migrate from one story to another, or, to put it otherwise, can be present in more than one story. Two senses in which a *fictum* can be present in a story are acknowledged. Let us focus first on the primary one, which is simply the fact that the *fictum* is a denoting concept that is referring in the story. Thus, for example, the Utterson of *SCJH* is the denoting concept [the mister and lawyer and Utterson and dreary and somewhat lovable], and this denoting concept is referring according to *SCJH*. Hence, in this primary sense, the Utterson of *SCJH* is present in *SCJH* (2012: 586). Now, if a *fictum*, [the *P*], is primarily present in a story *S*, it may well happen that [the *P*] is also referring in another story *S*'. If so, the *fictum* in question is primarily present in both stories. To illustrate, consider the case of a writer who, independently of Doyle, writes a story very similar to *SIS* (2012: 587). In such a case, the two stories make salient, we may assume, the same Sherlock Holmes character, a certain denoting concept which is referring in both stories.

Before moving to the second sense in which a *fictum* may be present in a story, there is now an important qualification to be made. The idea that a certain denoting concept is made salient by a story really regards stories that generate a new character. Thus, for example, we take *SIS* to be the story that generates the Sherlock Holmes character, and *SCJH* to be the story that generates the Jekyll/Hyde character. In this approach, this is understood as *SIS*'s making salient a certain denoting concept,

and *SCJH*'s making salient a certain other denoting concept. It is however acknowledged that an author may want to connect to a previous story of which she is aware and create a new story wherein a character of that previous story is somehow present (2012: 587). When this is the case, the new author has an intention to do this[155], and typically signals this via a certain denoting concept that is referring in both the old story and the new story; e.g., in both *SIS* and *HB*, [the Sherlock Holmes] is referring[156]. However, it is only the old story that makes salient a certain denoting concept. From the perspective of this approach, this is what the creation of a character, in this case the Sherlock Holmes character, amounts to. The new story, instead, does not create a new Sherlock Holmes character; that is, there is no denoting concept that, according to the new story, is co-referring with [the Sherlock Holmes] and is also made salient by the new story. It is rather the case, we may say, that a denoting concept that is referring in the new story is appropriately linked to a denoting concept made salient by the previous story, thanks to the intention of the author of the new story. Let us say that in this case that the new story is *intentionally connected* to the salient denoting concept of the previous story. We then say that in the new story the old character is present, in a *secondary* sense of presence (2012: 587).

It is important to note that this secondary presence of an old character in a new story may be such that, according to the new story, the character in question may fail to have its salient features; that is, the old character, to which the new story is intentionally connected, may fail to be a denoting concept that

[155] As made clear in Orilia (2025: §2.5), this intention need not conscious, as we shall see in discussing (6b).

[156] Orilia (2025: § 2.5) provides further details and explains that we can also have less typical cases of this secondary presence, cases in which the author of the new story does not appeal to the same denoting concept of the previous story, but to another denoting concept with an appropriate historical connection. For example, in his *Ulysses* Alfred Tennyson uses the proper name "Ulysses" and thus appeals to the denoting concept *[the Ulysses]* rather than to the denoting concept *[the Odysseus]*, which instead occurs in the *Odyssey*. However, there is a historical connection between the two names and thus between the two denoting concepts, and Tennyson appears to have the intention of making the Odysseus character of the *Odyssey* also a character of *Ulysses*.

is referring, according to the new story. As an example, Orilia considers the movie *Without a Clue* (*WAC*, in short), according to which, Sherlock Holmes is a pretty stupid actor, rather than a clever detective. Orilia assumes that being clever is one of the salient features of the original Sherlock Holmes character, to which the author of *Without a Clue* wants to connect. Hence, the original Sherlock Holmes character is a denoting concept with a property component that involves as conjunct the property of being clever. This character is secondarily present in *WAC*, and yet, according to *WAC*, Sherlock Holmes is stupid and not clever (2012: 587). In this way, Thomasson's criticism to Wolterstorff (considered at the end of § 1) is taken into account.

The issue of real objects as characters can be handled in this approach in analogy with the treatment of the secondary presence of old characters in new stories[157]. That is, we can assume that the author's recourse in a story text to a singular term that refers to a real object may simply establish a connection to previous uses of this term that refer to this object, rather than giving rise to a certain denoting concept's being made salient by the story. Consider, e.g., the use of "London" by Doyle in realizing the text of *SIS*. There is a denoting concept, [the London], expressed by "London," which is referring, according to *SIS*, just as, according to *SIS*, the denoting concept expressed by "Sherlock Holmes" is referring. Yet, in the former case, the connection to previous uses of "London," and thus the reference to London of [the London], precludes the generation of a *fictum*, and rather makes it the case that the story is, *inter alia*, about London. London can then be considered a character of the story, but not a *fictional* character of the story.

As in the other approaches that we have considered, we can attribute properties to *ficta* in both an internal and in an external

[157] Orilia (2012) is not quite explicit on this, but it is hinted in note 9, p. 583. The issue is then explicitly considered in Orilia (2025: § 3.1), where, however, an alternative idea is also considered. According to it, the use in the text of a story of a singular term that refers to a real object may also be seen as giving rise to a salient denoting concept and thus to a fictional object. Accordingly, e.g., there would be a fictional London which is a character of *SIS*. For simplicity's sake, we shall ignore this alternative here.

way. A *fictum* is internally *P* if and only if its property component entails the property *P*. Thus, to take the usual example, the Utterson character of *SCJH*, i.e., the denoting concept [the man and mister and lawyer and Utterson and dreary and somewhat lovable] has internally the properties being a man and being a mammal, since these properties are entailed by the property component of the denoting concept in question. On the other hand, *ficta* have properties in an external way, in that denoting concepts simply can exemplify properties. For instance, the Utterson character exemplifies the property of being considered a secondary character by literary critics[158]. Just as in the other approaches, *ficta* are incomplete and possibly inconsistent from the point of view of internal predication, but are complete and consistent, as any other entity, from the point of view of external predication. As regards the notion of the ascription of a feature to a *fictum*, in this approach we must make a distinction between the case in which the *fictum* is primarily present in the story, and the case in which it is only secondarily present. Let us illustrate this with two examples. The Sherlock Holmes of *SIS* is, let us assume, the denoting concept [the clever and detective and …], which is referring, according to *SIS*. In this case, the fact that the Sherlock Holmes of *SIS* is ascribed by *SIS* the property of investigating on the death of Enoch Drebber amounts to it being the case that, according to *SIS*, the clever detective … investigates on the death of Enoch Drebber, i.e., more formally, in(*SIS*, [the clever and detective and …](investigates on the death of Enoch Drebber)). Now consider that the Sherlock Holmes of *WAC* is also the denoting concept [the clever and detective and …] (to which *WAC* is intentionally connected). This denoting concept is however only secondarily present in *WAC*. The fact that it is ascribed the property of being an actor by *WAC* amounts to this: there is a denoting concept, [the Sherlock Holmes], linked to [the clever and detective and …], such that according to

[158] Just like regarding Wolterstorff's and Currie's approach, it could be objected that it is not a denoting concept that literary critics consider a secondary character, and it could be replied that, if *ficta* are denoting concepts, it is in fact so, even though literary critics are not aware of it.

WAC, Sherlock Holmes is an actor; more formally, in(*WAC*, [the Sherlock Holmes](actor)).

In conclusion, we can assume the following identity condition:

> (INS-O) necessarily, for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* iff (i) *x* is a denoting concept such that there is a story that makes *x* salient, (ii) *y* is a denoting concept such that there is a story that makes *y* salient, or which is intentionally connected to *x*, and (iii) $x = y$[159].

4. *Case Studies*

We shall now turn to the case studies presented in the introduction and consider how they can be handled by the four views presented above. Here is the first group of statements:

(1) Holmes is Holmes;
(2) Holmes is not Watson;
(3) Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde.

If we regard them as paratextual, as implicitly relativized to a story, all the approaches can take them to be true. In all of them, the proposition that Holmes is Holmes and the propositions that Holmes is not Watson are true according to a story, e.g., *SIS*; and the proposition that Jekyll is Hyde is true, according to *SCJH*.

But suppose we take (1)-(3) as metatextual assertions regarding *ficta* named by the singular terms in question. In the story-free views by Wolterstorff and Orilia, we can plausibly take the terms as names of story-free *ficta*, either non-maximal kinds (for Wolterstorff) or salient denoting concepts (for Orilia).

[159] For an example regarding case (i), consider the Holmes of *SIS* and the Holmes of the very similar story *SIS'* imagined above; they are identical in that the former is a denoting concept made salient by the story *SIS*, and the latter is the very same denoting concept made salient by the story *SIS'*. For an example regarding case (ii), consider that the Holmes of *SIS* and the Holmes of *WAC* are identical in that the former is a denoting concept made salient by the story *SIS* and the latter is this very same denoting concept, to which *WAC* is intentionally connected.

This of course presupposes that (i) in the Holmes stories there is the presence of two distinct general characters denoted by "Holmes" and "Watson," respectively, and (ii) in *SCJH* and subsequent versions there is the presence of one general character denoted by both "Jekyll" and "Hyde." In contrast, in the story-bound views by Currie and by Cocchiarella and Landini, the best we can do is to take the terms of (1)-(3) as referring to story-bound *ficta*, whether roles presupposing a specific story, or denoting concepts relativized to stories. Thus, "Holmes" and "Watson" must be understood as short, e.g., for "the Holmes of *SIS*" and "the Watson of *SIS*." Similarly, "Jekyll" and "Hyde" must be understood as short for "the Jekyll of *SCJH*" and "the Hyde of *SCJH*." This seems a disadvantage, since the terms in question do not involve this reference to a specific story and yet intuitively they are taken as names of *ficta*. There is a further issue to be considered regarding Currie's approach. Recall that two alternative options seem to be available in a case such as that of Jekyll and Hyde: one leads to two distinct Jekyll and Hyde character, and thus takes (3) to be false; another leads to a single Jekyll/Hyde character, and thus takes (3) to be true.

Let us now consider:

(4) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*;
(5) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie *Sherlock Holmes*.

The story-free views can take them at face value as true, given that they acknowledge one and the same Holmes general character, occurring in the stories in question, and referred to by the singular terms of these sentences. In contrast, the story-bound views must approach (4)-(5) differently, since they rule out such general characters. There is the option, suggested by Cocchiarella, to take (4)-(5), not literally, but as asserting that distinct *ficta* are counterparts of one another. This option, however, clearly suggests that these sentences, taken literally, are false. Alternatively, following Currie, as we saw, we could assume there is an extended coherent story, call it *SHS*, made up by all the Sherlock Holmes stories. And then we could take all the

definite descriptions in (4) and (5) to stand for the role based on the comprehensive description associated to the occurrence of the name "Sherlock Holmes" in *SHS*. All such definite descriptions would refer to the same role, and accordingly (4) and (5) would be true. *Mutatis mutandis*, we could say something similar for the Cocchiarella-Landini approach. A problematic aspect of this proposal, however, is that the identity of a character changes any time a new story is added to the series. For example, "the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*" did not denote, when Doyle wrote *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the same character that it denotes now, after Guy Ritchie's movie, for the extended Sherlock Holmes story at that previous time is only a part of the extended story now. Hence, two different Sherlock Holmes roles are associated to such different extended stories, one of which is only a part of the other.

Turn now to:

> (6) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *Without a Clue*;
> (6a) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as Rapper Holmes;
> (6b) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II*.

From the perspective of Wolterstorff's approach, all these statements should be considered false. If we take the terms to stand for maximal kinds, they all stand for different kinds and this makes the statements false. But even if we take the terms to stand for general characters, i.e., non-maximal kinds, the statements can hardly be true, for all the "Holmes" terms here seemingly must pick up different Holmes general characters. This is because the salient features that we can associate to them, according to the different stories, vary sensibly. For instance, in *Without a Clue*, Holmes is stupid rather than amazingly intelligent, and in the story of Rapper Holmes, Holmes is a rapper who lives in XX Century Atlanta, whereas the original Holmes lives in London around 1900 and has never heard of rapper music. Here we have the problem underlined by Thomasson, which we saw at the end of § 1. It is a problem, of

course, if statements such as these are true. Their claim to truth, however, does have some plausibility.

These statements should be considered false also from the standpoint of Currie's approach. Given "Holmes discrepancies" such as those that we have just noted, we have here post-Doyle Sherlock Holmes stories that cannot coherently be added to Doyle's previous ones (Currie 1990: 177). In particular, there are in these stories Sherlock Holmes characters with features that are at odds with those of the original Holmes. Thus, the four definite descriptions in these statements refer to four distinct roles, and accordingly all these statements are false. For analogous reasons, these statements are false for the Cocchiarella-Landini approach.

In contrast, in Orilia's approach, (6), (6a), and (6b) can be taken to be true. For the second singular term in each of these sentences may well stand for the salient denoting concept referred to by "the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet*," which is present in a primary sense in *SIS*, and is also present, albeit only in a secondary sense, in the three post-Doyle stories in question. This depends on the assumption that the use of "Sherlock Holmes" by the authors of such post-Doyle stories is appropriately connected to Doyle's original story: the denoting concept expressed by this term must be intentionally connected to that story. As we saw in the Introduction, the nature of the author's intention as regards this connection is different in the three post-Doyle stories. However, at least to the extent that the intention is judged to be sufficiently strong, in Orilia's approach any such story does not determine a new character[160]; it rather attributes deviant features to an old character, which is secondarily present in the story in question; accordingly, the statements are true[161].

Let us move to:

(7) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Unaware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*;

[160] That is, the post-Doyle story does not make a certain denoting concept salient.
[161] Otherwise the statements are false.

(8) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Aware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*.

As regards them, Wolterstorff's approach would presumably decree that all the three versions of *Don Quixote* delineate the same person-kind, which is referred by the three definite descriptions of these sentences. Accordingly, this approach takes (7) and (8) to be true, regardless of the intentions of Unaware Pierre Menard and Aware Pierre Menard. *Mutatis mutandis*, a similar response can also be attributed to Orilia's view.

