

2 | THE ABSTRACT ARTIFACTUAL THEORY OF FICTIONAL CHARAC- TERS

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I undertake an extended criticism of several aspects of Thomasson's (1999) artifactual theory of fictional characters. Thomasson offers a metaphysical view in which fictional characters are 'abstract artifacts', that is, are abstract entities created by and depending for their existence on the acts of authors (1999: 7). Her stated goal in providing such a theory is to show that the study of fiction is not merely a 'sideshow' to the study of metaphysics, but is in fact centrally important to it (1999: xi). Instead of 'starting from a ready-made ontology and seeing how we can fit fictional characters into it' (1999: 5), Thomasson wants to 'begin by paying careful attention to our literary practices so that we can see what sorts of things would most closely correspond to them' (1999: 5).

I focus here on two important features of Thomasson's theory. The first is her account of how positing fictional characters as abstract artifacts corresponds to and makes sense of our beliefs and practices concerning literary fiction. The second is her argument that the artifactual theory best explains certain linguistic data: the

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data relating to well-known problems associated with discourse about fiction, and apparent reference to fictional characters.²

My criticisms are, thus, divided into two main sections. In the first section, I raise a number of difficulties for Thomasson's account of the relationship between literary practices and artifactual fictional characters. Firstly, I argue that Thomasson fails to adequately explain how, on her view, fictional characters are created by authors. Secondly, I argue that Thomasson's account of the metaphysical dependencies that such characters have is incomplete, and that further considerations about these dependencies raise a number of difficult questions. Thirdly, I argue that the identity conditions Thomasson outlines for abstract 'literary works' are problematic, and may have unappealing consequences, especially with regard to how we normally think about the production and consumption of literary fictions. In the second section, I evaluate Thomasson's explanation of the linguistic data from fictional discourse (e.g. apparent reference to fictional characters, negative existentials, literary critical discourse, etc.). Thomasson is correct that much of the linguistic data are explained well on her view. However, I argue that, when it comes to the data that are not so easily accommodated by her theory, the explanation she offers is unsatisfactory.

None of the criticisms I offer is a knock-down objection, nor is it my intention to argue that Thomasson's theory is wholly false or unfixable. I aim only to highlight certain problems for the view which either are not apparent to or not addressed by Thomasson. Specifically, I aim to raise objections which are not broadly metaphysical in nature, but which are instead founded in our understanding of literary practices and fictional discourse. These objections must be dealt with in order for Thomasson's view to both make sense of our literary practices as well as explain fictional discourse.

² These are merely the two aspects I have chosen to focus on; I do not mean to imply that Thomasson's work revolves solely around these claims.

ARTIFACTUAL FICTIONAL CHARACTERS AND LITERARY PRACTICES

As Thomasson points out, when it comes to giving an account of fictional objects, her view has significant advantages over Meinongian theories of non-existent/abstract objects, such as those in Parsons (1980), Zalta (1983), and Rapaport (1978). Meinongian views employ what is known as a ‘comprehension principle’, which states that ‘there is at least one object correlated

with every set of properties’ (Thomasson, 1999: 14). The consequence this principle has for fiction is that authors do not, as we normally believe, *create* fictional characters, but instead pick out some non-existent object that was already there, and then make it fictional by writing about it (Thomasson, 1999: 16). This is a strange result, and Thomasson is correct to note that it does not satisfy the normal view that authors *do* genuinely engage in creative activity when they produce fiction (1999: 16). This consequence is avoided on Thomasson’s artifactual view, since she does not employ any kind of comprehension principle: her view is not that there is an infinite number of non-existent or abstract objects which make up a distinct ontological realm, but rather that fictional characters are similar to more ordinary artifacts, in that they are created, dependent entities (1999: 15–17). That her view is not at odds with our ordinary understanding of how fictional characters are produced is, thus, an advantage Thomasson has over the Meinongian.³ Nevertheless, I will argue that there are still several difficulties for Thomasson’s account when it comes to our literary practices.

