Chapter 2

THE COMMITTAL THEORIES (II)

1. Synopsis

In this chapter I devote my attention to the evaluation of the alternative abstractionist conception of fictional entities, namely the *artifactualist* theory. I focus on one of the most articulate versions of that conception, namely Amie Thomasson's theory of fictional objects. This theory takes *ficta* to be entities that depend both in a rigid and a historical way on the specific mental acts of their creators and in a generic and constant manner on the literary works in which they appear. I agree that this theory is able to solve the problems left unresolved by the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist doctrine, but I try to point out some of its drawbacks.

First, by elaborating Thomasson's position a bit further, I show not only that it deals with the "incompleteness" datum in the same way as Neo-Meinongians from the structural angle but also that, unlike the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist doctrine, it fails to accommodate the "analyticity" datum.

More importantly, I point out that in Thomasson's account the artifactualists' basic claim that *ficta* are generated abstract artifactual entities is an unsatisfactory proposition.

Finally, and most significantly, I maintain that since the existence of specific mental acts and the existence of generic literary works do not, even jointly, constitute sufficient conditions for the existence of a fictional being, Thomasson's theory risks undermining her fundamental idea that there really are such things as fictional entities understood as abstract artifacts.

2. The Artifactualist Abstractionist Conception

As we saw in our examination of the "no-*ficta*" and the "many-*ficta*" problems, the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist doctrine of fictional entities foundered on the fact that a *fictum* is something over and above a set of properties. Although it took this fact into account, the Castañedean weakening of Neo-Meinongian abstractionism was also unsuccessful. It is now time to evaluate a (partially) new approach to fictional entities.

Up to now, *ficta* have been conceived in terms of a, broadly speaking, Platonic model of what an abstract entity is. According to this model, an abstract entity is an *atemporal* being as its non-spatiotemporal existence suggests. Moreover, though as stated above it is an actual entity, it belongs to that "part" of the real world—what Plato called the hyperuranic realm—which has no substantive relation with the area of concrete actual entities. Finally, as is suggested by its lack of interaction with concrete actual entities, it exists (non-spatiotemporally) not only in the real world but also in all the possible worlds: it is a *necessary* being. Mathematical entities are typical examples of this model of abstractness; but types satisfy it as well (as Plato claimed in developing his theory of ideas). So, inasmuch as *ficta* are taken to be either (one-one correlates of) sets or generic objects, they are also taken to be (one-one correlates of) abstract entities of the same kind.

Nonetheless, intuitively speaking, *ficta* do not seem to fit this model. It may be the case that mathematical entities and types exist independently of concrete entities and in particular of human beings.[1] But if there were no humans, would there be fictional entities? Could a spiritless world—specifically, a world without human beings—be a world in which Hamlet and Holmes are freely floating entities along with the number 4 and the classes that are members of themselves or with the Bold and the Beautiful? Moreover, again unlike abstract Platonic entities, *ficta* are often described as creations of (human) minds, as products of (human) fantasy. That is, not only do they seem to be entities dependent for their existence on the existence of other beings (humans or, better, human communities) but they also appear to be entities that come into being at a certain point in the history of the world as a product of someone's imagination. Not only, if there are no humans, there is no Hamlet; but also, if nobody had conceived (and correspondingly verbalized, written or performed) *Hamlet*, once again there would be no Hamlet. Whereas, if Plato is right, neither the number 4 nor the Beautiful needs a soul to activate it.

[1] I say "it may be the case" since one can genuinely question whether mathematical beings as well as types are Platonic-like entities—for instance, if one endorses mathematical constructivism.

Undoubtedly, however, this intuition does not mean that the abstractionist conception of fictional entities has to be abandoned. It merely means that *ficta* do not fit the model of what Edmund Husserl would call *free idealities*, namely *abstracta* having the Platonic features described above. But the domain of *abstracta* is not exhausted by free idealities. There are also what Husserl labelled *bound idealities*, namely *abstracta* that depend for their existence on the existence of other beings.[2] Furthermore, this dependence is not only *metaphysical*—the dependent entity exists only in possible worlds in which those other beings exist—but also *temporal*: the dependent entity must be such that it begins to exist when one of those beings brings it into existence.[3] Institutional entities, such as constitutions, nations and universities, are prototypical cases of bound idealities in the above sense. Following Wolfgang Künne, I will take species as an exemplifying case of such entities. Wherever we go, we never encounter the species *homo*, but only specimens of it. Nor could we: it is an abstract entity, a being that exists in a non-spatiotemporal way. Yet this species exists only insofar as there are specimens of it: in a world with no humans, the species would not exist. Moreover, the species must be such that it exists as soon as a specimen of it, a concrete human being, happens to exist (if Charles Darwin is right, the species has not always existed but came into existence as soon as its first specimen was born).[4]