In the Cocchiarella-Landini approach, we could take these statements to be true, if we could take all the stories in question to be really just one story, call it *S*. Then, we could say that all the singular terms stand for the same story-bound denoting concept, [the $DQ]_S$, regardless of the intentions of the authors. However, if the stories are different, even if extremely similar, the story-bound denoting concepts are different (even if very similar), and thus strictly speaking the statements are false. We can at most say that the denoting concepts are counterparts of each other in a very strong sense, given the strong similarity.

According to Currie, (7) is false. For one thing, he says, in determining the content of a story, one must take into account the relevant background information presupposed by the author, and presumably this background information would not be the same for the two authors in question. Moreover, according to Currie's approach, as we have seen, one of the characters of a story is always the narrator, or fictional author, of the story, and we must assume that we have here two different narrators. Hence, even if the background information were the same, we would still have two different stories, because of the difference in narrators (Currie 1990: 178-179). Now, since the role with which a character is identified depends on what exactly the story is, two different stories, even if almost identical, as it would be the case here, cannot generate the same roles. Thus, the two definite descriptions in (7) stand for different roles and accordingly this statement is false. We have distinguished (7) and (8), because of the different identifying intentions of Aware Pierre Menard and Unaware Pierre Menard. However,

in Currie's approach, such intentions are irrelevant and other considerations regarding background information and the fictional author are in place. Such considerations are alike for both (7) and (8), and accordingly, (8) should be deemed false just like (7), for the very same reasons.

Consider now:

> (9) the real Napoleon is the same as the Napoleon of *War and Peace*;
> (10) the legendary King Arthur is the same as the King Arthur of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*;
> (11) the mythical Zeus is the same as the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*.

As we saw, Wolterstorff admits that a proper name used in a story can refer to a real object, but nevertheless this real object is something other than the fictional character, understood as a kind, to which the proper name can also be associated. In other words, the Napoleon of *War and Peace* is a certain person kind and the real Napoleon is a concrete individual. Accordingly, (9) is false. Similarly, (10) is false if "the legendary King Arthur" succeeds in referring to a concrete individual of which the original King Arthur legends speak. On the other hand, if we look at such legends as making up a story which determines a person kind to which "the legendary King Arthur" refers, then we could take (10) to be true, to the extent that: (i) this person kind is a general character, and (ii) the very same general character is determined by *The Warlord Chronicles* and can work as referent of "the King Arthur of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*." Similarly, (11) can be taken as true only to the extent that the same general Zeus character is referred to by "the mythical Zeus" and "the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*."

As regards (9), Currie's approach clearly has it that this statement is true. Currie distinguishes between proper names used as directly referring and proper names used to introduce a fictional character in a story, and admits that an author can use a proper name as directly referring in order to speak about a real person in a story. This happens, according to Currie, when

it is reasonable to infer that the fictional author intended to refer to this person, and it is common knowledge at the time of the writing that the person has by and large the features ascribed to them in the story[162]. "Napoleon" as used by Tolstoy in *War and Peace* is explicitly cited as an example of this (Currie 1990: 129). Hence, we may say that the two definite descriptions in (9) stand for the same entity, and accordingly (9) is true.

What about (10) and (11) in Currie's approach? Given his distinction on the use of proper names in fiction, it seems that it all depends on how we interpret the use of "Arthur" and "Zeus" in the relevant stories. Let us assume that "the legendary King Artur" is understood as "the King Arthur of story *KA*," where *KA* is the sequence of early Middle Ages King Arthur stories in which the proper name "Arthur" occurs. Suppose all of this: (i) in *KA*, King Arthur is ascribed features that, according to common knowledge (at the time of the writing of *KA*), were King Arthur features; (ii) the authors intended to use "Arthur" to refer to a real person; and (iii) King Arthur in fact existed. Then, the legendary King Arthur is a real person, referred to by "King Arthur," as used in KA. If so, for (10) to be true, "King Arthur" as used in *The Warlord Chronicles* must also refer to the same real person, there must be Cornwell's intention to use the name to refer to a real person, and in Cornwell's story King Arthur must be ascribed features that, according to common knowledge (at the time of the writing of *The Warlord Chronicles*), were King Arthur features. In sum, if these conditions regarding common knowledge and authors' intentions are fulfilled and there really was a King Arthur, then (10) is true. These conditions as a matter of fact appear difficult to fulfill, and, if they are not, the alternative is to view one or the other of the descriptions in (10), or both, to stand for a role. In all such cases, (10) must be false. For even if both definite descriptions stand for roles, there must be different roles for the two descriptions, since, as we saw, roles are strictly tied to stories and, in this case, we have two

[162] Currie admits that sometimes it is "indeterminate" if these conditions are satisfied and the name in question refers to a real person or not (Currie 1990: 129). It is not clear if the indeterminacy in question is epistemic or ontic.

different stories. As regards (11), we could say similar things about common knowledge and authors' intentions. However, in this case, we should take for granted that there isn't any Zeus to be referred to by "Zeus," and Riordan surely did not intend to use this name as directly referential. Hence, at least "the Zeus of Rick Riordan novel *The Lightning Thief*" refers to a role. "The legendary Zeus," on the other hand, is either an empty term or stands for a different role (since roles are strictly tied to stories). In either case, (12) cannot be true.

As regards the denoting concept approaches, only Orilia (2025) gives indications about the treatment of such cases. The idea is that only when a singular term used in the story is non-referring (at least prior to the creation of the story) can the story be seen as a generator of a fictional character, a certain salient denoting concept, to which the singular term refers in metafictional discourse. In this perspective, the Napoleon of *War and Peace* is not a salient denoting concept and (9) is true. Similarly, (10) is true, if there is a concrete individual which is the legendary King Arthur. As regards (11), we may assume that "Zeus," as used in the myths, is non-referring, even if the authors of the myths took it to be referring. If we take the *corpus* of the myths to be a generator of a Zeus fictional character, a certain salient denoting concept, we can in principle assume, from Orilia's perspective, that such a denoting concept is referred to by "the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*." Accordingly, (11) could count as true.

Let us turn to the issue of groups, illustrated in the Introduction by these examples:

> (12) each orc of Sauron's army in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is distinct from the others;
> (13) each fictional twin in a pair of indiscernible fictional twins is distinct from the other.

Let us note first that (12) and (13), understood as paratextual, could be taken as trivially true in all the approaches that we are considering. The sentence "each orc of Sauron's army is distinct from the others" can be seen as making both (i) the informative existential claim that there are members of Sauron's army

and (ii) the tautologous claim that any two such members are distinct[163]. This is a proposition implied by the story, and thus true according to the story. Similarly, "each twin is distinct from the other" can be taken to make both the informative existential claim that (i) there are two twins, and (ii) the tautologous claim that each of them is distinct from the other. This is a proposition that is true, according to a story that speaks of two twins, say *The Robinson Twins* story, without differentiating them[164]. Now, (14) can be taken to mean that, according to *The Robinson Twins*, this proposition is true. In sum, both (12) and (13) can be seen as paratextual truths.

The paratextual truth of these sentences might suggest that there are several distinct orc characters in Tolkien and two distinct Robinson twin characters in *The Robinson Twins*. There seems to be a problem here for Wolterstorff's view[165]. For from the perspective of Wolterstorff, *The Lord of the Rings* should involve an orc of Sauron's army kind, which should be viewed as a single character, although it is true in the story that this kind has more than one instance. Similarly, a story with two undifferentiated twins, such as *The Robinson Twins*, should involve a Robinson twin kind that should be viewed as a single character, although it is true in the story that this kind has two instances.

One could say perhaps that this is as it should be: in Tolkien's story there is one character which is the army and in *The Robinson Twins* there is *one* character that is the Robison twins, except that they are peculiar in that they are plural characters, where this means that there are distinctness truths regarding them, that is, paratextual truths such as those we saw above. The problem with Wolterstorff, however, is that

[163] This could be formalized as follows: there are x and y such that x is distinct from y and that x is an orc in Sauron's army and y is an orc in Sauron's army and for any two individuals x and y such that x is an orc in Sauron's army and y is an orc in Sauron's army, it is the case that x is distinct from y.

[164] We appeal here to an example made up by Walton (1983) in order to criticize Wolterstorff's theory.

[165] Pointed out by Walton (1983).

no difference is made between plural characters and normal individual characters. In both cases they are kinds.

In Currie there is a solution to this. He explicitly discusses this issue. He considers the case of a story that talks about the Wapping gang, without talking of specific members of the gang (Currie 1990: 175). He proposes that in a case like this there is a character, the Wapping gang who robbed a bank, understood as a role filled in a possible world, not by a single individual, but by a mereological sum of individuals. In this case, the definite description is "the *x* such that *x* is the sum of several people who robbed the bank" (Currie 1990: 176). We could say that we have a plural role in this case. Similarly, we could have a plural role for the orcs of Sauron army and a plural role for the Robinson twins.

As regards the denoting concept approaches, Orilia (2025: 3.2) proposes an analogous treatment of such cases, with a distinction between plural characters and individual characters. Individual characters are definite denoting concepts of the sort we have seen. Additionally, there is a further appeal to other sorts of denoting concepts as plural characters, which refer, according to a given story, to groups rather than to single individuals. For example, it is suggested that the *Lord of the Rings* generates as character a salient denoting concept such as *[the army and led by Sauron and made of orcs and …]*, which "the Sauron's army of *Lord of the Rings*" can be taken to denote.

Let us now turn to the issue of indeterminacy raised by these examples:

> (14a) it is indeterminate that, according to *Pale Fire*, Shade is the same as Kinbote;
> (14 b) the Shade of *Pale Fire* is the same as the Kinbote of *Pale Fire*;
> (15a) according to Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, it is indeterminate that Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room;
> (15b) Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room.

Orilia (2025: § 3.3) focuses explicitly on these cases of this sort and reaches verdicts on them in the way that we shall now

see. Seemingly, the other approaches all reach the same verdicts and so we shall assume.

As regards (14a), it is accepted as true, understood as the claim that, from the text of Pale Fire (plus the relevant background knowledge), it is neither possible to infer that Shade is Kinbote, nor possible to infer that Shade is not Kinbote. Precisely because of that, (14b) is taken to be false. Thus, Shade and Kinbote turn out to be distinct characters, rather than examples of ontic indeterminacy.

As regards (15a), to take it as true in the approaches under consideration, we must presume that they allow for a proposition's being asserted to be indeterminate, specifically the proposition that Kumiko is the woman in the hotel room. Let us then grant this and in particular that (15a) is true. Nevertheless, one could say that it does not follow that the corresponding identity proposition, namely (15b), is indeterminate and thus brings about ontic indeterminacy. We may assume that a character (a kind, a role, a denoting concept) corresponds to "Kumiko" and a character (a kind, a role, a denoting concept) corresponds to "the woman in the hotel room." But since, by assumption, it cannot be inferred that, according to the story in question, Kumiko is the woman in the hotel room, we presumably should say that the character associated to "the woman in the hotel room" is different from the one associated to "Kumiko."[166] Hence, (15b) is considered false, rather than indeterminate.

Turn now to the inconsistency problems illustrated by:

(16a) according to *Un drame bien parisien*, the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul;
(16b) the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul.

[166] It may be objected that presumably it is also not possible to infer from the story that Kumiko is not the woman in the hotel room. Even so, one could insist that, if the story does not grant that Kumiko is the woman in the hotel room, then the story cannot generate one comprehensive Kumiko/woman-in-the-hotel-room character.

Although not all the supporters of the approaches that we are considering explicitly address the phenomenon of inconsistent stories, we agreed to take for granted, for all the approaches, that there can be inconsistent stories, and consequently that what is true in a story depends on a paraconsistent entailment. Accordingly, (16a) could be considered true in all the approaches[167]. It need not follow, however, that the contradiction (16b) is also true. Presumably, since, according to the story, the Templar is the same as Raoul, the story determines a single Templar/Raoul character, which is internally both Raoul and Templar[168]. Hence, it is true that the Templar of *Un drame bien parisien* is the Raoul of *Un drame bien parisien*, i.e., the first conjunct of (16b) is true, and the second conjunct is false. However, since it is also the case that, according to the story, the Templar is not the same as Raoul, this Templar/Raoul character is an inconsistent character: it has internally the property of being identical to the Templar and also the property of not being identical to the Templar, and similarly it has internally the property of being identical to Raoul and also the property of not being identical to Raoul.

Let us move to fusion and fission:

(17) the Berget and the Vington of the 1912 *Recherche* are the Vinteuil of the final *Recherche*;
(18) the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Queen of Hearts and the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Among the approaches in question, only Orilia (2012: 598) addresses this issue, and with these very examples. His solution relies on having story-free characters, understood as salient denoting concepts. Let us see how he deals with (17). Recall that we should also assume that the Berget and the Vington of the 1912 *Recherche* are distinct characters, and this seems in

[167] This does some violence to Currie's approach, given what Currie (1990: 87-89) says about inconsistent fiction.

[168] As we saw in discussing the Jekyll/Hyde example, there is an issue to be resolved in Currie's case, but let us ignore this problem here.

conflict with (17), since this tells us that there is one character to which they are identical. Hence, the fear of a contradiction arises. Similarly, a fear of contradiction arises for (18), since we should assume that the Queen of Hearts and the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland* are distinct characters.

Orilia's solution addresses explicitly (17), by proposing this analysis: (i) there is a general character referred by "the Berget of the 1912 *Recherche*," i.e., a certain salient denoting concept, [the B], which is primarily present in the 1912 *Recherche*; similarly, (ii) there is another general character referred by "the Vington of the 1912 *Recherche*," i.e., a certain salient denoting concept, [the V], which is primarily present in the 1912 *Recherche*; moreover, (iii) there is still another general character referred by "the Vinteuil of the final *Recherche*," i.e., a certain salient denoting concept, [the V'], which is primarily present in the final *Recherche*; and (iv) according to the final *Recherche*, [the B], [the V], and [the V'] are co-referring.