HOW FICTIONAL CHARACTERS ARE CREATED

I have just noted that it is an advantage of the artifactual view that it does not conflict with our everyday idea that authors engage in creative activity when they write about fictional characters. However, this view has its own problem when it comes to

³ This is an advantage that Thomasson claims over *possibilist* theories of fiction, also.

the creative activity of authors: it has to explain *how* these artifacts come into existence through authors' actions. The theorist who is not in the business of postulating fictional objects has less of an explanatory burden when it comes to the creative acts of authors: whatever else she wants to say about literary creativity, she can maintain that authors do not *literally* create fictional characters, in the sense of creating new abstract entities. Alternatively, Thomasson does have to explain how, in a very literal sense, fictional characters are *created*; how they are brought into existence (often on the spot) on the basis of certain actions taken by authors.⁴ I argue that Thomasson's account of how authors create new abstract artifacts is unsatisfactory.

Thomasson acknowledges that it might seem strange to think that authors can bring fictional characters into existence merely by writing about them. She notes however, that 'it has long been noticed that a common feature of so-called conventional or effective illocutionary acts such as appointing, resigning, adjourning, and marrying is that they bring into existence the state of affairs under discussion' (1999: 12).⁵ She also points out that institutional entities can be brought into existence by being represented as existing, using Searle's example, 'this note is legal tender for all debts private and public' (1995: 74). Thomasson asserts that there is a parallel between these types of cases and how fictional characters are created (1999: 13). The idea is that just as an utterance of 'I promise to [...]' or 'I hereby resign from [...]', thereby brings about the state of affairs in which someone has promised or resigned (respectively), 'a fictional character is created by being represented in a work of literature' (1999: 13). As an example, Thomasson uses the first sentence of Jane Austen's *Emma*:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her (1999: 12).

⁴ I say only 'often on the spot' because not all fictional characters are created in a single act; Thomasson is clear that it may be a long process involving different authors (1999: 7).

⁵ Thomasson cites Bach and Harnish (1979) here on effective illocutionary acts.

This explanation, that there is a parallel between the marriage, promise, resignation, etc., cases and the case of fictional characters, is inadequate. Thomasson offers a broad analogy between these two types of cases as her explanation, but a closer look reveals that they are really distinct. It is clear how one can make a promise simply by uttering, 'I promise', and it is clear how the declaration that a piece of paper is legal tender *makes* it legal tender, assuming the declaration is backed up by the relevant authority. In these cases, the content of the sentence uttered in the linguistic act directly corresponds to the state of affairs which results from the linguistic act. But is this what is going on with the case of fictional characters? I do not think it is. Take Thomasson's example of the first sentence of *Emma*: this sentence mentions the person Emma Woodhouse, and then says some things about her, but it is not clear that it thereby creates a state of affairs in the real world in which there is a new abstract artifact. The sentence does not express a content corresponding to the state of affairs it purportedly brings about. In order for there to be parallel with the effective illocutionary act cases, authors need to utter sentences like, 'I hereby create the fictional character Emma Woodhouse' or, 'there is a fictional character called Emma Woodhouse'. Assuming that authors can create such states of affairs through linguistic acts, it is these utterances, and not ones like the first sentence of *Emma*, that would bring such states of affairs about.

That the above sentences are needed in order for the analogy to be sound is of course problematic for Thomasson's account. Jane Austen cannot utter, 'there is a fictional character called Emma Woodhouse' as part of the literary fiction, because her creative act itself is not a part of the fiction, and because in *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse is a human, not a fictional character. Since Thomasson cannot explain the creative acts of authors in terms of these types of sentences, she cannot use the analogy with effective illocutionary acts, and a separate explanation of how abstract fictional characters are created is needed.