Thus, as far as fictional entities are concerned it is possible not to give up abstractionism altogether but, instead, to develop a thoroughly different kind of abstractionist theory. This will be a doctrine that does not take *ficta* to be (one-one correlates of) free idealities, as Neo-Meinongians do, but rather bound idealities. According to this theory, *ficta* depend for their existence on the existence of other beings, on human mental acts. More precisely, they depend on them not only metaphysically, but also temporally. Moreover, temporal dependence on mental acts makes it possible to see *ficta* as *constructed* abstract objects. Lastly, since they are constructed entities, they may be thought of as abstract *artifacts*. This doctrine was first defended by Roman Ingarden[5] and then by several scholars on different occasions.[6] A new version has been recently presented in Thomasson's artifactual theory of

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[2] Cf. Husserl (1948: 267).

[3] Cf. again Husserl (ibid.).

[4] Cf. Künne (1982: 407). In point of fact, it is controversial that species are bound idealities. One might say instead that they are like types, for which existence means instantiation. Yet my point is completely independent of this issue.

[5] Cf. Ingarden (1931). In fact, Ingarden prompted Husserl to revise his original theory of *abstracta* and to allow for bound idealities. Cf. Künne (1982: 406–7). As to the advantage of Ingarden's theory of *ficta* over Meinong's own theory, see Smith (1980).

[6] Cf., for example, Kripke (1973), Searle (1979), van Inwagen (1979), and Salmon (1998).

fictional entities.[7] As far as I know, this is the most complete development of this alternative abstractionist conception of fictional entities. So, it is to the evaluation of this theory that I now turn.

To begin with, Thomasson openly acknowledges that a *fictum* is an abstract entity: no spatiotemporal location can be truthfully attributed to it.[8] Yet, on Thomasson's own account a *fictum* is abstract in the same sense as a Husserlian bound ideality is. Indeed, Thomasson's first substantive claim is that a *fictum* is an abstract entity which, both rigidly and historically, depends on the mental act by means of which its creator thinks of it.[9] Let me expand on this.

Following a widespread tradition, Thomasson elucidates existential dependence in *modal* terms: saying that the existence of one entity depends on the existence of another entity amounts to saying that the first entity *cannot* exist unless the second exists. But Thomasson enriches this traditional account by specifying dependence as such in a variety of ways. First of all, dependence can be either *rigid* or *generic*. The former is dependence on a particular individual: the dependent entity cannot exist unless a particular individual exists. This is a *specific* dependence: an object depends on another particular entity for its existence. The latter, in contrast, is dependence on something of a particular type: the dependent entity cannot exist unless something of a particular type exists.[10]

Now, according to Thomasson, *ficta* are primarily affected by the first kind of dependence. A *fictum* depends rigidly on the particular mental act of the author of the fiction that talks of it: if that act did not exist, the *fictum* would not exist either. Furthermore, this dependence is not only rigid but also *historical*, where by "historical dependence" Thomasson means that in order for the dependent entity to come into existence, another entity must already exist.[11] Hence, a *fictum* also requires that the mental act on which it rigidly depends already exists in order for it to come into existence: had that

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[7] Cf. Thomasson (1999).

[8] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 36–7). By taking *ficta* to be historically and, as will be seen below, also constantly dependent on other entities, Thomasson allows for *ficta* to have temporal features. Goodman (2003) holds that Thomasson's theory should be revised by saying that, though abstract, a *fictum* has not only temporal but also *spatial* features, in the sense of having a *generic* habitat of existence. This fits Husserl's conception of bound idealities, according to which their boundedness "is a boundedness to *spatio*temporal regions" (Künne (1982: 430; my italics)). Yet to allow for *ficta* to have an, albeit generic, location seems utterly counterintuitive. Would we be prepared to say that two *ficta* have switched places if the communities that respectively brought them into existence had exchanged settlements?

[9] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 35).

[10] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 29). For both kinds of dependencies, see also Mulligan-Smith (1986: 117–8).

[11] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 31).

act not occurred, the *fictum* would not have come into existence. Historical dependence is what entitles us to speak of the *fictum*'s original thinker, namely the author of the fiction talking of it, as its *creator*.

By means of this conceptual apparatus, the artifactual theory can provide a solution to the problems illustrated at the end of the previous chapter, namely the "no-*ficta*" and the "many-*ficta*" problems.