Note that this account gives us a sense in which, according to the final *Recherche*, there is one single Berget/Vington/Vinteuil character (as testified by point (iv), the co-reference of [the B], [the V], and [the V'] in the final *Recherche*), even though, according to the 1912 *Recherche*, there are two distinct Berget and Vington characters (as it is not asserted that [the B] and [the V] are co-referring in the 1912 *Recherche*)[169]. No contradiction can arise from this. Orilia remarks that an analogous account of (18) can be offered. And in fact we could propose this analysis: (i) there is a general character referred by "the Queen of Hearts

[169] This analysis does not require that the Vinteuil of the final *Recherche* incorporates all the salient features of both Berget and Vington. For example, suppose that the salient features of Berget are B1 and B2, and the salient features of Vington are V1 and V2, so that Berget is the salient denoting concept [the B_1 and B_2] and Vington is the salient denoting concept [the V_1 and V_2]; then, it may well be that the salient features of Vinteuil are V1 and B1, whereas V2 and B2 are non-salient features of Vinteuil. That is, Vinteuil is the salient denoting concept [the V1 and B1], and, according to the final *Recherche*, Vinteuil is both V2 and B2 (i.e., in(*Recherche*, [the V1 and B1](V_2)) and in(*Recherche*, [the V1 and B1](B_2)). Note that in this account Berget and Vington are not characters of the final *Recherche* and yet Vinteuil is a fusion of them in that he has, in the *Recherche*, all the salient features of both Vington and Berget. However, it has some of them as salient (V1 and B1), and some of them as non-salient (V2 and B2).

of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland*," i.e., a certain salient denoting concept, [the Q], which is primarily present in the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland*; similarly, (ii) there is another general character referred to by "the Queen of Hearts of *Alice in Wonderland*," i.e., a certain salient denoting concept, [the Q'], which is primarily present in *Alice in Wonderland*; moreover, (iii) there is still another general character referred to by "the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*," i.e., a certain salient denoting concept, [the UD], which is primarily present in *Alice in Wonderland*; and (iv) according to the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland*, [the Q], [the Q'], and [the UD] are co-referring[170].

Since Wolterstorff also admits story-free general characters, this account could perhaps be adapted to his approach, with non-maximal kinds replacing salient denoting concepts. In contrast, in Currie, and in Cocchiarella and Landini, where there are only story-bound characters, it cannot be adapted. Consider Currie. He does not address explicitly matters of fission and fusion of characters. However, in the light of his general treatment we can infer that (17) and (18) are strictly speaking false. The 1912 *Recherche* and the final *Recherche* are two distinct stories and, accordingly, the Vinteuil role arising from the latter must be distinct from any role arising from the final *Recherche*, despite any similarity that there may be; so that (17) is false. Analogously, the preliminary version and the final version of *Alice in Wonderland* are two distinct stories and thus give rise to different roles, which makes (18) false.

Consider now

(19) Odysseus inspired both Dante Alighieri and James Joyce.

This can easily be taken as true in all approaches. They all admit there is an Odysseus character, which can be in the

[170] It should be noted that, even though [the Q'] and [the UD] are denoting concepts that occur in the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland*, they are not taken do be salient denoting concepts, and thus distinct characters, generated by this story. This respects the fact that in the preliminary version there is no mention of two distinct characters.

inspiring relation to both Dante and James Joyce.

Turn then to

> (20) the Faust of Goethe's *Faust* is an aspect of the Faust general character.

Here "is an aspect" could be understood as Wolterstorff's (1980: 148-149) "is a possible way in which it could be developed." Then, Wolterstorff could take it as true in the following sense. The Faust of Goethe's *Faust* is a maximal kind of which the general Faust is a subkind. Thus, there are many properties internally attributable to the former, which are not attributable to the latter. Something similar could be said for Orilia's approach.

As regards the story-bound approaches, things are different. Let us concentrate on Currie to see why. There is perhaps a sense in which Currie could take it to be true. The Faust general character could be seen as the role arising from all the Faust stories taken together, so as to form one single big character of the larger story. Goethe's Faust would be one of the stories that compose the larger story and accordingly the features involved in the Faust role associated to Goethe's *Faust* would be a subset of the features of the Faust role of the larger story. On the basis of this, (20) could be considered true. Similarly, for the approach by Cocchiarella and Landini.

Finally, consider:

> (21) Holmes could have been ascribed according to some story the feature of having a friend named "Wilson" (instead of having one named "Watson");
> (22) Holmes could not have failed to be ascribed according to any story the feature of being a detective;
> (23) Holmes acquires (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of having an enemy named "Moriarty";
> (24) Holmes could acquire (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of moving to Birmingham;
> (25) Holmes could not acquire (according to any subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century.

Seemingly, in the story-bound approaches, (21), (23), and (24) must be counted as false, for they appear to presuppose the migration from one story to another, which a story-bound view rules out. Sentence (22) could be considered true, only because we see Holmes as bound to just one story, according to which he is a detective. Analogously, (25) could be considered true, only because we see Holmes as bound to just one story, in which he is not a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century.

In contrast, and more plausibly, the story-free approaches can provide senses in which these sentences are true. Consider Wolterstorff. He does not deal with these issues explicitly, but, by appealing to general characters, we could say the following. Suppose we assume that the Holmes general character is internally a detective living in London in XIX/XX Century, but does not have internally the other features evoked in these examples, i.e., having a friend named "Wilson," etc. Then, we can accept that there are stories in which this general character occurs and is ascribed such features. We can see this as making (21), (23), and (24) true. As regards (22), note that, if this general character is internally a detective, it would be ascribed being a detective in any story in which it occurs. Thus, (22) turns out to be true. As regards (25), consider a story in which there occurs the general character Holmes, understood as being internally a detective living in London in XIX/XX Century, and this very character is ascribed being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century. This would be an inconsistent story, because any internal property of the character is also ascribed to the character by the story. Thus, we can say that (25) is true, in the sense that, any story of this sort would be an inconsistent story.

For Orilia's approach, we could say, *mutatis mutandis*, similar things, but with an additional twist. For Orilia could provide both a sense in which (25) is true and a sense in which it is false. It is true, if understood in the sense that we just saw above. It is false however in the following sense. Consider a story *S* in which the Holmes general character (the one which is primarily present in *SIS*) is only secondarily present (as it is

appropriately connected to the denoting concept [the Holmes] occurring in *S*). In this case, we have a sense in which the Holmes general character is ascribed, by the story *S*, the property of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century, without any inconsistency. If there is this possibility, then we have a sense in which (25) is false.

Chapter 3

Anti-Realism

Anti-realism holds that *ficta* are not *bona fide* and *sui generis* entities and that, accordingly, they should be eliminated in favor of further entities that we may call "*ficta*-surrogates." In this Chapter, we shall examine two main approaches to anti-realism: the semantic accounts (both Millian-friendly and unorthodox ones) and the pretense-theoretic accounts.

1. *Semantic Approach*

Fictional proper names are *prima facie* paradigmatic examples of empty names – i.e., names that fail to refer to anything out there[171]. Nevertheless, we typically use them to convey (allegedly) veridical information about fiction and reality – e.g., that Hermione Granger is a witch or that Clarissa Dalloway was created by Virginia Woolf. This fact requires some explanation.

1.1. *Millian-Friendly Accounts*

According to the received view about proper names, which is often referred to as *Direct Reference Theory* – as well as *Millianism*, after John Stuart Mill – the following thesis holds:

[171] As it should be clear now, this is precisely what the objectual realist wants to deny: fictional proper names – she maintains – actually refer to non-existent objects or to abstract artifacts.

(DR) the semantic value (or content, or meaning) of a proper name, if it has any, is the individual to which it refers[172].

Let us assume that the semantic value of a sentence is a proposition. In particular, the proposition expressed by a singular sentence such as "Mill is a philosopher" would be a structured entity which can be represented by the ordered pair < Mill, being a philosopher >, where the first entry is the individual denoted by "Mill" and the second entry is the property expressed by "is a philosopher."[173]

It follows from (DR), along with the anti-realist assumption that fictional proper names fail to refer, that a sentence such as

(W) Hermione Granger is a witch

expresses the *gappy* proposition < ____, being a witch >, and that a sentence such as

(W*) Clarissa Dalloway is a witch

expresses the same gappy proposition as (W), namely < ____, being a witch >[174].

At first glance, consequences of this sort are unacceptable. (W) seems to have a complete (non-gappy) meaning, as well as (W*). Moreover, when we hear utterances of (W) and (W*), we understand very different things. Also, one would like to say that (W) is true while (W*) is false: they seem to have even different truth values, let alone having different meanings.

The Millian anti-realist must face this challenge: how is it possible that fictional sentences *mean* something although

[172] Braun (1993: 450).

[173] We shall assume this (minimal) Russellian account of propositions just for the sake of clarity and because it is the account typically endorsed by the philosophers we encounter along this Section. Clearly enough, it is not necessary to make such an endorsement – nor to assume the existence of propositions at all – in order to gain the problems that we shall discuss below.

[174] More precisely, it follows either that fictional sentences express gappy propositions or that they do not express any proposition at all. The latter is referred to by Braun (1993) as the *No Proposition View*, which is arguably less appealing than the *Unfilled Proposition View*.

fictional names do not refer to anything? We shall examine two answers to this question, which are quite similar in spirit, and some criticism that applies to them.

To begin with, David Braun offers the following truth conditions for singular sentences:

> (TC) if *P* is a proposition having a single subject position and a one-place property position, then *P* is true iff the subject position is filled by one, and only one, object, and it exemplifies the property filling the property position. If *P* is not true, then it is false[175].

Given (TC), both (W) and (W*) turn out to be false since in both cases the subject position is not filled by anything. As a consequence, their (propositional) negations turn out to be true:

> (Neg-W) it is not the case that Hermione Granger is a witch,
> (Neg-W*) it is not the case that Clarissa Dalloway is a witch.

It might be argued that commonsensical intuitions are compliant with these results of (TC): roughly speaking, if Hermione Granger and Clarissa Dalloway are nothing at all, it must be false that they are witches and it must be true that it is not the case that they are witches. Still, there seems to be a strongly resistant intuition that (W) and (W*) differ in truth value. After all, in a true-false test about English literature, (W) and (W*) would have different correct answers.

According to Braun, this intuition is justified by the fact that, although (W) and (W*) have the same semantic content (i.e., a gappy proposition) and the same truth value, they may have different *cognitive* contents and values: a competent speaker typically entertains different propositional attitudes towards (W) and (W*), e.g., she would typically believe the former and reject the latter. In other words, the gappy proposition expressed by (W) and (W*) can be rationally believed in different ways – partially because the empty names occurring in them are 'grasped' in different ways. In fact, ordinary speakers judge that names such as "Hermione Granger" and "Clarissa Dalloway"

[175] Braun (1993: 464).

are meaningful, in spite of their lacking a semantic content: rational agents bear cognitive relations to fictional (hence non-referring) names, which are analogous to the cognitive relations they bear to referring ones[176].

A similar mechanism is invoked on a pragmatic basis by Fred Adams, Gary Fuller, and Robert Stecker. Their account explains how sentences such as (W) and (W*) function differently, despite having the same semantics, along the following lines. To begin with, let us consider how fictional proper names come into use. "Hermione Granger," for instance, was introduced by Joanne Rowling in order to fictionally refer to a certain made-up individual and produce descriptions about her/it ("a teenage and very smart muggle-born Hogwarts student, etc."). Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, introduced "Clarissa Dalloway" for similar purposes but in order to produce quite different descriptions ("a middle-aged and upper-class woman throwing a party in London, etc."). Now, even though (W) and (W*) express the same gappy proposition, they differ in some respects.

Clearly enough, they have different lexicon: (W) contains the name "Hermione Granger" while (W*) contains the name "Clarissa Dalloway," and each name is associated with a different description. Any apparent difference in meaning between (W) and (W*) amounts to the difference in meaning between the descriptions associated with "Hermione Granger" and "Clarissa Dalloway."[177] Given (DR), these descriptions are not part of the semantic content of fictional names: they are just pragmatically *conveyed* (and not semantically *expressed*) by sentences in which fictional names occur. Thus, even though the gappy proposition expressed by (W) has no truth value[178], (W) conveys a non-gappy proposition which (i) involves a description associated with the empty name "Hermione Granger" (e.g.,

[176] Braun (2005: 600). A *caveat* is in order here: Braun (2005: 609-614) eventually endorses realism about *ficta* (especially with respect to metatextual discourse) but maintains that only some utterances (or inscriptions) of fictional names refer to fictional characters.

[177] Adams, Fuller, Stecker (1997: 132).

[178] Adams, Fuller, and Stecker do not endorse (TC) as Braun does. In particular, they seem to refuse the last clause: if *P* is not true, then it is false. A gappy proposition, on their account, is neither true nor false.

"the girl with a ginger cat"), (ii) literally bears a truth value, and (iii) is different from the proposition conveyed by (W*)[179]. Our intuitions about the semantic content and the truth value of (W) and (W*) are actually about their pragmatically conveyed propositions[180].

Several objections have been raised both to the cognitive and the pragmatic move. Starting from the former, we shall briefly examine two of them.

The Problem of Truth Values: it can be argued that (TC) fails to capture our intuitions about the truth values of certain utterances containing empty names. We already recognized that there is a sense in which (TC)'s results about (W) and (Neg-W), with respect to their relevant utterances, seem to accommodate some of our pre-theoretical beliefs[181]. However, let us consider predicative instead of propositional negation. Of course, a sentence such as "Hermione Granger is not a witch" may be read either as (Neg-W) or as

(Neg-Pre-W) Hermione Granger is a non-witch.

On Braun's account, the latter should be understood as semantically analogous to (W): they would both express gappy, hence false, propositions – respectively, < ____, being

[179] Let us suppose that, with respect to some utterances of (W) and (W*), the description associated with "Hermione Granger" is "the girl with a ginger cat" and the description associated with "Clarissa Dalloway" is "the woman who buys flowers in Bond Street." In order to account for the difference in truth value between the propositions conveyed by (W) and (W*), it is useful to make it explicit that an *in-the-fiction* operator is involved (more on this below): it is true that, in Rowling's novels, the girl with a ginger cat is a witch; it is false that, in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, the woman who buys flowers in Bond Street is a witch. Otherwise, outside of the scope of the relevant *in-the-fiction* operators, the propositions conveyed by (W) and (W*) would both count as false (or as neither true nor false).