It might be objected that Thomasson also makes reference to her 'intentional object theory of intentionality' with regards to the production of fictional characters, and that those considerations can serve as an explanation of authors' creative abilities. In particular, Thomasson states that 'because according to the intentional object theory every intentional act has an object as well

as a content, if there is no pre-existent object that the thought is about, a mind-dependent object is generated by that act' (1999: 88). I do not think, however, that this point serves as any further explanation; it merely states again that on Thomasson's view, abstract objects are sometimes created. My objection is not that this is false, but that the mechanism Thomasson employs in order to explain *how* this generation occurs does not work. She asserts that 'whether in the case of ordinary performative speech acts, or creative acts of imagination, an intentional act may bring its object into existence' (1999: 90). My point is that Thomasson's attempt to explain the latter case in terms of the former (when the latter case concerns fictional characters) is unsuccessful.

THE DEPENDENCIES OF FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

Thomasson develops a theory of existential dependence which she uses to explicate the ontological status of both fictional characters as well as abstract 'literary works' (1999: 24). She explains that although fictional characters are dependent on the creative acts of authors to begin their existence, they can go on existing after their authors are dead. Thus, fictional characters have what Thomasson calls a, 'rigid historical dependence' on their authors, but not a, 'constant dependence' on them: a given fictional character is dependent on its specific author to come into existence, but is not dependent for every given moment of its existence on that, or any author (1999: 35, 36). Fictional characters, however, do have a 'generic constant dependence' on some literary work of which they are a part (1999: 36). It is a constant dependence because if no literary work containing the character exists, neither does the character, but it is generic because a given fictional character can appear in several different literary works, and it does not matter which of these several remains (1999: 36). Literary works, too, are rigidly historically dependent on the authors that created them, and they also exhibit two generic constant dependencies: firstly, they are dependent on there being at least one copy of the literary work, and secondly, they are dependent on there being a population capable of reading the work (1999:

36). These, again, are both generic dependencies because there is no unique copy or population on which they are dependent; there just needs to be at least one of each for the literary work to remain in existence.

Thomasson says that dependence on literary works and authors' creative acts exhausts the immediate dependencies of fictional characters (1999: 36). But, I think this account is incomplete. Consideration of the drafting process that literary works undergo as they are being written shows that fictional characters also exhibit some dependence on the *will* of their authors, after they have been created. I argue that this consideration creates a puzzle for Thomasson's account that is difficult to resolve.

Imagine that I write a piece of fiction, and at some point compose the sentence, 'Mary eventually met four strangers in the hotel lobby: Frank, Jessica, Susan, and Sarah'. I finish this piece of fiction and then leave it on my shelf for three years, after which I come back and revise it. Coming upon the sentence above, I decide four strangers are too many and I revise the sentence to '[...] three strangers in the hotel lobby: Frank, Jessica, and Susan'. Assuming with Thomasson that when I wrote the above sentence, I created four new fictional characters, it seems like now I have just destroyed one. Intuitively, it looks as if Sarah was rigidly constantly dependent on my wanting to keep her in the story: I could have taken her out at any given time, and when I eventually decided to revise the work, Sarah ceased to exist. It might be thought, alternatively, that it is not that Sarah was dependent on my will as the author, but that she was only constantly dependent on the literary work, as Thomasson's theory stipulates. On this view, when I revised the sentence to remove Sarah, I created a new literary work, destroying the old one on which Sarah was dependent. That seems implausible to me. Our regular understanding of the way authors produce literary works is that in the process, they make changes and additions to one and the same work; they do not produce and destroy hundreds of different ones. We want to say that I merely took Sarah out of the work that used to have her in it, not that, by revising that one sentence, I created a new literary work, and destroyed a different one.