As you will remember, the "no-*ficta*" problem was exemplified by the "Moloch" case: although there already exists a set of "moloch-ish" properties, there is no such a thing as Moloch since no "Moloch" story is really recounted in the Bible. However, in the context of the artifactualist theory, it is clear that there might have been such a thing as Moloch, if the Bible had really contained the "Moloch" story. And if at the times when the Bible was written there had been someone who had conceived of (and, accordingly, included in a book of the Bible) Moloch as the protagonist of the story we erroneously think of as really found in the Bible.[12]

The "many-*ficta*" problem has a similar solution. Let us recall the idealized case of Pierre Menard: two syntactically identical texts written by two totally unconnected individuals, Cervantes and Pierre Menard. In that situation, there are two different mental acts of thinking about a character named "Don Quixote", one by Cervantes and another by Pierre Menard. Given the rigid historical dependence of *ficta* on their creators' mental acts, those thoughts bring into existence two different characters, two Don Quixotes; these are distinct *ficta* even though in both texts they are ascribed all the very same properties.[13]

At first sight, one might think that the mental act on which a *fictum* depends rigidly and historically is the extra factor, over and above its being a property set, that makes a *fictum* the entity it is. Yet Thomasson does not go in this direction. Certainly, as we have seen, she acknowledges with Neo-Meinongian abstractionists that a *fictum* is an abstract being. But, in her view, the fact that there is something a fictional entity *historically* depends on, that a *fictum* is an entity which comes into being as a result of something happening, shows that a *fictum* is nothing like a set. Indeed, for Thomasson a *fictum* is an *artifact*, though an abstract one; it is a product of human culture, such as games, institutions and laws.

At this point, it must be explained what makes a *fictum* remain in being once it has come into existence through being thought of by its creator. If a *fictum* were a set, this issue would not even arise. As we saw, by borrowing the Platonic conception of mathematical entities one might claim that, *qua* set, a *fictum*—like a number—is an atemporal being. Thus, it

[12] This is the solution suggested by Kripke (1973).

[13] Cf. Thomasson herself (1999: 6–7, 56).

neither comes into existence nor persists in it for its existence is totally independent of temporal connotations. Nonetheless, from the artifactualist perspective a *fictum* is no set at all, but rather an entity that comes into existence at a certain point in history by being thought of by its creator. Now, if it comes into existence in this way, how is it that, on Thomasson's account, a *fictum* may go on existing? Let me call this the *persistence problem*.

In order to address this problem, Thomasson advances her second substantive claim: over and above its rigid historical dependence on a given mental act of its creator, a *fictum* also depends generically and constantly on a literary work or other in which it is mentioned.[14] I have already explained what generic dependence is: the dependent entity cannot exist unless something or other of a particular type exists. In order for a *fictum* to exist, therefore, there must be a narration that speaks of that *fictum*. Moreover, this generic dependence is also constant. By "constant dependence" Thomasson means a relation such that the dependent entity requires that the entity on which it depends, exists at every moment at which the dependent entity exists.[15] As a result, by being constantly and generically dependent on literary works, a *fictum* requires that, at every moment it exists, there is a literary work that mentions it.

It is clear how such a claim enables Thomasson to solve the persistence problem. A *fictum* continues in being as long as there is a work that numbers it among its elements. In its turn, a literary work generically and constantly depends on a copy of itself. By "copy of a work", Thomasson means a semantically interpreted entity, a physical item understood in a certain way by a given linguistic community.[16] Accordingly, a *fictum* continues in being as long as there exists a copy of a work that has it among its characters.

An obvious consequence of this position is that a *fictum* is perishable. Suppose that every copy of every work in which a certain *fictum* is mentioned ceases to exist; that all the physical copies of those works are destroyed and all memories of the *fictum* fade into oblivion. The result is that the fictional entity itself also vanishes from existence.[17]

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[14] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 36).

[15] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 30).

[16] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 36, 65–6). To be more precise, for Thomasson even a mental remembering of a work may suffice in order for that work to be kept in existence. Cf. (1999: 11–2, 36). She would in fact remark that, once copies are taken to be semantically interpreted entities, there is no need for them to exist in the *outer* rather than in the *inner* world (as memories, *qua* mental acts endowed with content, do).

[17] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 10).

In the context of the artifactualist abstractionist approach to fictional beings, this is quite understandable. As stated previously, I take species to be an illuminating case of bound idealities, of abstract dependent entities. Now, just as it originates when its first specimen comes into being, a species ceases to exist as soon as its last specimen dies out.[18] One may therefore expect that, in general, any bound ideality will go out of existence as soon as the entities on which it constantly depends no longer exist.

3. The Drawbacks of the Artifactualist Abstractionist Conception

Up to this point, I have sketched a paradigm which is partially an alternative to the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist conception of fictional beings. This alternative seems more promising than the Meinongian conception for it develops an apparently more intuitive conception of fictional beings capable of solving the problems—the "no-*ficta*" and the "many-*ficta*" problems—on which the Neo-Meinongian conception had foundered. It is now time to see whether such merits give the artifactualist abstractionist theory a real advantage over the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist conception. I do not in fact think that they do. First of all, despite its intuitive nature, the artifactualist theory accounts for the second datum pointed out in the previous chapter—the "incompleteness" datum—in the same way as Neo-Meinongians. Also, unlike the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist doctrine, it does not explain the third datum, the "analyticity" datum. More problematically than this, moreover, it is unclear how it can support the artifactualist's basic claim that *ficta* are generated abstract artifactual entities. Finally and most perplexingly, even if that doctrine is taken to provide the necessary conditions for the identity of a fictional entity, it fails to offer convincing sufficient conditions for its existence. As a result, it risks providing no real basis for its ontologically realist stance on *ficta* as abstract artifacts. Let me address these issues in turn.