[180] Analogously, Taylor (2000) argues that what ordinary speakers interpret as meaningful and (possibly) true in fictional sentences concerns what is pragmatically *implicated* rather than semantically *expressed* by them. Such a pragmatic mechanism is not a Gricean one, for reasons we shall not explore here: see Taylor (2000: 35).

[181] Everett (2003: 9) thinks otherwise, especially with respect to sentences such as "Hermione Granger is identical to Hermione Granger": it is highly counterintuitive – he maintains – to suppose the latter to be false and its propositional negation to be true.

a non-witch > and < ____, being a witch >. This consequence seems incompatible with another robust intuition, namely that (Neg-W) and (Neg-Pre-W) have the same truth value, which differs from the truth value of (W) itself. Moreover, predicative readings of sentences such as "Hermione Granger does not exist," which the anti-realist would happily accept as true, turn out to be false[182]. Even worse, its propositional negation, i.e., "It is not the case that Hermione Granger does not exist," turns out to be true.

The Problem of Propositional Content. Braun maintains that ordinary speakers may judge an utterance of (W) and an utterance of (W*) to have different propositional contents because these two utterances are associated with different mental states. But how is it possible in spite of speakers' *recognizing* that the names involved in (W) and (W*) are 'equally' empty? Some further explanation is required.

It can be argued that this kind of troubles would be avoided by adopting a pragmatic-descriptive account such as the one outlined above[183]. Nevertheless, the latter seems to be affected by its own problems. In the remainder of this Section, we shall briefly mention three of them.

The Problem of Modal Profiles. Let us consider a sentence such as "Hermione Granger is identical to Amie Thomasson," that seems to be necessarily false: there is no possible world in which the individual denoted by "Amie Thomasson" is the same (null) individual denoted by "Hermione Granger." Still, according to the pragmatic view, the gappy proposition expressed by such a sentence would count as truth-valueless – and *not* false – in every possible world. Maybe, then, our intuitions about the modal profile of this sentence should be explained by means of the proposition it pragmatically conveys – just like our intuitions about its meaning and truth value. Unfortunately, this is not the case: there are some worlds (like ours) in which it is false that Amie Thomasson is the girl with a

[182] Note that the same holds for affirmative sentences such as "Hermione Granger is a fictional character," which would intuitively count as true while turning out to be false on Braun's account.

[183] See Everett (2003: 16).

ginger cat but also others in which this is true. The proposition conveyed by our identity statement is only contingently false[184].

The Problem of Pragmatic Content. It seems quite reasonable to suppose that the same pragmatic mechanism is operative both in case of full and empty names, especially because speakers may be unaware of the emptiness of some names and still use them in order to say true or false things[185]. Nevertheless, the pragmatist account for fictional sentences would be problematic when applied to non-fictional ones as well. For we should admit (i) that utterances containing full names will also pragmatically convey descriptive propositions and (ii) that speakers are prone to mistake them for what an utterance literally says[186]. Along this path, the pragmatist account would collapse into some sort of disguised descriptivism and, therefore, should face Kripke-like arguments against it[187].

The Problem of Descriptive Content: further worries may be raised concerning a widespread phenomenon such as the variation in descriptive associations across speakers and times. Let us suppose that Amie Thomasson never read Rowling's novels nor watched the movies; still, she has obviously heard something about Hermione Granger over the years. She may know, for instance, that Hermione has magical powers but not that she owns a ginger cat (perhaps she used to know it once but

184 Clearly enough, a pragmatic theorist may reject the necessity of identity: therefore – she would claim – the pragmatically conveyed proposition correctly predicts that our sentence is contingently false. Nevertheless, as Everett (2003: 20) shows, it is possible to reformulate this argument without identity in order to raise the same objection about modal profiles.

185 Urbain Le Verrier's utterances about Vulcan are a case in point.

186 Indeed, according to the pragmatic-descriptive account, this is what speakers do as regards fictional sentences: wrongly assuming their conveyed propositions as literal meaning and, on this basis, forming certain intuitions about their semantic features. If the pragmatic-descriptive account is to be applied to non-fictional sentences as well, an analogous mechanism for such cases must be invoked.

187 Taylor (2000) suggests that the pragmatic mechanism at issue is operative only in those cases where a name is actually empty, whether or not speakers take it as such. Still, a pragmatic mechanism should be taken as grounded on some linguistic convention: as Everett (2003: 24) points out, it sounds implausible to posit a convention which bestows descriptive content only upon empty names – whether or not speakers take them as such – and not upon full names as well. The introduction of such a convention would look suspiciously *ad hoc*.

now she has forgotten). Graham Priest, on the other hand, is kind of an expert on the *Harry Potter* saga: he knows everything about its characters. Now, of course, Amie and Graham associate different descriptions to the empty name "Hermione Granger." Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Amie and Graham say the same thing when they assert that Hermione Granger does not exist. Once again, it seems that our intuitions concerning the propositional content of fictional sentences cannot be explained in terms of descriptive (pragmatically conveyed) propositions.

1.2. *Unorthodox Accounts*

In order to avoid the aforementioned troubles, which affects Millian-friendly anti-realism, it may be useful to reject (DR), namely orthodox Millianism: the semantic contribution of a proper name is not just the individual to which it refers. There must be something more. In this Section, we shall focus on Mark Sainsbury's proposal of a quasi-Fregean semantics for singular reference[188].

Sainsbury's theory of reference aims at allowing for the intelligibility of empty names without assuming that the meaning of a proper name is captured by some definite description. The problem with such a purpose may be stated as follows: since there is nothing in the world to attach the name "Hermione Granger" to, it seems that such a name has no meaning – it is not intelligible. But this is precisely what Sainsbury wants to deny: there is no need to require word-world links in *every* case. As a matter of fact, we are familiar with this idea in the case of definite descriptions: "the present king of France" is perfectly

[188] Despite being in the minority, several unorthodox accounts have been proposed over the past few years. Tiedke (2011) interprets names as context-sensitive expressions associated with a particular act of dubbing, which is used to determine their semantic value (an ordinary individual in case of referential dubbings, a set of properties in case of fictional ones). Orlando (2016) argues that fictional names in oblique contexts refer to mental files, which should be understood as the senses (or modes of presentation) of natural language singular terms. Favazzo (2019; 2025a) employs the Goodmanian notion of secondary extension in order to eliminate fictional characters as genuine entities in favor of pluralities (or clusters) of fictional depictions.

intelligible even if it has no worldly referent. Sainsbury simply proposes to extend the same general idea to proper names as well. In a nutshell, we shall assume that a referential expression – whether it is a definite description or a proper name – can make an entirely good semantic contribution even if it fails to refer[189]. This assumption would require a change of logic, though. The inclusion of empty names in the language of our theory would lead us to unwelcome results within a classical logic framework. The truth of (W), for instance, would entail that Hermione Granger exists. Negative free logic looks like a good candidate for substitution.

A logic is said to be free of existential assumptions just in case it rejects the following two theorems of classical logic: (i) at least one individual exists, and (ii) any singular term denotes an existing individual. A free logic vocabulary, then, allows for singular terms that denote no existing individual. *Negative* free logic is a free logic whose semantics assigns the truth value *false* to any atomic formula in which a non-referring singular term occurs. Therefore, it shows two major advantages for anti-realism[190]. First, it blocks the inference from a sentence in which a name is associated with a predicate to a corresponding sentence claiming that the predicate is true of something real. Secondly, it delivers the right results with regard to existential claims: "Hermione Granger exists" is false and, accordingly, its negation is true.

However, it is far from obvious how this semantic framework should be applied to fictional discourse in general. To begin with, both (W) and (W*) would count as false. In fact, *any* atomic fictional sentence would count as false. Nevertheless, at least with regard to sentences such as (W) and (W*) – namely paratextual ones, i.e., statements which recount what is true/

[189] In order to achieve this goal, Sainsbury (2005) develops an axiomatic Davidson-style truth theory in which it is feasible to specify the non-descriptive meaning of a proper name. This meaning is characterized as a (non-descriptive) Fregean sense, in so far as it amounts to what speakers grasp when they understand the name.

[190] It is worth pointing out that several philosophers have argued that there are strong independent reasons for replacing classical logic with a free one – see, among others, Lambert (2002).

false according to some story – this may not be an unwanted result. We presumably do not want to say that (W) is literally true. We just want to say that (W) is faithful to the *Harry Potter* novels, in the same way as (W*) is *not* faithful to Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. It would then suffice to prefix (W) and (W*) with the appropriate *in-the-fiction* operator in order to gain the correct outcomes: both sentences would be paraphrased away or replaced[191] by their prefixed versions,

> (Pre-W) in the *Harry Potter* saga, Hermione Granger is a witch,
> (Pre-W*) in the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway is a witch,

that will turn out to be true and false, respectively.

So far so good. Let us consider now a more complex case of paratextual sentence, one which involves a comparison between characters belonging to different fictional 'worlds':

> (M) Hermione Granger is more intelligent than Clarissa Dalloway.

Anyone who is acquainted with these two characters would probably want to say that there is some sense in which (M) is true. But, once again, this intuition can be better explained in terms of fidelity (to the relevant stories) rather than literal truth. All we need is a more complex *in-the-fiction* operator as a result of the previous ones mixed together. (M) could then be regarded as elliptical for

> (Pre-M) in the *Harry Potter* saga and in *Mrs. Dalloway* combined together, Hermione Granger is more intelligent than Clarissa Dalloway.

[191] Sainsbury (2009: 117-120) distinguishes paraphrase from replacement and maintains that this sort of move (as well as some of the others we shall examine below) can be understood either way. In short, while the former requires equivalence in truth conditions, the latter only supplies a new sentence which serves all the purposes of the original one but lacks its problematic ontological commitment. In what follows, for the sake of simplicity, we shall ignore this distinction.

There is still a further way, other than paraphrase or replacement, to analyze paratextual sentences, including cross-fictional comparisons. It has to do with the notion of presupposition, which Sainsbury characterizes as a special case of rejection: one can reject (W) or (M) as literally false while holding that they are true under a certain presupposition, which one does not need to believe. For instance, we may presuppose that there are such people as Hermione Granger and Clarissa Dalloway, even if we do not believe it, and so genuinely assert that Granger is more intelligent than Dalloway.

The notion of presupposition-relative truth[192] can be extended to metatextual sentences as well – i.e., statements which recount what is true/false outside of stories. Many of these sentences involve intensional verbs, such as

(Z) Mark Sainsbury admires Hermione Granger.

The rejection move naturally applies: (Z) is literally false but it is true under the presupposition that there is such a person as Hermione Granger – something we know to be false. Evidence in favor of this analysis is given by the fact that, if one tries to explicitly block the relevant presupposition, the result is odd: there is no such person as Hermione Granger and Mark Sainsbury admires her.

As an alternative, it may be argued that admiring is a special case of thinking about and that for Mark to think about Hermione is for Mark to stand in some relation to a propositional content expressible by means of the non-referring name "Hermione Granger." Thus, (Z) may be replaced with

(Z*) Mark Sainsbury entertains a propositional attitude of the proper kind with the content that Hermione Granger is *such and such*.

A similar analysis can be suggested in the following case:

(F) Hermione Granger is famous.

[192] See Howell (2015) for the related notion of assumption-relative truth.

First of all, it is worth specifying that (F) can be read paratextually as well as metatextually, and it seems true in both readings: Hermione is a famous witch inside the magic world depicted by Joanne Rowling in her novels (at least, she becomes quite famous after the war against Lord Voldemort begins), but also a famous fictional character in the real world. We are now interested in the metatextual reading. According to Sainsbury, being famous amounts to being thought about by many people in the proper way. Therefore, (F) is replaceable by

(F*) Many people think about Hermione Granger in the proper way,

which may be reduced in turn to something along the lines of (Z*).

Sainsbury's account seems to be affected by at least three problems.

The Problem of Co-Identification, that shall be addressed in Section 3.

The Problem of Shifting Presuppositions: with regard to rejection moves, the presupposed content needs to be adjusted depending on the intuitions we are supposed to explain case by case; sometimes, it may shift even within a single sentence. Let us consider a particularly tricky one:

(S) Hermione Granger is a witch that was created by Joanne Rowling.

Clearly enough, (S) cannot be handled through the same presupposition. Its first part is truly asserted under the presupposition$_1$ that there is such a person as Hermione Granger, while its second part is truly asserted under the presupposition$_2$ that there is a fictional character – *not* a real person: by no means, when asserting (S), we are willing to say that Rowling created a real person. Let us turn to another sentence, which is similar in some respects:

(D) Sherlock Holmes is a detective, more famous than any real detective.

Sainsbury admits that, as pointed out by Emily Caddick in discussion, there is a difficulty here[193]: we begin with presupposing the existence of a real person, who is a detective; then we say that his fame is greater than that of any real detective; therefore, we seem to be saying that Holmes' fame is greater than itself. Obviously, this is not what we wanted to say. Sainsbury suggests a change of presupposition: we presuppose that there is a robust fictional character (in the realist sense) and that he/it is more famous than any real detective. This move will not work, though: we presumably do not want to say that a robust fictional character is a detective. As in the case of (S), two different presuppositions seem to be involved here[194]. In sum, the rejection strategy does not manage to capture our intuition that, by asserting (S) or (D), we mean to talk about one and the same thing – whatever this thing may be – and not about two differently presupposed individuals.

The Problem of Systematicity. Sainsbury builds his strategy as a form of resistance, case after case, against the problematic sentences which realists offer as evidence to ground their stance[195]. Albeit flexible, such an attitude might leave too much room for uncertainty: it is preferable to invoke paraphrase or replacement in some cases while rejection in others, and there is no general criterion to make a choice on a systematic basis[196].