If what I am saying is correct, then during the drafting process, fictional characters can also exhibit a rigid constant dependence on the will of their authors: each moment of Sarah's continued

existence depended on the fact that I did not revise my work. Here is the puzzling part: we also want to say that this dependence ends at some point. If I publish my work of fiction, we no longer want to say that I will be able to revise it, and thus, we no longer want to say that Sarah is constantly dependent on my will to keep her in the story. I can wish all I want that I had taken her out, but at this point it is no longer up to me. The puzzle is located in the definition of the constant existential dependence relation: ‘necessarily, whenever X exists, Y exists’ (Thomasson, 1999: 30). What this definition expresses is that *every moment* of Y’s existence depends on X’s existence. The definition of constant dependence does not allow for an object to exhibit it sometimes and not other times, since by exhibiting it only some of the time, it thereby fails to exhibit it at all. Saying that a fictional character can exhibit rigid constant dependence and then stop exhibiting it forces us to say that it never exhibited that kind of dependence at all. There is a real sense in which, if at any point in those three years, I had published the work before removing Sarah, she could have existed without me. Yet, in the original case in which I do remove Sarah, there is also a strong drive to say that her whole existence depended on my will. This is a puzzle that results from Thomasson’s theory.

I think two different attempts to resolve this puzzle can be made, but each way has consequences which conflict with our understanding of literary practices. The first way is to deny the puzzle outright, to insist that there is nothing really problematic with saying that during the drafting process, fictional characters exhibit rigid constant dependence on their authors’ wills, but that after publication, they cease to exhibit it.⁶ This response may be appealing, but it has an unintuitive consequence. What this line of response suggests is that fictional characters are not identical to themselves before and after publication. For any given fictional character, the result is that before publication, it is an object which exhibits rigid constant dependence on its author’s will, and after publication it is an object which does not. If this is

⁶ I assume for ease of explanation that the line at which we want to say this dependence would end is publication, since it is the clearest place to make the distinction. Other considerations may suggest this line should be drawn slightly before, or slightly after publication; but those considerations do not affect the point being made.

the case, then those are really two different objects and not one. This conflicts with a basic belief we have about fictions, namely that the characters contained in them are the same before and after the fiction is published. The other attempt at resolving the puzzle is to bite the bullet and accept that fictional characters do not, after all, exhibit a rigid constant dependence on their authors will, even during the drafting process. This response is also unsatisfactory, however: it fails to explain the intuitive scenario in which the fictional character Sarah was dependent on my will to keep her in my story, and it seems to deny the obvious ability of authors to revise their fictions and remove characters as they please. Thus, with either response, giving a fuller account of the dependencies of fictional characters leads to unintuitive results with regard to our regular understanding of literary practices.

IDENTITY CONDITIONS OF LITERARY WORKS

An important aspect of Thomasson's theory is that a literary work is not identical with any particular copy of it; it is this property of literary works that allows them to remain in existence independently of any one copy, and thus, allows them to keep the fictional characters within them existent as well. In addition to the generic constant dependencies outlined for literary works (that there be some copy of the work and some population capable of understanding the work), Thomasson states that 'literary works are not mere strings of symbols', and that 'one and the same composition can serve as the foundation for two different literary works in the context of different readerships' (1999: 65).

On Thomasson's view, in order for a readership to engage not just with the words on the page (the composition), but with the literary work itself, that readership needs to have a certain set of background assumptions (1999: 65, 66). This is because literary works have particular origins; they are essentially tied to a particular place in social, political and literary history (1999: 8). Thomasson illustrates this idea with the example of *Animal Farm*: 'the same sequence of words appearing in *Animal Farm* could have been written in 1905, but that literary work could

not have had the property of being a satire of a Stalinist state, a central property of Orwell's tale' (1999: 8).

This aspect of Thomasson's theory also has problematic consequences; I again offer a hypothetical example to illustrate them. Imagine that a future civilisation finds a book on an archeological dig which they correctly believe to be a piece of fiction. However, they lack the historical knowledge necessary to determine the political, social, and literary context in which this book is written. Nevertheless, they can read and understand the sequence of words contained in the book, and subsequent literary critical discourse develops out of their engagement with this archeological find. For clarity's sake, let us assume the book they find is *Animal Farm*, and for whatever reason, this civilisation knows nothing about twentieth century history or Stalinist regimes. We can also assume that there is no other population who still has kept *Animal Farm*, as we know it, in existence. When they read the book, are they engaging with *Animal Farm* as a literary work?