3.1 The Artifactualist Approach to Data

Since Thomasson's theory conceives of *ficta* as abstract entities, it is no surprise that it accounts for the first datum regarding *ficta* that I pointed out in the previous chapter, namely the "nonexistence" datum, in very much the same terms as Neo-Meinongian abstractionists. A *fictum* does not exist in the sense that it does not exist spatiotemporally, or, amounting to the same

[18] Cf. Künne (1982: 407).

thing, it exists non-spatiotemporally.[19] What is probably surprising is that Thomasson ends up accounting for the second datum, the "incompleteness" datum, in structurally the same way that Neo-Meinongian abstractionists explain it. To show that this is the case, a short digression is required.

To begin with, it will be remembered from the previous chapter that the idea that a *fictum* possesses the properties ascribed to it in the relevant narration can seem perplexing. How can it be that Hamlet is a prince, like Charles, Prince of Wales, and that Sherlock Holmes lives in London, like Queen Elizabeth II? Neo-Meinongians answer this question in the affirmative by appealing either to the "kinds of properties" or to the "modes of predication" distinction; for example, *being a prince* either is a nuclear property of Hamlet or is internally predicated of him. Thomasson, on the contrary, appears to answer this question in the negative. Because a *fictum* is an abstract artifact, it cannot have the properties that real concrete individuals possess. As she says, it is literally not true that Hamlet is a prince.[20]

Thomasson's answer, however, is more complex than this. First of all, she draws a distinction between two kinds of sentential contexts in which a property is predicated of a certain *fictum*. In her view, one and the same sentence can be understood both from the perspective of a real context and from that of a fictional context; that is, both with respect to a concrete section of the real world and with respect to an abstract section of the same

[19] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 112). On this issue there is a slight difference between Thomasson and Neo-Meinongians. On the one hand, the Neo-Meinongians tend to interpret the distinction between *abstracta* and other *actualia* in terms of their possession of different first-order properties: *abstracta subsist*, that is they exist non-spatiotemporally or, alternatively, merely bring about effects, whereas other *actualia exist tout court*, that is they exist spatiotemporally or, alternatively, both bring about and undergo effects. On the other hand, Thomasson deals with this existential difference in terms of a contextual restriction of the particular quantifier which for her has only an existentially loaded import. When one says that there are entities of a certain kind, one may take the quantifier to be either unrestricted—as bounding a variable that ranges over any entity whatsoever—or restricted—as bounding a variable that ranges only over spatiotemporally existent beings. So, when one says that there are such things as fictional beings, one is making a true statement if the quantifier is understood in the unrestricted sense, but a false statement if it is used in the restricted sense (ibid.). Certainly, some—perhaps most—Neo-Meinongians admit that when we say that there are no fictional entities, we are contextually restricting the particular quantifier to a domain of existents. Yet they stress that if we are to make such a restriction, a first-order property of existence *tout court* must be available. See the authors quoted in n.4 of the previous chapter. Nevertheless, such a difference between the two perspectives is irrelevant for our present purposes.

[20] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 107).

world, a section constituted by the relevant story in which that *fictum* originally occurred.[21] So, take a sentence such as:

(1) Hamlet is a prince.

With respect to the first context this sentence is false, for in the concrete section of our world it is simply not the case that the abstract artifact Hamlet has the property of *being a prince*. Yet with respect to the second context the sentence is true, for in a certain abstract section of our world, namely the story of *Hamlet*, the abstract artifact Hamlet does have that property. Indeed, *Hamlet* says that Hamlet is a prince.[22]

Although Thomasson would not put it in this way, one can say that on her account a *fictum* has the properties ascribed to it in the relevant fiction—let us take them to be *absolute* properties—only *relatively*; that is, only in the relevant fictional context. Indeed, the situation here is structurally similar to the situation affecting temporal contexts; one and the same sentence, for example:

(2) George W. Bush is president of the USA

is evaluated differently with respect to different temporal contexts, say 1995 and 2005; with respect to the first context it is false and with respect to the second it is true. Thus one may say that Bush has the property of *being president of USA* only relatively; that is, only in the second temporal context.