[193] See Sainsbury (2009: 147).

[194] It might be objected that, if we read (D) as "Holmes is a *fictional* detective, more famous than any real detective," just one presupposition will be enough – one under which there are both fictional and real detectives. Still, consider the following: "Holmes is a fictional detective, smarter than any real detective." It would be incorrect to analyze it as if we were presupposing that the fictional character is smart, since smartness is a property that only minded entities can exemplify and fictional detectives are not among them. Perhaps it would be better analyzed by means of paraphrase or replacement: "Holmes is a detective smart at degree *X*" is fictionally true, namely true under the presupposition that there exists a real person such as Holmes, and it is literally true that any detective is smart at a degree lower than *X*.

[195] Sainsbury (2009: 117). On the other hand, one may prefer to offer a positive argument for anti-realism rather than a mere defense against realism – see Cameron (2013) for an interesting attempt in this direction.

[196] As Thomasson (1999: 99) put it, in reference to unsystematic anti-realist attempts in general, "[…] the need to constantly adjust the theory with a series of *ad hoc* tinkerings to avoid apparent counterexamples [should] be taken as a sign of the theory's failure and need to be replaced."

Moreover, the rejection strategy does not seem to be always suitable. Let us consider a sentence that some literary scholars may presumably want to assert:

> (V) there are fictional characters in some Nineteenth-Century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any Eighteenth-Century novel[197],

which clearly entails

(V*) there are fictional characters.

It would sound bizarre to explain scholars' assertion of (V*) as something along these lines: under the presupposition that there are fictional characters, there are fictional characters. In fact, Sainsbury recommends paraphrase in order to treat this case properly: (V*) should be replaced with something such as "There are fictions according to which there are specific characters."[198]

However, the very idea of presupposition leads us really close to the currently mainstream anti-realist approach to fictional characters, in which the notion of pretense plays a crucial role[199].

2. *Pretense-Theoretic Approach*

Some philosophers argue that our thoughts and talk about fictional characters – even in the most 'serious' cases, like metatextual ones – should be understood in terms of our making *as if* we were thinking and talking about real things. In

[197] This example, although slightly modified, is a well-known one which derives from van Inwagen (1977: 302).

[198] Sainsbury (2009: 150). It is worth noticing what Thomasson (1999: 137-145) would object to this proposal: it can be argued that excluding fictional characters from the ontological inventory while admitting fictional works is a case of false parsimony.

[199] As Sainsbury (2009: 121) points out, though, the role of pretense is subtly different from that of presupposition: while the latter is supposed to leave the speech act kind intact (e.g., an assertion under a presupposition remains a genuine assertion), the former naturally affects the force of certain speech acts (e.g., an assertion within pretense would count as a mere pretended assertion).

other words, fictional discourse is supposed to always involve some sort of pretense. This claim amounts to a fictionalist stance towards *ficta*.

Fictionalism about a certain region of discourse *D* is the view that *D* should be regarded, despite appearances, as a peculiar genre of fiction[200]. There are two main strands of fictionalism about fictional characters: the prefix strategy and the pretense one[201]. We shall examine them in turn.

2.1. *Prefix Strategy Extended*

As we have seen above, it is quite natural to treat paratextual sentences as elliptical for prefixed sentences of the form "in the fiction (or according to the fiction) *F*, it is the case that *P*." This kind of strategy may be extended to metatextual sentences such as

(C) Hermione Granger was created by Joanne Rowling.

While uttering (C), we are making *as if* there actually existed a fictional character denoted by the proper name "Hermione Granger" and this character was created by Joanne Rowling. That is to say, we are talking as if we were creationists: we are playing the game of creationism. Thus, (C) should be understood as elliptical for

(Pre-C) in the fiction of creationism, Hermione Granger was created by Joanne Rowling[202].

Typically, when we engage in discussion about fictional characters, we use their names as though they referred to something, regardless of our ontological opinions. It is only

[200] Fictionalism has been applied to many different areas – among others, mathematics, scientific theories, moral and modal discourse. See Eklund (2024) for a detailed overview of fictionalism as a general strategy.

[201] See Brock, Everett (2015: 19).

[202] See Phillips (2000: 115) and Brock (2002: 9).

when we want to make the latter explicit that we utter sentences such as

(E) Hermione Granger does not exist.

Still, even negative existentials may be analyzed according to the extended prefix strategy, given the appropriate *in-the-fiction* operator. (E), for instance, might be understood as elliptical for

(Pre-E) in the fiction of Meinongianism, Hermione Granger does not exist[203].

Prefix Fictionalism suffers from the *Problem of Inference Preservation*[204]. To be sure, since fiction is not closed under entailment, this way of paraphrasing metatextual sentences does not preserve the logical relations holding between them: it is not valid to infer that "in the fiction *F*, it is the case that *Q*" from the premises that "in the fiction *F*, it is the case that *P*" and that *P* entails *Q*. For instance, while (C) is obviously entailed by

(C*) Hermione Granger and Harry Potter were created by Joanne Rowling,

it is hard to explain how (Pre-C) would be entailed by

(Pre-C*) in the fiction of creationism, Hermione Granger and Harry Potter were created by Joanne Rowling

in virtue of the pure logical form of (Pre-C) and (Pre-C*)[205].

[203] It is worth emphasizing that utterances of (Pre-C) and (Pre-E) are genuine assertions rather than pretended ones: in this respect, Prefix Fictionalism is more similar to Sainsbury's account than to Pretense Fictionalism.

[204] Vision (1993) and Joyce (2005) have raised this objection against any application of Prefix Fictionalism.

[205] See Brock (2015) for an attempt to neutralize this objection.

2.2. *Games of Make-Believe*

A more widespread fictionalist strategy traces back to Gareth Evans and Kendall Walton[206]. More recently, it has been developed in greater detail by Anthony Everett[207]. In what follows, we shall mainly rely on his way of articulating Pretense Fictionalism about fictional characters[208].

Let us consider some distinct games of make-believe: first, a very simple one, the mud-pie game, in which children imagine globs of mud to be cakes; then, a more structured one, in which readers imagine that Hermione Granger is a young and very smart witch who owns a ginger cat; lastly, an even more complex game, in which literary scholars imagine that several fictional characters were created by Joanne Rowling and one of them was named "Hermione Granger." Albeit different from each other, these three games have something in common: any of them is governed by certain principles of generation that determine what counts as true within the game – hence, what we are supposed to imagine being the case if we decide to engage in that game.

It seems reasonable to distinguish three different kinds of principles of generation[209].

> (Type-I) principles which simply stipulate that certain things are the case within the scope of our pretense.

For example, if we engage in a mud-pie game of make-believe in which we pretend that cakes are always covered in chocolate, our game will be governed by the type-I principle of generation according to which cakes are always covered in chocolate.

> (Type-II) principles in virtue of which some features of the real world will determine the content of our pretense, so that what is

[206] See Evans (1982) and Walton (1990).

[207] In particular, see Everett (2013).

[208] See also Crimmins (1998) and Kroon (2000) for significant contributions to this view.

[209] Everett (2013: 18-26).

> true within the imaginative scenario will partially depend upon what is true in the real world.

For example, we may want to engage in a mud-pie game of make-believe governed by the type-II principle of generation in virtue of which, if the mud globs are soft in reality, then cakes within the pretense will be soft as well[210].

> (Type-III) more general principles which allow us to complete our imaginative scenario on the basis of what the real world is actually like or what it would be like if the content of our pretense really obtained.

For example, we may want to allow that our mud-pie game was governed by a type-III principle to the effect that, if it actually starts to rain, then we take it to be raining within the pretense as well. We may also want to allow that our game was governed by another type-III principle in virtue of which, if it is raining within the pretense (perhaps because we are deploying a type-I principle to this effect), then we are also getting wet within the pretense – since this is what would happen in reality.

The former case is an instance of the *incorporation* principle: if *P* is actually true, then *P* is fictionally true. The latter case is an instance of the *reality* principle: if *P* entails *Q* and *P* is fictionally true, then *Q* is fictionally true[211]. It should be noticed that fictional truth – i.e., truth within the pretense – is not a kind of genuine truth. Rather, it is something that *mimics* real truth within the scope of our pretense[212]. Likewise, utterances made within the game should not be regarded as genuine assertions, although they count as assertions within the scope of our game[213].

[210] Real world items that are employed in games of make-believe, such as the globs of mud in our example, are what Walton (1990) would call *props*. More on this below.

[211] Everett (2013: 23) also mentions two further type-III principles, *mutual belief I* and *II*, which are structurally analogous to the reality principle but concern what is believed (respectively, by those who created the game or by those who are involved in it) rather than what is actually true.

[212] Everett (2013: 29).

[213] Nevertheless, some truths within the scope of a pretense may count as

Now, according to pretense fictionalists about fictional characters, principles of the same sort are operative when it comes to engagement with works of fiction.[214] Unfortunately, it is not always clear exactly what principles should be taken as governing a story, and much seems to depend on how we are to interpret the fictional text correctly. Given that, at least in some cases, a fiction may have more than one acceptable interpretation, the following fictional truth conditions can be provided:

> (FTC) *P* is (absolutely) true in the fiction *F* iff *P* is true within the scope of the pretense mandated by the principles of generation for *F* (in all acceptable interpretations); *P* is (absolutely) false in the fiction *F* iff ¬*P* is true in the fiction *F* (in all acceptable interpretations); otherwise, it is indeterminate whether *P* is (absolutely) true or false in the fiction *F*[215].

In the same way as we make utterances within the scope of a pretense in order to describe what is the case within that pretense – i.e., what is fictionally the case –, we also make utterances within the pretense in order to convey information about the real world. Everett calls this phenomenon *piggybacking*[216] and distinguishes between pretense-oriented and world-oriented versions thereof. While the latter aims to convey 'robust' information about the real world, the former aims to convey information about that peculiar portion of the real world which is the pretense itself.

A paradigmatic example of world-oriented piggybacking is historical fiction – Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, for instance, in which factual information about the Napoleonic wars is conveyed. As

genuine truths as well, and some utterances may count both as genuine assertions and as assertions within the scope of the pretense (e.g., the very first line of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* which concerns happy and unhappy families).

214 As Walton (1990: 11) put it, works of fiction serve as props in such make-believe activities in the same way as mud globs, dolls and teddy bears serve as props in children's games.

215 Everett (2013: 34-37).

216 The term is borrowed from Richard (2000). The phenomenon has been extensively explored by Evans (1982: 263-268) and Walton (1990: 385-419).

regards pretense-oriented piggybacking, consider a scenario in which I utter (W) in order to *report* the content of the *Harry Potter* game of make-believe rather than simply participating in that game[217]. In such a case, I would be piggybacking a claim about the nature of my pretense upon a claim that I make within the pretense itself: in other words, my utterance of (W) would roughly amount to – or have the same informative content of – (Pre-W)[218].

Another kind of pretense-oriented piggybacking consists in adding further principles of generation to our game of make-believe and speaking within the scope of the resulting extended pretense. A very natural way of extending a given base pretense has to do with comparatives such as (M): while engaging in a game of make-believe, we happen to compare the entities that we imagine existing within that game with entities from different games. In other words, we simply incorporate items from further pretenses (along with the corresponding principles of generation) into an extended pretense that originates from the base one[219].

Similar analyses can be proposed for metatextual sentences such as (C) and (F). There are good reasons to keep track of the person who introduced a game of make-believe in the first place – among others, she plausibly has some authority over what is true within the pretense. It will be natural, for participants in the game, to convey the relevant information in a way which does not force them to step outside the pretense. For this purpose, they may talk as if Hermione Granger were a genuine entity that was brought into existence by Joanne Rowling and, within this

[217] Such a dichotomy reflects somehow the distinction made by Evans (1982) between conniving uses (which roughly amount to acts of storytelling) and non-conniving uses of fictional sentences. Fictional sentences in their non-conniving use are what we call *paratextual* sentences.

[218] According to Everett (2013: 47-53), though, (W) cannot be reduced to (Pre-W) and must be taken as more fundamental, for reasons that we shall not explore here.

[219] Everett (2013: 54-55). In the case of (M), as Walton (1990) would put it, the base pretense is the one *authorized* for the *Harry Potter* saga while the extended pretense is an *unofficial* one, into which an item from *Mrs. Dalloway* is incorporated.

extended pretense, utter something like (C)[220]. Analogously, we utter sentences such as (F), in its metatextual reading, or

(Ch) Hermione Granger is a fictional character

within the scope of an extended pretense in which we talk as if some things were fictional and others real, and as if things that are famous could either be fictional or real[221].

An analogous treatment is applied to negative existentials[222]. Everett offers two different accounts of sentences such as (E) and argues that the pretense theorist should take each of them to be operative in different cases. However, they are both built upon the same general idea. While producing or consuming true negative existentials, we engage in an extended pretense governed by certain principles such that: according to the first account, within the scope of our pretense, some things will count as real and others as non-real[223]; according to the second account, within the scope of our pretense, some things will count as really existing and others as fictionally existing[224].

In any case, then, utterances of sentences purporting to refer to (or quantify over) fictional characters will count as true or false within a certain game of make-believe – although on objective grounds: principles of generation governing the game together with various real-worldly facts. Outside of the pretense, such utterances are either false or truth-valueless[225].

220 Everett (2013: 59).

221 Everett (2013: 66-67).

222 Albeit similar in spirit, it differs from other analyses in the field of Pretense Fictionalism. According to Walton (1990), a typical utterance of (E) is a genuine assertion which amounts to *disavowing* any attempt to refer through the name "Hermione Granger." Analogously, Kroon (2000) takes utterances of (E) to pragmatically convey a meta-representational claim of the form "*Hermione Granger*. Reference attempts of this kind fail."

223 More precisely, this extended pretense is also governed by a further principle in virtue of which all and only things which are real exist. Provided that, within the extended pretense, Hermione Granger is not real, then it is also the case, within the extended pretense, that Hermione Granger does not exist.