I argue that, based on Thomasson's identity conditions for literary works, we are forced to say that they are not, which has problematic consequences for the view. Thomasson maintains that 'being a satire seems essential to *Animal Farm* considered as a work of literature' (1999: 9). This fact alone excludes our future civilisation from engaging with *Animal Farm* properly. On top of that, the theory of dependence outlined for literary works suggest that *Animal Farm* no longer exists (since there is no population with the correct background assumptions to understand it), and if it does not exist then our future civilisation cannot engage with it. We cannot say that our future civilisation has revived *Animal Farm* either, for the same reason they are not reading it in the first place: they are ignorant of the historical circumstances in which *Animal Farm* was created.

It looks like we are forced to say that this future civilisation is not engaging with the literary work *Animal Farm*, but instead has a new literary work on their hands based on the same sequence of words. This conclusion has two troubling consequences. The first is that, if there is a new literary work, then it must have been created. Unlike the easy cases in which we can identify a literary work with particular creative acts of a single author, in this case we have several different people, and all they have done is read a book. Figuring out the dependencies this new literary work will

exhibit may be impossible. It may even be the case that there are multiple new literary works and not just one, assuming that a number of different people carry different enough background assumptions. It also conflicts with our understanding of literary practices to say that a literary work can be created by being read; if something is being read, then we want to say that a literary work already exists.

The second problematic consequence derives from the fact that it is the future civilization's ignorance of Stalinism that prevents them from engaging with or reviving the literary work *Animal Farm*. We said that they cannot be engaging with *Animal Farm* because they fail to realise that it is a satire, and thus, we were forced to say that they have somehow created a new literary work. Though somewhat more elaborate, this case is not drastically different from the more mundane scenario in which a person simply reads *Animal Farm* but fails to understand it properly. Let us say, perhaps, that Billy, nine years old, reads it and interprets it as a story about animals on a farm. This case is different in details, but not substance, from our future civilisation case. It looks like we have to say that Billy, also, has created a new literary work, since by definition he is not reading *Animal Farm*. This is highly unintuitive; we do not want to say that Billy has read something new, we want to say that he has read *Animal Farm*, but failed to understand it. The stark division that Thomasson makes between a sequence of words and the literary work produced by those words, though plausibly in many ways, is responsible for these unintuitive consequences.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE LINGUISTIC DATA

Thomasson maintains that one of the benefits of her theory is that it neatly accounts for certain linguistic data that other theories have difficulty with. She points out that a great deal of work has been done on analysing fictional discourse, most of it in an effort to explain how our ways of speaking seem to commit us to fictional characters, and to avoid postulating such characters (1999: 93). Thomasson thinks that this approach is mistaken, and that fictional discourse is better accounted for if we admit fictional

characters into our ontology. I agree that Thomasson's view handles much of the linguistic data from fictional discourse well, but argue that with respect to one piece of data her explanation is lacking.

The problems surrounding fictional discourse are well known; our talk about fiction seems to commit us to the existence of fictional characters, since we use names like, 'Holmes' and, 'Hamlet' which seem to refer to them. As Thomasson notes,

[...] philosophers of language dealing with fiction have often taken their task to be that of providing analyses of statements apparently about fictional objects that, despite the nonreference of fictional terms, yield truth-values that accord with our ordinary beliefs about which statements are true, and which false (1999: 94).

Thomasson acknowledges that non-postulating views, such as Russellian and Fregean analyses, are capable of adequately accounting for certain, but not all, of the data (1999: 95). The data they can account for are the simplest cases which seem to commit us to fictional characters: sentences like 'Hamlet is a prince'. The Fregean analysis, for example, treats this sentence as lacking truth-value, since it insists that the name 'Hamlet' does not refer to anything. This relieves us of the ontological commitment to fictional characters, but does not accommodate our judgement that the sentence is true. The most common way to make such an accommodation is to paraphrase the sentence as, 'according to the story, Hamlet is a prince' (Thomasson, 1999: 94, 95).