However, Thomasson adds that to say truly with respect to a fictional context that a *fictum* has a property ascribed to it by the story which determines that context amounts to saying truly *tout court* that according to the story that *fictum* has that property.[23] To my mind, this move amounts to allowing that fictional objects absolutely have *story-relative* properties, namely, relational properties of the kind *being P according to story S*.[24] One may take this property to be very close to a converse-intentional property of the kind *being told/believed by agent A to be P*, which may indeed be rephrased as *being P according to A*.[25] A comparison with the situation affecting standard contexts

[21] I think that, like artifactualists in general [cf., for example, Predelli (1997) and (2002)], Thomasson regards these contexts as relevant merely for the evaluation of the sentences involved. It is obvious that, for her, the shift from a real to a fictional context does not induce any shift in the meaning of a sentence; rather, the contextual shift is relevant only in that it may alter the truth value of the sentence. In Chapter 5, however, we see that the artifactualists' belief that fictional contexts induce no meaning shift in the sentences involved is ungrounded.

[22] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 105–7).

[23] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 107).

[24] For many examples of relational properties of this kind, see, for example, Varzi (2001: 98–9).

[25] For the notion of a converse-intentional property, see Chisholm (1982a).

of sentential evaluation, possible worlds, will be useful here. Saying that with respect to a possible world *w*, an object possesses the absolute property of *being P* is the same as saying that this same object possesses absolutely the world-relative property of *being P-in-w*.[26]

Undoubtedly, Thomasson could do without this appeal to story-relative properties if, in saying that a sentence such as (1) is tantamount to:

(1′) According to *Hamlet*, Hamlet is a prince

she further claimed that (1′) has to be read *de dicto*. Yet she clearly rejects this option: for her, (1′) is to be read *de re*.[27] But this is precisely the same as saying that by means of (1′)—or of its equivalent (1)—the story-relative property of *being a prince according to Hamlet* is predicated of the fictional object Hamlet.

Once we bring in story-relative properties, it turns out that regarding the issue of property possession, Thomasson's position is not very far from that advocating the "type of property" distinction. At first sight, one might say that whereas the latter position distinguishes between nuclear and extranuclear properties, Thomasson distinguishes between story-relative and story-*non*relative, namely absolute, properties.[28]

Of course, Thomasson may immediately point out that there is a difference between her (possible) appeal to a distinction between story-relative and absolute properties and what the advocates of the "type of property" distinction maintain. According to them, a *fictum* genuinely possesses not only nuclear but also extranuclear properties. Thomasson, in contrast, thinks that a *fictum* genuinely possesses only story-relative properties. Absolute properties, which for her are not extranuclear properties but just the de-relativized counterparts of the story-relative properties, are properties that the *fictum* possesses only relatively, that is, with respect to the appropriate fictional context.

This view is correct. Yet it can immediately be retorted that, in looking at Thomasson's theoretical framework, the nuclear/extranuclear distinction should not be mapped onto that between story-relative and absolute properties but, rather, onto that between story-relative and (let me call them) *reality*-relative properties. In distinguishing between real and fictional contexts, Thomasson not only says that *ficta* possess certain properties with respect to

[26] Cf. Plantinga (1974: 62).

[27] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 107).

[28] This seems to be the gist of Ingarden's distinction between *ficta* possessing *ascribed characteristics*, corresponding to true sentences such as (1'), and *properties in the strict sense*, such as *being a fictional character*. On this distinction, see Smith (1980: 101).

fictional contexts but not to real contexts, she also claims that *ficta* possess other properties with respect to real contexts but not to fictional contexts, for instance the property of *being a fictional character*.[29] This is to say that a *fictum* also possesses those very properties relatively. Moreover, one must say that for Thomasson to say truly with respect to a real context that a *fictum* possesses one such property is again tantamount to saying truly that, according to reality (that is, according to the concrete part of our world), that *fictum* possesses that property. Yet this is, furthermore, the same as saying that that *fictum* possesses absolutely the reality-relative property of *being a fictional character according to reality*.[30]

When things are viewed in this light, Thomasson's account of the "incompleteness" datum turns out to be structurally similar to the account given by the supporters of the "types of property" distinction or even by those favoring any kind of Neo-Meinongian conception. Regarding any property *P* about which the relevant narration neither says nor implies that a given character either has or does not have it, Thomasson claims that it is false both that, according to the story, the character has it and that, according to the story, that the character does not have it. For instance, she claims that it is false both that, according to Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet is of blood type A and that, according to Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet is not of blood type A.[31] In actual fact, for Thomasson this does not demonstrate that such a *fictum* is incomplete with respect to the property *P* in question. It is simply false that such a *fictum* has *P*, and it is also false that it possesses any property that, on the contrary, the relevant narration says it has. Stated more precisely, with respect to a real context it is false that the *fictum* has *P* or any of the properties the relevant narration says it has. For instance, in relation

[29] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 106). According to Neo-Meinongians, these are in fact the extranuclear properties.