224 Everett (2013: 71-74).

225 Everett (2013) assumes both (DR) and the *Unfilled Proposition View*. As we have seen above, whether the gappy propositions expressed by fictional sentences are to count as false or truth-valueless depends on the truth conditions of singular sentences that one may want to adopt.

Nevertheless, speakers are willing to make *as if* they were true or false: after all, we often count utterances as true even if they are not, in virtue of them conveying veridical information (think of metaphorical language, for instance).

At least four troubles beset Pretense Fictionalism.

The Problem of Co-Identification, that shall be addressed in Section 3.

The Problem of Compositionality: the principles of generation governing games of make-believe do not typically show the kind of systematicity (i.e., compositionality) which allows speakers to understand an indefinite number of previously unencountered sentences[226]. In particular, it is patently true of children's games that, when involved in them, people often switch in a rapid and unpredictable manner between different pretenses governed by different principles of generation, so that some participants in the game may not be able to grasp the meaning of novel sentences because the meaning of their constituents has abruptly changed in the meantime[227]. The pretense theorist could reply that fictional character discourse is not usually such unstable as typical games of make-believe are[228]. This sort of rebuttal is double-edged, though, since it could be taken as a good reason to reject fictional character discourse as a genuine case of talking within pretense.

The latter remark leads us straightforwardly to the *Problem of Phenomenology*. As a matter of fact, 'serious' discourse about fictional characters – such as literary criticism – does not strike us as a peculiar genre of fiction. As Thomasson points out[229], the production and consumption of critical statements do not reveal the same phenomenology which typically accompanies our engagement with fiction and our self-conscious participation in games of make-believe. Moreover, according to fictionalism about a certain region of discourse *D*, the same psychological

[226] See Stanley (2001).

[227] Consider, for instance, the mud-pie game again: while playing it, children may move very randomly from a pretense in which mud globs are chocolate cakes to one in which they are strawberry crumbles and *vice versa*.

[228] Everett (2013: 105).

[229] Thomasson (2003b: 206-209).

mechanisms involved in make-believe should be involved in understanding the use of *D*: unfortunately, empirical evidence does not seem to support such an assumption at least for some *D*[230].

The Problem of Ontology. It seems reasonable to maintain that, while pretending to assert something about fictional characters, one genuinely asserts something else: whenever I utter a fictionally true sentence like (Ch), which appears to concern a *fictum*, I say something *really* true about a certain game of make-believe[231]. Apparently, then, what makes my utterance really true is the actual existence of such entities as games of make-believe. At this point, the pretense-theorist needs to provide a metaphysical account of this sort of entities: for it may turn out that their existence/identity depends on the existence/identity of the fictional characters made-up within them[232], and it is necessary to exclude this possibility in order to preserve anti-realism.

3. *No Identity Without Entity?*

So far, we have not taken into account the very question which the title of this book refers to: the identity of fictional characters. Anti-realist philosophers may be tempted to presume that, since fictional characters are not *bona fide* entities, the problem of their identity is not an authentic one[233]. Still, there seems to be something genuinely puzzling in statements (1)-(25): even the

[230] Against fictionalism about mathematics, Stanley (2001) notices that, since autistic persons have difficulties with make-believe, they should have similar difficulties with mathematics: still, this is not usually the case. However, it is far from obvious whether this objection could be applied to fictionalism about fictional character discourse: see Everett (2013: 108-110) for a discussion.

[231] According to Walton (1990: 408), for instance, what is *really* true as regards (Ch) is a sentence of the form: "The relevant unofficial game of make-believe is such that, within it, to utter (Ch) is fictionally to speak the truth."

[232] This might seem plausible, e.g., if games of make-believe were characterized in a typical way as intentional processes endowed with specific contents.

[233] Adams, Fuller, Stecker (1997: 134-135) claim something along these lines: "[…] about questions of identity of fictional entities, there is no fact of the matter when they are identical. This is so because there is no actual individual entity that bears the identity relationship to itself."

anti-realist must face the challenge of fixing their truth values and explaining our intuitions about them. For what reasons, e.g., readers are inclined to assert that Holmes is Holmes and to distinguish him from Watson, even if there are no Holmes and no Watson in any literal sense whatsoever, or whether Doyle's Holmes is the same as the Holmes in Ritchie's movie. Such questions seem to be genuine ones, whether or not fictional characters are included as genuine entities in our ontological inventory.

First of all, anti-realist accounts have to deal with the *Problem of Co-Identification*, which affects both the semantic and the pretense-theoretic approach: it is necessary to explain how different uses of a certain fictional name identify the same character if there is no character to be identified in the first place[234].

In order to further appraise this problem, let us consider the following case. At the very beginning of Franz Kafka's masterpiece *The Metamorphosis* it is told that, one morning, Gregor Samsa awakes from uneasy dreams and finds himself transformed into a gigantic insect. The text never specifies which kind of insect, though. On the basis of Kafka's descriptions, most critics have supposed that it should be a cockroach. Still, in a well-known essay, Vladimir Nabokov argues that, on the same basis, we must conclude that Gregor Samsa was changed into a beetle[235]. Undoubtedly, we have the robust intuition that Nabokov and the critics are talking about the 'same thing,' although there is no such thing and even different descriptions are associated with the name "Gregor Samsa."

Within a pretense-theoretic framework, this troublesome phenomenon can be handled along the following lines. As a

[234] Friend (2014) raises a particular version of this objection directed against name-centric explanations such as Sainsbury's, which she proposes to replace with an info-centric kind of explanation inspired by Evans (1973). Salis (2013) and García-Carpintero (2020) attempt to undermine Friend's objection in order to rehabilitate the name-centric approach favored by Sainsbury (2005). Pautz (2008) shows that Pretense Fictionalism has some troubles with fictional co-reference as well.

[235] See Friend (2011). The Nabokov case can be understood as a special case of the problem about intentional identity raised by Geach (1967): see García-Carpintero (2020).

matter of fact, different utterances of the same fictional name, such as Nabokov's and the critics', are bound together in a certain network of uses. Since fictional names are empty, this network must be ungrounded, i.e., not grounded in a real entity. Therefore, different utterances of "Gregor Samsa" cannot genuinely refer to the same thing: we just make as if they referred to the same thing. When Nabokov discusses with literary scholars about Kafka's main character, he just pretends that *The Metamorphosis* is fact and that his and the critics' utterances are bound together in the same grounded network and hence are about the same thing[236].

From the viewpoint of the pretense theorist[237], this picture aims to explain our intuitions about the truth value of statements such as these:

(1) Holmes is Holmes;
(2) Holmes is not Watson;
(3) Dr. Jekyll is Mr. Hyde[238].

The principles of generation governing our engagement with the relevant stories mandate us to imagine that Holmes and Watson are distinct persons while Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are the same person (with distinct personalities, of course)[239].

[236] Everett (2013: 93).

[237] In the remainder of this Section, we shall focus on the pretense-theoretic analysis of statements (1)-(25). As we noticed above, anti-realist philosophers are inclined to overlook identity issues about *ficta*, sometimes by explicitly refusing them as unsubstantial or "silly" (Walton 1990: 407-408). Thus, anti-realist accounts typically seem to lack sufficient explanatory power in this respect. On the contrary, Everett (2013: 188-207) offers some well-developed tools which we shall try to apply in order to deal with (1)-(25) from an anti-realist point of view. It may be presumed that, within a semantic framework such as Sainsbury's, a similar analysis could be implemented by appealing to the notion of presupposition-relative truth. At any rate, at the end of this Chapter, we shall suggest a more general strategy suitable for both the semantic and the pretense-theoretic approach to anti-realism.

[238] With regard to (3), in which two different names that purport to identify the same fictional character occur, things are the other way around: we first come to realize (perhaps while reading *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) that, within the pretense that Stevenson's novel is fact, "Dr. Jekyll" and "Mr. Hyde" refer to the same person and hence we bind them together in the same network.

[239] Everett (2013: 205-206).

Further statements related to identification within a story should be handled in a similar way. Let us begin with a couple of straightforward cases, which concern fictional indiscernibility:

(12) each orc of Sauron's army in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings is distinct from the others;*
(13) each fictional twin in a pair of indiscernible fictional twins is distinct from the other.

The indiscernible orcs of Sauron's army count as distinct characters just because the base pretense for *The Lord of the Rings* mandates us to imagine them as distinct characters. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the fictional pair of twins.

Still, as we have seen, intrafictional identification may be quite more troublesome:

(14a) it is indeterminate that, according to *Pale Fire*, Shade is the same as Kinbote;
(14b) the Shade of *Pale Fire* is the same as the Kinbote of *Pale Fire*;
(15a) according to Murakami's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, it is indeterminate that Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room;
(15b) Kumiko is the same as the woman in the hotel room;
(16a) according to *Un drame bien parisien*, the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul;
(16b) the Templar is the same as Raoul and the Templar is not the same as Raoul.

Since (14a) and (15a) are true, the base pretenses for *Pale Fire* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* seem to mandate us to imagine, respectively, that it is indeterminate whether Shade and Kinbote are identical and that Kumiko and the woman in the hotel room are indeterminately identical. Similarly, since (16a) is true, the base pretense for *Un drame bien parisien* mandates us to imagine that the Templar and Raoul are both distinct and identical. The realm of fictional characters is plagued by vagueness and incoherence – one may say. The same cannot be said about reality, though: (16b) is true, and (14b)-(15b) are neither true nor false (or indeterminate), only within the

extended pretense that there are such characters as Shade and Kinbote, Kumiko and the woman, Raoul and the Templar. Outside of this pretense, they are not entities at all.

A plausible account of identification across different stories, or across fiction and reality, should be provided as well. To begin with,

> (4) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

can be understood as a true claim uttered within an extended pretense in which a character α from one story has been successfully incorporated as β into another story[240]. Such a 'migration' is successful if and only if, when we engage with the base pretense for the latter story, its principles of generation mandate us to imagine β as being α[241]. A similar treatment can be applied to

> (9) the real Napoleon is the same as the Napoleon of *War and Peace*.

Napoleon is successfully incorporated into *War and Peace* as one of its characters just because the base pretense for this novel is governed by certain principles of generation which mandate us to imagine Tolstoy's Napoleon as being the real Napoleon[242].

Unfortunately, it is not always clear whether a given story is ruled by such principles or not. As we already noticed above, which principles of generation govern our engagement with a certain work of fiction largely depends on how that work is supposed to be interpreted, and interpretation of literary works is a highly controversial matter. Ordinary readers as well as

[240] Here the *Problem of Ontology* may arise again: presumably, the identity of an extended pretense depends on the identity of the base pretenses that it is made of; the latter, in turn, might depend on the identity of their respective contents, namely (among others) $story_1$'s Holmes and $story_2$'s Holmes. Such a consequence, other than threatening the anti-realist assumption, would also result in a form of vicious circularity.

[241] Everett (2013: 97).

[242] Everett (2013: 99).

literary critics seem to regard the author's intentions, among other factors, as playing a prominent role in determining the correct interpretation of a literary work[243]. Still, those intentions may be misleading or simply fail: we will typically imagine β as being α if we recognize that the author intends to incorporate α from $story_1$ as β into $story_2$ *only insofar as* it allows us to make sense of $story_2$ or it does not significantly distort our engagement with it. It seems part of the latter constraint for $story_2$ to be sufficiently conservative with respect to $story_1$, so that engagement with the base pretense for $story_2$ will involve imagining β as having at least some of the features that α has within the base pretense for $story_1$. Clearly enough, how much β has to preserve of α before falling into nonsense or incoherence mostly depends on the nature or genre of $story_2$ – a lot changes, e.g., if it counts as a sequel or a parody[244].

We are now equipped with some tools to fix the truth value of further statements related to identification across stories. Within the respective extended pretenses, the following sentences would presumably count as true:

> (5) the Sherlock Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie *Sherlock Holmes*;
> (10) the legendary King Arthur is the same as the King Arthur of Bernard Cornwell's *The Warlord Chronicles*;
> (11) the mythical Zeus is the same as the Zeus of Rick Riordan's novel *The Lightning Thief*.

For instance, *The Warlord Chronicles* mandates us to imagine its protagonist as being the legendary King Arthur and it seems to be sufficiently conservative with respect to the ancient Celtic legends about him; analogous considerations apply to the Sherlock Holmes of Guy Ritchie's movie as well as to the Zeus of *The Lightning Thief*.

[243] There is a huge and heated debate around literary interpretation and the relevance of authorial intentions to its legitimacy or correctness: we shall go into some detail in Chapter 4.

[244] Everett (2013: 100-101).

It is worth noticing that the relation of being incorporated as is not a symmetric one: there are cases in which the principles of generation governing story$_1$ prevent us from identifying α and β, even if the principles of generation governing story$_2$ mandate the opposite[245]. As a consequence, interfictional identity statements should be treated as ambiguous since the 'sameness' relation they invoke may fail to be symmetric. (10), for instance, can be read either as

> (10*) the legendary King Arthur is the same as the King Arthur of *The Warlord Chronicles*, or
> (10**) the King Arthur of *The Warlord Chronicles* is the same as the legendary King Arthur.

Still, it would presumably count as true in both readings[246].

Things look quite more complicated when it comes to statements such as these:

> (6) the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *Without a Clue*,
> (6a) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as Rapper Holmes.

As regards (6), it may be argued as follows. Imagining the stupid Holmes of the movie *Without a Clue* as the protagonist of *A Study in Scarlet* would significantly distort our engagement with the latter story. On the contrary, imagining the clever Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* as the protagonist of *Without a Clue* seems to be crucial in order to properly enjoy it – even if the latter story, being a parody, is far less conservative with respect to the former story than a sequel (as *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) would be. Thus, (6*) turns out to be false while (6**) turns out to be true:

> (6*) the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *Without a Clue*,

[245] Everett (2013: 98). We shall see a few plausible examples below.

[246] For the sake of simplicity, we shall ignore this distinction hereinafter unless it bears some relevance to the particular case under discussion.

(6**) the Holmes of *Without a Clue* is the same as the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet*.