However, non-postulating views have a much more difficult time accounting for sentences which are not about the content of fictions, but are 'real-world' assertions of critical literary discourse. Sentences of this category are those like, 'Hamlet is a fictional character', and 'Hamlet was created by Shakespeare' (Thomasson, 1999: 95).

Thomasson's main criticism of non-postulating views is that in order to account for sentences like these, they have to develop more implausible ad hoc paraphrases which do not contribute to a general account of fictional discourse; all for the goal of avoiding postulating fictional characters (1999: 95, 99). Thomasson's

view, alternatively, handles the real-world assertions well. She analyses, for example, 'Hamlet was created by Shakespeare' as straightforwardly true: the name Hamlet refers to a fictional character which was indeed created by Shakespeare. No paraphrase is needed and the intuitively correct truth value is derived; this simple explanation of these types of sentences is certainly an advantage of Thomasson's account.⁷

Yet, as Thomasson acknowledges, her theory does encounter problems with certain data, most notably with negative existentials, as well as with the simple 'Hamlet is a prince' case. The first problem is that, on Thomasson's view, negative existential statements seem to come out false, even though we intuitively think there is a sense in which they are true. We usually think 'Hamlet does not exist' expresses a truth, since Hamlet is a fictional character from a play. Since Thomasson postulates the existence of fictional characters, however, that sentence looks false on her view. The second problem is with cases like 'Hamlet is a prince'. On Thomasson's view, 'Hamlet' refers to the fictional character created by Shakespeare; fictional characters are abstract artifacts, and an abstract artifact cannot have the property of being a prince. Thus, this sentence also comes out false, even though it is intuitively true.

Thomasson's resolution to these difficulties is to offer paraphrases of these two types of sentences. She acknowledges that fictional discourse comes with 'confusions and inconsistencies that need to be sorted out', and that every theory will have to make some trade-offs (1999: 111). She is careful to point out in criticising non-postulating views that it is not the paraphrase technique itself that she objects to, just the ad hoc overuses of it (1999: 96). Thus, Thomasson argues that the negative existential cases, like 'Hamlet does not exist', can be paraphrased to express truths. Thomasson suggests we interpret this sentence as saying 'there is no (real) person who is Hamlet' (1999: 112). Further, Thomasson thinks that all statements made in what she calls the 'fictional context' (the context in which what is being discussed is what is true in the fiction) can usefully be prefixed with: 'according to the story'. But, because we implicitly understand if

⁷ Thomasson also points out that her theory has advantages over Walton's (1990) 'pretense' view, as well as the other postulating, Meinongian views (1999: 96, 97, 100–105).

we are in the fictional context or not, actually doing so is usually unnecessary (1999: 105). Since the sentence ‘Hamlet is a prince’ is uttered in the fictional context, it can be prefixed in this way, and understood to express a truth (1999: 113).

I think Thomasson’s resolution of the negative existential case is more or less unproblematic. Thomasson is right to point out that her paraphrase is usually what people have in mind by uttering this sentence; they want to deny that there is such a *person* Hamlet in the real world, but have no intention of denying (unless influenced by philosophy) that there is a fictional character Hamlet (1999: 113). However, I think Thomasson’s resolution of the ‘Hamlet is a prince’ case is not as straightforward or satisfactory as she takes it to be. The ‘according to the story’ prefix does not alone resolve the problem.

Considerations found in Currie (1990) help to make the issue for Thomasson clear. Currie distinguishes between three different uses of fictional names and offers a different account for each one. His three-way distinction is between what he calls, ‘fictive’ uses, ‘metafictive’ uses and, ‘transfictive’ uses (1990: 180, 181). The metafictive use, and the transfictive use, more or less correspond to Thomasson’s fictional context and real context, respectively; in addition, Currie offers similar explanations to Thomasson’s.⁸ Currie’s ‘fictive’ use of fictional names is the use employed in the actual text of a given fiction. If I utter, for example, ‘Holmes smokes a pipe’, then that is a metafictive use, but if Conan Doyle utters it in writing the fiction, then it is a fictive use (1990: 146, 147).