[30] At this point, one might even say that the "types of property" distinction is really grounded in Thomasson's distinction between story-relative and reality-relative properties. For that distinction is able to solve problems that the original appeal to the nuclear/extranuclear distinction had left open. As will be remembered from the previous chapter, scrutiny of the "types of property" distinction prompted (*inter alia*) the following doubts. Above all, how can the nuclear/extranuclear property distinction be justified? Moreover, what is the watered-down nuclear version of an extranuclear property? Appealing to relative properties can solve both problems at the same time. First, one can assume that nuclear properties differ from extranuclear properties in being *each* a watered-down version of the corresponding extranuclear property. Secondly, one can take extranuclear properties to be the reality-relative properties and watered-down nuclear versions of extranuclear properties to be precisely the corresponding story-relative properties.

[31] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 107–8).

to a real context it is false both that Hamlet is of blood type A and that Hamlet is a prince.[32] Yet, as we have already seen, the two false sentences:

(3) According to *Hamlet*, Hamlet is of blood type A

(4) According to *Hamlet*, Hamlet is not of blood type A

should for Thomasson be read *de re*:

(3′) Hamlet is such that, according to *Hamlet*, he is of blood type A

(4′) Hamlet is such that, according to *Hamlet*, he is not of blood type A.

But, as we have also seen above, this is the same as saying that, in Thomasson's view, Hamlet fails to possess the story-relative property of *being of blood type A according to Hamlet* and also fails to possess its complement, namely the story-relative property of *not being of blood type A according to Hamlet*. Thus, I conclude that Thomasson's position is very close to that of a Neo-Meinongian follower of the "types of property" distinction who holds that a *fictum F* is incomplete iff, with respect to both the nuclear property *P* and its complement *not-P*, the *fictum* fails to have them (this is equivalent to saying that both "F is P" and "F is not-P" are false). *Mutatis mutandis*, we have to say that, with respect to this point, Thomasson's position is in general close to that of a Neo-Meinongian.

Be that as it may, however, this way of accounting for the "incompleteness" datum is of no use with respect to the "analyticity" datum. As we saw in the previous chapter, this datum is that to say of a certain *fictum F* that it has a property *P* about which the relevant story either says or implies that it is indeed possessed by *F*, if it is a truth, is a trivial—or at least an unrevisable—truth. For example, it sounds trivially true to say that Hamlet is a prince since this is what *Hamlet* says he is. This datum suggests that the corresponding sentence "F is P" is analytically true. Now, this datum cannot be accounted for by saying that a sentence "F is P" is an abbreviation for "According to story S, F is P" and, hence, by appealing (admittedly indirectly) to story-relative properties. We still need an explanation of why the sentence "F is P", even when read as "According to story S, F is P", is *analytically* true. Thomasson may perhaps point to her distinction between real and fictional contexts and tentatively agree that, wherever "F is P" is true, namely with respect to some fictional contexts and not to real ones, it is also analytically true. Yet, if she did agree, she should further provide an original

[32] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 108 n. 24).

account of this analyticity because she could definitely not rely on a Neo-Meinongian explanation. A Neo-Meinongian can indeed say that that sentence is analytically true in that the *designatum* of the predicative term "_ is P"—either a certain nuclear property or an internally predicated property *P*—belongs to the set which constitutes the *designatum* of the singular term "F", that is the *fictum F* in question.[33]

3.2 Generation and Artifactuality of a Fictional Being from the Artifactualist Perspective

Granted that the problem of how to account for the data we have been discussing is just a minor problem for Thomasson's approach, she could perhaps disregard the fact that her theory does not specifically fit the "analyticity" datum by simply stating that that datum is disputable. To my mind, however, her theory faces bigger problems.[34] Above all, it risks being unable to provide any support for the general claim that characterizes the artifactualist position, namely that *ficta* are generated abstract artifactual entities.

To start with, Thomasson's account raises questions relative to the first part of the above-mentioned claim that *ficta* are generated entities. According to Thomasson, given the rigid historical dependence of a fictional entity on a particular mental act, a *fictum* comes into being as the *purely intentional object* of that act. Following Brentano, we would say that a purely intentional object is the *immanent* entity that a mental act is "directed" at. In Brentano's terminology, in fact, purely intentional objects "in-exist" in their mental acts.[35] A purely

[33] One might say that since Thomasson actually treats fictional and real contexts as circumstances of evaluation for sentences such as (1), she could here adopt a Kaplanian stance. Namely, by first separating contexts of utterance from circumstances of evaluation of such sentences and then saying that one such sentence is analytically true iff it is true in all its contexts of utterance. Cf. Kaplan (1989a). Yet this approach does not work because in all the utterance contexts whose world parameter is the fictional circumstance of evaluation, a sentence such as (1) are not such but in all the contexts whose world parameter is the real circumstance of evaluation, the sentence turns out to be false.