At first glance, (6a) seemingly counts as false: Rapper Holmes is far too different from Conan Doyle's Holmes to be taken as the same character. Still, there may be a story about the former such that, if we imagine its protagonist to be the original Holmes, we appear to make good sense of this story. Let us consider a science fiction novel in which a rapper who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century, and is unable to solve murder cases, accidentally runs into a mysterious time machine through which people can access alternative past scenarios. Then, as the reader discovers with some astonishment, our protagonist finds himself in the shoes of a detective who lives in London at the end of the XIX Century and solves murder cases pretty well. Such a story would be a science fiction prequel of Conan Doyle's stories that makes (6a) true[247].

Let us turn now to three cases which have something to do with the author's intentions or with a lack thereof:

(6b) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet II*;
(7) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Unaware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*;
(8) the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is the same as the Don Quixote of Aware Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote*.

[247] This is another case in which it is useful to distinguish two readings:

(6a*) the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is the same as Rapper Holmes;
(6a**) Rapper Holmes is the same as the Holmes of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*.

With regard to our science fiction story, (6a**) reasonably counts as true while (6a*) reasonably counts as false. It does not make much sense to imagine the protagonist of Conan Doyle's stories as coming from the future. On the contrary, imagining the protagonist of our story as the Conan Doyle's Holmes in an alternative future scenario is precisely what our whole story is about. At any rate, while analyzing sentences such as (6) and (6a), a lot seems to depend on the kind of story in which a poorly conservative character appears.

On Everett's account, (6b) would count as false while (7)-(8) would count as true. Ultimately, the intentions of the author seem to play a subsidiary role in the interfictional conditions we outlined above[248]: principles of generation governing the relevant stories do have the last word. Provided that *A Study in Scarlet II* is not sufficiently conservative with respect to Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, the two corresponding Holmes will not be the same. On the other hand, provided that the two novels written by Unaware and Aware Pierre Menard are either totally or sufficiently conservative with respect to Cervantes' Don Quixote, the three corresponding Don Quixote will be the same – no matter what the intentions of the three authors actually are[249].

Things look easier with the following:

(17) the Berget and the Vington of the 1912 *Recherche* are the Vinteuil of the final *Recherche*;
(18) the Queen of Hearts of the preliminary version of *Alice in Wonderland* is the Queen of Hearts and the Ugly Duchess of *Alice in Wonderland*;
(19) Odysseus inspired both Dante Alighieri and James Joyce;
(20) the Faust of Goethe's *Faust* is an aspect of the Faust general character.

(17)-(18) would probably count as true within an extended pretense in which, other than migrating across stories, characters can also undergo fission and fusion processes across different versions of the same story. Let us examine (17) – the same will hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for (18). Two distinct characters, Berget and Vington, fuse together into a new character, Vinteuil. Nevertheless, none of them is the same as Vinteuil: the new version of the story does not mandate us to imagine Vinteuil as

248 As well as the attitudes of participants in games of make-believe: hence,

(11*) the Zeus of believers is the same as the Zeus of non-believers

would simply count as true.

249 Everett (2013: 203) explicitly refuses the author's intention to identify two characters as a necessary condition for them to be identical. In fact, Unaware Menard does not have such intention. It may be presumed that Aware Menard's intention *not* to identify two characters is not sufficient for them to be distinct either.

being Berget or as being Vington; it just mandates us to imagine Vinteuil as being Berget *plus* Vington.

Goethe's Faust is dissimilar in many respects to other versions of the same general character: still, it is undoubtedly a version thereof. This should suffice to make (20) true. And of course Leopold Bloom and Dante's Ulysses are well distinct characters even though they are both inspired by Homer's Odysseus. This should suffice to make (19) true.

Finally, Everett's account seems to be quite liberal – perhaps *too* liberal, one may object – when it comes to these:

> (21) Holmes could have been ascribed according to some story the feature of having a friend named "Wilson" (instead of having one named "Watson");
> (22) Holmes could not have failed to be ascribed according to any story the feature of being a detective;
> (23) Holmes acquires (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of having an enemy named "Moriarty";
> (24) Holmes could acquire (according to some subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of moving to Birmingham;
> (25) Holmes could not acquire (according to any subsequent story) the ascription of the feature of being a rapper who is unable to solve murder cases and who lives in Atlanta in the XX Century.

Of course, with (21), the base pretense for Conan Doyle's stories could have been such that, in virtue of it, Holmes had a friend named "Wilson" instead of a friend named "Watson": nothing in our conditions prevents this possibility. However, on the same basis, (23) and (24) will count as true while (22) and (25) will count as false: we should admit – as weird as it may sound – that Holmes could have failed to be a detective and that he could have been a rapper instead[250].

[250] In our science fiction story, Holmes is both a rapper *and* a detective. But we can also bear in mind a different story in which Sherlock Holmes awakes from a long sleep and suddenly realizes that he was dreaming all the time: while in his dreams he was a detective, in reality he is an opera singer unable to solve murder cases. And it seems correct to say that, had Conan Doyle written such a story, the character of Holmes (i.e., *that* very character) would have been far less fascinating. See Everett (2013: 196) for a similar example.

It is worth emphasizing that, in the foregoing discussion, the truth value of statements (1)-(25) has been fixed or examined within the scope of an extended pretense according to which: (i) there are such entities as fictional characters and (ii) these entities can be either distinguished or identified (or both!) depending on what goes on within the base pretenses where they come from.

This may suggest a quite general strategy.

In principle, from an anti-realist point of view, matters about fictional characters' identification can be addressed in a very natural way. Since *ficta* have been excluded from the ontological inventory in favor of *ficta*-surrogates, identity matters should be handled just in terms of the latter entities: genuine questions raised by statements (1)-(25) and the like actually concern identity between, say, cognitive/descriptive/propositional contents or games of make-believe. This would require a huge amount of translation work[251]: here is a more practical alternative.

First, let us call *R* the best realist theory and *A-R* the best anti-realist theory[252]. Secondly, let us assume that any sentence in the language of *R* has an appropriate translation into the language of *A-R*. According to the anti-realist, *A-R* correctly describes how things really are while *R* does not: it is not metaphysically transparent. Nevertheless, we stipulate to use the language of *R* since it shows a clear pragmatic advantage: basically, it simplifies communication. In other words, we will make as if *R* were true only because talking within the *R*-pretense allows us to display and discuss the same problems in an easier (albeit ontologically inaccurate) way[253].

[251] It may be worth the price, though: translating such problematic data in terms of *ficta*-surrogates might allow a more fine-grained analysis thereof, as Favazzo (2025b) and Favazzo (2025c) show, respectively, with regard to cases of interfictional and intrafictional identity.

[252] For present purposes, a roughly intuitive notion of what a best theory is will suffice.

[253] Phillips (2000: 115) seems to propose something along these lines within a Prefix Fictionalism framework: "[…] we adopt a new kind of fictionalism in which the intensional operator is 'According to *NR*, …,' where *NR* abbreviates *naive realism* [i.e., the best realist theory according to Phillips]. Then, in situations in which fiction is being discussed, and we are speaking as though the characters, events, etc., are real, our sentences are to be understood as prefixed by 'According to *NR*, …'."

Crucially, it is not necessary to endorse a pretense-theoretic account in order to apply this kind of strategy: i.e., one does not need to commit herself to the thesis that fictional sentences are always uttered within the scope of a pretense. It will suffice to provide an exhaustive schema for translation into the language of *A-R* and keep talking through the language of *R* in order to find out what would be the case were *R* a true picture of the world – rather than just a useful manner of speaking.

Chapter 4

The Identity of *Ficta* and Literary Interpretation

Fictional characters raise several troubles with respect to their identity – not only among different stories, or different versions of the same story, or among fiction and reality, but even within the very same story. As we have seen so far, both realist and anti-realist accounts may employ different kinds of analysis in order to deal with such troublesome cases. A further remarkable question, which we are now going to examine, concerns the interplay between *ficta*'s identity and the interpretive practices of literary criticism. Does literary interpretation bear some sort of influence on the identity conditions of fictional characters? And, if so, in what sense and to which extent?

In this context, we take the literary interpretation of a literary work as including all the acts that result in grasping and justifying (or that at least aim at grasping and justifying) all the information about that work and all the information conveyed through that work. For example: its content; its theme(s); its stylistic and literary features; its relationships with specific historical/cultural contexts (e.g., reflecting the values of such contexts, being revolutionary with respect to them, and so on); its relationships with its author, with its intended audience, with specific ideas; its symbols; its purpose(s); its expressive features; its tone(s); and so on.

Therefore, we assume a *broad* characterization of literary interpretation. Thus, we do not take the literary interpretation of a work as being only concerned with the salience and the impact

of that work[254], with some specific subset of its features[255], with what is most difficult to grasp about that work[256]. Nor do we distinguish between the literary interpretation of a work and the understanding, description, elucidation, and explication of that work – as some authors do[257]. This broad characterization is meant to capture how all the activities connected with understanding, interpreting, and explaining a work may turn out to bear similar influence upon the identity of the *ficta* figuring in that work.

In a similar vein, we may introduce the literary interpretation of a *fictum* as including all the acts that result in grasping and justifying (or that at least aim at grasping and justifying) all the information about that *fictum* and all the information conveyed through that *fictum*. For example: its features; the idea(s) that may be expressed through that *fictum*; the stylistic and literary features of the work that are relevant in order to understand that *fictum*; its relationships with specific historical/cultural contexts, with its author, with its intended audience, with specific ideas; its possibly being a symbol of something; its purpose(s) in the story; and so on.

The literary interpretation of a *fictum* includes acts such the following: a given interpreter's interpreting Holmes as a detective according to the stories, as being the paradigmatic hero of Positivism, as representing the virtues of human reason but also some vices connected with the paroxysmal use of human reason, and so on. The literary interpretation of a *fictum* is based upon the literary interpretation of the work(s) in which that *fictum* appears. From now onwards, by using "interpretation," we shall only refer to literary interpretation. And, more precisely, we shall mostly refer to the literary interpretation of *ficta*.

From an ontological standpoint, acts of interpretation may be interpreted as relational facts. Indeed, and at face value, such acts have the typical structure of relational facts. The *relata* of acts of interpretation *qua* relational facts include: one specific

[254] See for example Hirsch (1967) and Farrell (2017).
[255] See for example Olsen (1977), Goldman (1990), and Currie (1993).
[256] See for example Carroll (2016).
[257] See for example Beardsley (1970), Barnes (1988), and Abell (2020).

interpreter; one specific *fictum*; one specific fact about that *fictum* (i.e., the interpreted fact). For example, the following are legitimate acts of interpretation: Mario's interpreting Holmes as a detective according to the stories (i.e., Mario interpreting Holmes as Holmes' being a detective according to the stories); Mario's interpreting Holmes as the paradigmatic hero of Positivism (i.e., Mario interpreting Holmes as Holmes' being the paradigmatic hero of Positivism); and so on. Mario is the interpreter. Holmes is the *fictum* that gets interpreted. Holmes' being a detective according to the stories and Holmes' being the paradigmatic hero of Positivism are the interpreted facts.

If one embraces anti-realism about *ficta*, one should replace the interpreted *fictum* (both as the second *relatum* of the act and as featuring in the interpreted fact) with some *fictum*-surrogate (e.g., some make-believe process, some linguistic practice, and so on). In this case, it would still be legitimate to talk of acts of interpretation such as Mario's interpreting Holmes as a detective according to the stories. But such talks would at best correspond to seemingly true propositions (e.g., [Mario interprets Holmes as a detective according to the stories]) – and *not* to facts. The truth of such propositions would be accounted for by facts consisting in the relevant interpreter (e.g., Mario) standing in some relation corresponding to interpretation with some *fictum*-surrogate (e.g., the *fictum*-surrogate of Holmes) and with some interpreted fact in which the *fictum*-surrogate is involved (e.g., the fact corresponding to Holmes being a detective according to the stories).

For the sake of simplicity, we shall treat acts of interpretation from the realist standpoint here. But what we shall claim about acts of interpretation will be also applicable – *mutatis mutandis* – to acts of interpretation from the anti-realist standpoint.

If we restrict our characterization of interpretation, the interpreted facts in acts of interpretation typically involve relationships between *ficta* and authors, *ficta* and historical/cultural contexts, *ficta* and communities of interpreters, as well as certain stylistic, literary, expressive, and symbolic features of *ficta*. But, as we have already claimed, we shall not restrict our characterization of interpretation here. At any rate, an

act of interpretation of a *fictum* is a legitimate one only if it is compatible with all the available and relevant textual and extratextual evidence about that *fictum*. For example, Mario's interpreting Holmes as a detective according to the stories is a legitimate act of interpretation only if it is compatible with all the available and relevant textual and extratextual evidence about Holmes.

This view of the legitimacy of acts of interpretation is also compatible with some sort of pluralism. Indeed, there may be distinct legitimate acts of interpretation about a certain *fictum* that are incompatible with one another though, *qua* legitimate, they are all compatible with all the available and relevant textual and extratextual evidence about that *fictum*.

Legitimate acts of interpretation are determined by factors of interpretation, i.e., something that determines (or at least contributes to determining) at least one legitimate act of interpretation. Here "determines" is used as a synonym of "fully grounds" and of "metaphysically explains." How does such a determination take place? Possibly, in different ways. For example, by *constituting* (at least some portion of) the relevant evidence. Or by *causing* or contributing to causing the latter. The former presumably happens with texts, whereas the latter with the actual intentions of authors (see below). But factors of interpretation may also make (at least some portion of) evidence relevant for the legitimate interpretation of the *fictum*. Or they may ground the legitimacy of an act of interpretation in some other way.