I contend that the problem with Thomasson’s explanation of the ‘Hamlet is a prince’ datum is derived from her failure to make a distinction along the lines of Currie’s ‘fictive’ use. For Thomasson, the name ‘Hamlet’ refers to the fictional character, that is, the abstract artifact ‘Hamlet’, both inside and outside the content of the fiction (1999: 107). This fact is suggested by remarks Thomasson makes regarding naming ceremonies for fictional characters; she states that the first uses of the names of characters in their texts are naming baptisms of the fictional ob-

⁸ The explanations are similar in that for the metafictive use, Currie employs an ‘according to the story’ operator, and for the transfictive use, Currie makes use of what he calls ‘roles’, which are theoretical entities that have much in common with Thomasson’s abstract artifacts (Currie, 1990: 159, 172–174).

jects themselves (1999: 47).⁹ Thus, if the name ‘Hamlet’ refers to a fictional object whenever it is used, then the ‘according to the story’ paraphrase does not help to make ‘Hamlet is a prince’ true. So paraphrased, the sentence ‘Hamlet is a prince’ ends up expressing the proposition that according to the story, the fictional object Hamlet is a prince. This sentence is false, because the story says nothing about any fictional object Hamlet; according to the story, Hamlet refers to a man, not a fictional object. What Thomasson needs in order to resolve this difficulty is to make a distinction along the lines of Currie’s fictive and metafictional uses.¹⁰ When it comes to ‘Hamlet is a prince’, it is not an ‘according to the story’ paraphrase that Thomasson needs, it is an *ambiguity* between ‘Hamlet’ as it is used to refer in the story, and ‘Hamlet’ as it is used to refer when talking about the fictional character. ‘Hamlet is a prince’ needs to be interpreted as ‘Hamlet-in-the-story is a prince’, and ‘Hamlet was created by Shakespeare’ needs to be interpreted as ‘Hamlet-fictional-object was created by Shakespeare’. Without this ambiguity, we end up asserting, through the bare paraphrase alone, that the story *Hamlet* makes claims about certain abstract fictional objects, which it does not.

Is such an ambiguity plausible? It seems like on Thomasson’s view, it is required, in order to reliably distinguish between what is true in the story, and what is true of certain fictional objects in the real world. I only want to bring up one worry, and that has to do with naming ceremonies. As I mentioned above, Thomasson takes fictional objects to be baptised with their names within the story in which they appear. Yet, if we are going to need an ambiguity between, for example, ‘Hamlet-in-the-story’ and, ‘Hamlet-fictional-object’, we are going to need a naming ceremony for the referent of ‘Hamlet-in-the-story’. The most obvious candidate is the first use of the name in the fiction, but this, on Thomasson’s account, is already the naming ceremony for the fictional object (1999: 48). Whether the initial use of a name in a piece of fiction can serve both as a naming ceremony for an abstract artifact in our world, as well as a person in the fiction, is not entirely clear.

9 This interpretation of Thomasson’s understanding of the reference of fictional names is reinforced in Braun (2005: 610).

10 I am not suggesting that Thomasson needs to adopt any of the analyses that Currie offers, only that uses of the name within the story and uses of the name outside of it are distinguished between.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Thomason's (1999) artifactual theory of fictional characters is problematic on several accounts. In the first section, I raised difficulties for the theory with regard to its accommodation of our understanding of ordinary literary practices. I argued that Thomason gives an inadequate explanation of how fictional characters are created, and that the theories of dependence for fictional characters and identity conditions for literary works have unintuitive consequences that need to be resolved. In the second section, I argued that, although Thomason's theory can explain much of the linguistic data from fictional discourse, her explanation of the 'Hamlet is a prince' case is unsatisfactory. My goal has been to point out these apparent difficulties and clarify the problems Thomason's account faces. In order for the artifactual theory of fictional characters to both make sense of our literary practices as well as fictional discourse, the issues I have raised in this paper must be addressed.

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