[34] However, a deep problem lies behind Thomasson's distinction between fictional and real contexts. Since such contexts are actually contexts of evaluation, and since this implies moreover that ascribing to a *fictum* an absolute property means ascribing that property to it relative to one such circumstance, it turns out that sentences which in her metaphysical account should be necessarily true are not such, for they are not true with respect to all circumstances of evaluation. Take for example "Hamlet was created by Shakespeare" or "Hamlet is a fictional being". According to Thomasson, these sentences are necessarily true (or at least, true in all circumstances of evaluation in which Hamlet exists) because the properties predicated of Hamlet in them are necessary properties of him. Yet if we evaluate those sentences with respect to the fictional context of *Hamlet*, they are false.

[35] Cf. Brentano (1924: 88).

intentional object, moreover, turns out to be a fictional entity insofar as we take it to be a *protracted* intentional object: an entity which, unlike a purely intentional object, survives the act of its conception by being kept in existence by the existence of some literary work or other; in other words, by its generic constant dependence upon literary works.[36] Now, as Thomasson herself claims, *intentionalia* vary in line with different kinds of dependence.[37] So, as far as *ficta* and pure *intentionalia* are concerned, the difference seems to be that, unlike a fictional object, a purely intentional object depends not only rigidly and historically, but also *constantly*, on the mental act that conceives it. Once that act no longer exists, its purely intentional object also vanishes.

This picture clearly assigns to thought a generative ontological power: thoughts create purely intentional objects—ephemeral entities that last as long as the thoughts last—as well as fictional entities—intentional objects that survive beyond the mental acts creating them.[38] But, as we saw in Chapter 1, ascribing such a power to thought is controversial.[39]

In the present context, let me reformulate this difficulty as follows. First, it is hardly acceptable to claim that there really is such a thing as a purely intentional object. Once a purely intentional object is characterized as above, it is the case that no purely intentional object can be shared both by different subjects and by one and the same subject at different times. Moreover, if a purely intentional object is one such ephemeral private entity, it is unclear how a fictional object can be an intentional object that survives the mental act that creates it. In order for such a survival to occur, it must be guaranteed that the object which, in the elaboration of a certain literary work, is thought of at time *t*' is the same as the object which, in inaugurating that work, was conceived of at time *t*. Yet this latter entity is *per se* a purely intentional object, that is, something that lasts as long as its initiating thought lasts. Hence, it cannot be identical with the former object. In a nutshell, if it is not clear both *whether* a certain mental act may bring into existence a purely intentional object, and *how* a purely intentional object can turn out to be an entity that is kept in existence by a literary work, that is a fictional entity, it will not be clear either how thoughts can generate fictional entities.[40]

Certainly, Thomasson may simply reply that I have misunderstood her position. According to her in contrast with Brentano, a purely intentional object is not an entity that is constantly dependent on its generating mental

[36] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 7, 36, 88–9).

[37] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 90).

[38] As Thomasson herself says, for both pure *intentionalia* and *ficta* the intentionality of a thought is a *creative* relation: it brings the object of thought, whether a pure *intentionale* or a *fictum*, into being. Cf. (1999: 90).

[39] On this difficulty, see also Howell (2002: 523).

[40] For a similar difficulty, see Reicher (1995: 107).

act. Rather, it is an entity which, following Ingarden, may well survive that act. For Thomasson, it is not the case that the very general category of *intentionalia* is divided into two subcategories, namely purely intentional objects, taken as Brentanian immanent objects, and fictional entities. On the contrary, purely intentional objects are already entities that survive their own creating mental acts. Furthermore, in that they also survive these creating mental acts, fictional objects are simply a subset of purely intentional objects.[41] As a result, it is not the case that a fictional object is a purely intentional object which, oddly enough, turns out to be a fictional entity. Rather, fictional objects are just one kind of purely intentional object taken to be entities that survive their generating mental acts.

Nonetheless, this reply raises further problems. First, if pure *intentionalia* survive their generating acts, then they face the classical problem of the identity of a both intersubjective and intrasubjective intentional object. If Hob and Nob, or if Hob alone at *t* and at *t'*, think of a witch cursing the whole city, do they think of the same intentional object or not?[42] This problem prompts the search for identity criteria for pure *intentionalia*. Second, if a purely intentional object that is not a fictional object also survives its generating act, what makes it different from a fictional object? Thomasson has to give an explanation of such a survival for she obviously cannot appeal to constant generic dependence on literary works, which is what she does for genuine *ficta*. As she herself claims, *ficta* are just a subset of pure *intentionalia*. As long as these problems regarding purely intentional objects in general are not solved, the general question of how thought can generate such objects remains entirely open. Since, on this account, fictional objects are just a subset of purely intentional objects, the question is open for them also.[43]

Yet the general problem here is not only *how* a fictional object is generated, but also *what* kind of entity is generated. According to Thomasson, a *fictum* is

[41] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 89).