At any rate, here are some plausible factors of interpretation for a *fictum*:

(a) the text of the work(s) in which it appears;
(b) the linguistic and literary conventions that ground the understanding of the text;
(c) the historical/cultural context of the actual author (of the work);
(d) the actual intentions of the actual author;
(e) the hypothetical and well-justified intentions of the actual author;
(f) the hypothetical and well-justified intentions of the hypothetical author;

(g) the features and intentions of the original or intended community of interpreters (i.e., of the interpreters living at the time of the actual author or towards whom the actual author addressed the work);
(h) the features and intentions of the contemporary community of interpreters (i.e., of the interpreters living at the time at which the act of interpretation is performed);
(i) the historical/cultural context of the interpreters;
(j) the maximization of specific values (e.g., artistic values, aesthetic satisfaction, and so on).

Different theories of interpretation have been elaborated and defended by focusing exclusively or more prominently on some of these factors. For example, textualist/conventionalist theories focus exclusively or more prominently on (a) and (b)[258]. Value-maximalist theories focus exclusively or more prominently on (j)[259]. Actual intentionalist theories focus exclusively or more prominently on (d)[260]. Hypothetical intentionalists may either focus exclusively or more prominently on (e) (if they are hypothetical intentionalists about the actual author)[261] or on (f) (if they are hypothetical intentionalists about some hypothetical author)[262].

Moreover, such theories may be compatible with one another – at least in their weaker versions. For example, some theories may stress that multiple factors are prominent. Or that one factor is more prominent than the others, but the other factors still matter. Or that some factors are more prominent in certain situations, whereas other factors are more prominent in other situations. And so on.

Since we are only concerned here with the relationships between the identity of *ficta* and literary interpretation, recall

[258] See for example Wimsatt, Beardsley (1946), Beardsley (1970), and Goodman, Elgin (1986).

[259] See for example Beardsley (1970), Davies (2007), and Goldman (2013).

[260] See for example Hirsch (1967; 1976), Barnes (1988), Carroll (1992; 2000; 2009), Iseminger (1992), Stecker (1993; 2003; 2006), Livingston (2005), Farrell (2017), Stock (2017).

[261] See for example Tolhurst (1979), Levinson (1992; 1996; 2006; 2010), Trivedi (2001).

[262] See for example Nehamas (1981), Nathan (2006), Lin (2023).

now the schemas of the identity conditions of *ficta*:

> (INS) necessarily (i.e., by metaphysical necessity), for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* iff *P*;
> (IS) necessarily, for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* if *P*;
> (IN) necessarily, for any *ficta x* and *y*, *fictum x* is identical with *fictum y* only if *P*.

Also recall that, when specifying *P*, one need not quantify over *ficta*. Nor need one be committed to there being *ficta* as objects or, more generally, as *bona fide* and *sui generis* entities.

Five questions are in order:

> (I) Can legitimate acts of interpretation figure in *P*?
> (II) Can legitimate acts of interpretation determine/cause/constrain/influence what figures in *P*?
> (III) Can factors of interpretation figure in *P*?
> (IV) Can factors of interpretation determine/cause/constrain/influence what figures in *P*?
> (V) What factors of interpretation are exclusively or mostly relevant in determining/causing/constraining/influencing what figures in *P*?

We shall not deal here with problem (V). Otherwise, we would have to embrace and defend at least one of the theories introduced above. And this will go far beyond the purposes of this work.

To anticipate, we shall motivate *negative* answers to (I) and (III) – with one *caveat* when it comes to (III). On the other hand, we shall motivate *positive* answers to (II) and (IV).

One preliminary point is the following: legitimate acts of interpretation cannot be included as such in the identity conditions of *ficta*. Otherwise, they would introduce vicious circularity. For example, if one were to introduce Mario's legitimately interpreting Holmes as a detective according to the stories in Holmes' identity conditions, the former act of interpretation would also depend for its identity upon Holmes. Thus, by transitivity, Holmes' identity conditions would also turn out to depend upon Holmes' identity itself.

In reply to this problem, one could introduce in the identity conditions of *ficta* specific features that correspond to legitimate acts of interpretation, e.g., being legitimately interpreted by Mario as a detective according to the stories.

But this would still be troublesome. Indeed, first of all, the identity conditions of Holmes would be tied to the identity (and possibly the existence) of specific interpreters such as Mario. What would happen if such interpreters did not exist or if they did not perform the relevant act of interpretation? Therefore, the feature to be included in the identity conditions of Holmes should rather be that of being legitimately interpreted *by someone* as a detective according to the stories.

Yet, this is still not enough. Indeed, what if, at a certain time/in a certain possible circumstance, no one performed the relevant act of interpretation? Holmes would have no identity conditions at that time/in that possible circumstance. At best, he would resume the possession of identity conditions at some subsequent time/in some further possible circumstance at/in which someone would perform the relevant act of interpretation. And this may look implausible.

To fix this problem, one should include in the identity conditions of Holmes the feature of being *possibly* and legitimately interpreted by someone as a detective according to the stories.

Would this feature be fine? We have at least one serious doubt. Indeed, this feature includes a certain content, i.e., being a detective according to the stories. And this feature is a good candidate for being included in *P* (i.e., the identity conditions of Holmes) *only insofar as* its content is a good candidate for being included in *P* as well. Namely, the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone as a detective according to the stories can be included in the identity conditions of Holmes only insofar as the feature of being a detective according to the stories (i.e., the content) can be included in such conditions as well. Otherwise, there would be no good reason for the inclusion of *that* feature with that specific content, instead of other features with other contents.

In sum, when it comes to the identity conditions of Holmes, the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone

as a detective according to the stories is *redundant* in comparison with its content, i.e., being a detective according to the stories. At best, the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone as a detective according to the stories can only be *derivatively* involved in those conditions, i.e., it may be involved in those conditions only insofar as some further feature gets involved as well (i.e., its content). On the contrary, the content-feature of being a detective according to the stories can be *non-derivatively* involved in the identity conditions of Holmes.

Thus, with respect to (I), we can conclude that features such as that of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone as a detective according to the stories – which correspond to acts of interpretation – cannot figure in *P*, i.e., in the identity conditions of *ficta*. Or, at least, they cannot non-derivatively figure in *P*. For they are redundant in comparison with their contents.

One may reply as follows. The feature of being a *fictum* is presumably involved in the identity conditions of *ficta*. Moreover, necessarily, something is a *fictum* if and only if (among other things) it can be legitimately interpreted by someone in a certain way, i.e., if and only if it has the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone in a certain way. Thus, the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone in a certain way is one that is actually involved in the identity conditions of *ficta*.

There are two problems with this reply. First of all, it seems that the feature at stake still derives from further features. Indeed, a *fictum* has the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone in a certain way only insofar as it partakes in a certain story, written by someone in a certain language, with certain purposes and a certain audience in mind, and so on. Thus, the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted by someone in a certain way would still count as derivative. Secondly, even if this feature were to be involved in the identity conditions of Holmes, it would be too generic. It would *not* contribute to individuating Holmes and to distinguishing him from all the other *ficta*. At best, it would contribute to distinguishing Holmes as a *fictum* from entities that are not *ficta*.

A similar reply is in order with factors of interpretation. What matters is the result/product of such factors, e.g., the legitimacy of the relevant possible acts of interpretation with specific contents. In turn, when it comes to such acts, what matters for the identity conditions of *ficta* is only their contents. For example, the text of *A Study in Scarlet plus* certain linguistic conventions contribute to making it the case that it is legitimate to interpret Holmes as a detective according to that story. But, with the identity conditions of Holmes, what *non-derivatively* matters is only that Holmes is a detective according to that story, i.e., the result/product of the relevant factors. Thus, with regard to (III), factors of interpretation cannot *non-derivatively* figure in *P*.

Nevertheless, there is one possible exception. Suppose that the identity conditions of Holmes include some act performed by Holmes' author, i.e., Conan Doyle. For example, they may include Conan Doyle's 'creation' of Holmes. Suppose that this act non-derivatively includes – in its own identity conditions – some actual intention on behalf of Conan Doyle, e.g., Conan Doyle's intention to represent Holmes as such-and-such. In this case, by transitivity, Conan Doyle's actual intention should be non-derivatively included in the identity conditions of Holmes. For that intention is non-derivatively included in the identity conditions of Conan Doyle's creative act, which is in turn non-derivatively included in the identity conditions of Holmes. Therefore, for at least some factors of interpretation (e.g., the actual intentions of actual authors), one could give a positive answer to (III). Or, better, one could claim that some factors of interpretation may figure in the identity conditions of *ficta* insofar as they play some further role. Indeed, Conan Doyle's actual intention does *not* figure in the identity conditions of Holmes *as a factor of interpretation*. It figures in such conditions insofar as it plays *another* role, i.e., that of being non-derivatively included in the identity conditions of Conan Doyle's creative act[263].

[263] Evnine (2016: 141, 144) explicitly includes intentions in the identity conditions of *ficta*, insofar as they direct the creative acts of authors that result in selecting the relevant features of *ficta*. Nevertheless, as argued in Paolini Paoletti (forthcoming), including relationships with authors in the identity conditions of *ficta*

When it comes to problems (II) and (IV), we are inclined to provide positive answers. Let us dwell on (II). Suppose that being a detective according to the stories is a feature that should be included in the identity conditions of Holmes. It seems that specific acts of interpretation performed by specific interpreters may well make it the case/cause that Holmes has the feature of being a detective according to the stories in his own identity conditions. Indeed, had Conan Doyle and/or his original and intended audience not successfully and legitimately interpreted Holmes as a detective according to the stories, Holmes would not have had that feature in his own identity conditions. Indeed, Holmes turned out to be a detective according to the stories only insofar as someone (i.e., his original author and/or the original and intended audience) successfully and legitimately interpreted Holmes as such. Without these 'original' acts of interpretation, Holmes would not have been a detective according to the stories. Accordingly, Holmes would not have included that feature in his own identity conditions.

In sum, the 'original' acts of interpretation of certain interpreters (such as original authors[264] and/or original and intended audiences) do cause that *ficta* have certain features which may figure in their own identity conditions, i.e., in *P*. And this seems to happen *contingently*, at least with respect to certain authors/audiences. For the relevant acts of interpretation could have been performed by other interpreters instead (e.g., by another original author distinct from Conan Doyle, if one does not believe in the necessity of original authorship).

But it seems that some 'original' act of interpretation or another – by some interpreter or another (i.e., by some original author and/or original and intended audience or another) – is *necessarily* required in order for Holmes to be a detective according to the stories. Therefore, it seems that some 'original' act of interpretation or another – by some interpreter or another (i.e., by some original author and/or some original and intended

may be troublesome for other reasons.

[264] The original acts of interpretation of the original authors are not the creative intentions included in such authors' creative acts, which may be included in *P* – as we have seen at least for *actual* intentionalism.

audience or another) – is *necessarily* required in order for Holmes to have that feature in his own identity conditions.

Finally, it seems that Holmes can *continue* to be a detective according to the stories – and thus have that feature in his own identity conditions – only insofar as he can be legitimately interpreted by some interpreter or another as such. Namely, only insofar as some interpreter or another can legitimately interpret Holmes as a detective according to the stories. Otherwise, Holmes would lose that feature. Obviously enough, the interpretation should be a legitimate one.

To summarize, assume that *P* (i.e., the identity conditions of Holmes) non-derivatively includes the feature of being a detective according to the stories. *P* does *not non-derivatively* include the feature of being possibly and legitimately interpreted as a detective by someone. However, that the feature of being a detective according to the stories characterizes Holmes and is therefore included in *P*:

> i. is contingently caused (also or only) by specific acts of interpretation performed by specific interpreters, i.e., Conan Doyle and/or his original and intended audience;
> ii. is necessarily caused (also or only) by some act of interpretation or another performed by some interpreter or another of a given type (i.e., the original author of Holmes, whoever she would have been, and/or the original and intended audience, whatever it would have been like);
> iii. continues to be the case, by necessity, in virtue of some possible and legitimate act of interpretation or another performed by some interpreter or another.

With respect to (i)-(iii), acts of interpretation are *not* redundant. Namely, when it comes to causing Holmes' being a detective according to the stories – as in (i) and (ii) – and when it comes to 'preserving' his being a detective according to the stories – as in (iii) –, acts of interpretation seemingly play a crucial and irreducible role. One cannot dispense with this role by pointing to the results of acts of interpretation (e.g., Holmes' being a detective according to the stories).

Mutatis mutandis, a similar reply is in order for (IV). Factors of interpretation may determine/constrain/cause/influence the acts of interpretation in (i)-(iii), and thus indirectly determine/constrain/cause/influence *P*. For example, consider intentions. Conan Doyle's actual intentions presumably caused his interpreting Holmes as a detective and, therefore, his characterizing Holmes as such. Presumably, and by necessity, the intentions of some agent or another (be that agent Conan Doyle or his audience or someone else) were required in order to cause the acts of interpretation in (ii). Finally, by necessity, the intentions of some agent or another (e.g., of a contemporary interpreter) are required in order to determine/constrain/cause/influence the acts of interpretation in (iii). Of course, similar scenarios may be hypothesized with factors of interpretation different from intentions, e.g., with texts and linguistic conventions.

There is also another, more direct way in which factors of interpretation may bear upon *P*, i.e., they may *directly* determine/constrain/cause/influence *P*. For example, Conan Doyle's actual intentions may have directly caused Conan Doyle's characterizing Holmes as a detective.

In sum, that the feature of being a detective according to the stories characterizes Holmes and is therefore included in *P* may be determined/constrained/caused/influenced (also or only) by factors of interpretation. And this may happen in two ways, i.e., directly (by 'acting' upon *P*) or indirectly (*via* acts of interpretation). As anticipated, if one is an anti-realist, one can replace *ficta* with the corresponding *ficta*-surrogates. And, *mutatis mutandis*, one can and should reach the same conclusions.

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The Identity of Fictional Characters

A Philosophical Survey

Is Homer's Ulysses the same character as Dante's Ulysses? How many characters are involved in Sauron's orcs army? And what about fictional people featuring in inconsistent stories? These and similar conundrums regard the identity of the mysterious inhabitants of fictions: fictional characters (*ficta*, for short). This book tackles such issues from the standpoint of three major metaphysical perspectives – objectual realism (*ficta* as objects), non-objectual realism (*ficta* as properties), anti-realism – and in interplay with literary interpretive practices.

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