[42] For this well-known problem, see Geach (1982[2]).

[43] More recently, Thomasson has explored another possibility: thoughts generate fictional objects by generating purely intentional objects (still in the Ingardenian sense), more or less in the same way that illocutionary acts are generated by the production of locutionary acts. Cf. (2003a) and (2003b). This possibility again makes fictional and purely intentional objects entities of different kinds, as in the first exposition investigated here (the one that treated purely intentional objects as Brentanian immanent beings). Unlike this exposition, however, it does not make a purely intentional object into a fictional object but takes pure *intentionalia* and *ficta* to be entities of different kinds from the very beginning. In these respects, this possibility is definitely better than the other two considered here. Yet it must still be clarified in what sense a thought may generate a fictional object over and above an intentional object by virtue of generating the latter. For example, why is it that dreams and hallucinations at most generate intentional objects, the objects that are dreamt of or hallucinated, whereas other thoughts also generate fictional entities by generating intentional objects?

not only a thought-generated purely intentional object, it is also an abstract artifact. This is in fact the remaining part of the artifactualists' basic claim about *ficta*. Accordingly, *ficta* should be entities that fall under the general category of *artefacta*, which includes also concrete items such as cars, coffee-machines and computers. Now what gives a *fictum* its artifactual character? Despite Thomasson's temptation to the contrary,[44] it is definitely not its origin for otherwise all the purely intentional objects, whether Brentanian or Ingardenian, would also be artifacts. But this does not seem to be the case. Perhaps there are purely intentional objects, but they are not at all artifacts. The simple fact that a single or different thoughts are "directed" at a certain intentional object does not make that object artifactual in any relevant sense of the term.

As a result, we seem to be forced into thinking that what gives a *fictum* its artifactual character is not its origin but rather its *protraction*—its life in some work or other; in Thomasson's terms, its constant generic dependence on literary works.

But even this suggestion does not work. Without doubt, one might reasonably claim that if *ficta* were affected by this kind of dependence, this would make them *cultural* entities. For, as Thomasson remarks, similar kinds of dependency allow universities as well as nations, hence institutions in general, to persist; and institutions clearly are cultural entities.[45] I limit myself here to speaking of a reasonable claim since I believe that i) *ficta* are not affected by this kind of dependence;[46] and ii) the genuine reason why they are cultural

[44] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 35).

[45] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 13–14).

[46] As regards this dependence thesis, I can in particular hardly conceive of *ficta* as perishable entities in Thomasson's sense that, should any copy of any literary work in which a certain *fictum* is spoken of disappear, that *fictum* would also vanish. To begin with, it is not clear what it means for a copy of a literary work to disappear. Since, as we have seen for Thomasson, a copy is a *semantically* individuated entity, it is not clear whether it is a physical particular and hence whether it can vanish in the same way as physical particulars do. This problem refers to the general question of how to individuate a literary work, which is not very evident in Thomasson's perspective. For similar difficulties, see Reicher (1995: 95–7); I come back to this issue in Chapter 7. Moreover, what we have is that once it has died, I can legitimately say of a living being that it was such. But can I say of a *fictum* where the works in which it appears have all been destroyed that it *was* a fictional character? Furthermore, Thomasson suggests that *ficta* can not only perish but also be revived (1999: 11 n. 7). In my paradigmatic case of constant dependence, namely the relation subsisting between a natural species and its specimens, it is clear how revival works: a species is revived insofar as an entirely new specimen of it comes into existence through the proper re-assemblage of a certain DNA string. But in the case of a *fictum*, what can play the role of the DNA string? Definitely not the (perhaps scattered) physical ink patches that have survived the destruction of the last copy of the last work in which that *fictum* was mentioned. There is no guarantee that a re-assemblage of those patches would not be interpreted as an utterly different work speaking of an entirely new *fictum* (precisely as in the "Menard" case).

entities seems to me to be another one (mentioned below). However, let me put my own convictions to one side. The question is, rather, this: how can constant generic dependence on literary works guarantee not *ficta*'s cultural nature but its artifactuality? In other words, how can what distinguishes *ficta* from pure *intentionalia* (Brentanian or Ingardenian), whatever it is, be responsible for *ficta* being—but pure *intentionalia* not being—artifacts?

At this point, we are wavering between two unsatisfactory hypotheses. On the one hand it seems that, if a *fictum* is an artifact, it must be such from its very beginning; hence, whatever accounts for its protraction does not account for its artifactuality. On the other hand, it seems that a *fictum* cannot begin its life as an artifact as we have seen that if a *fictum* originates in the same way as a purely intentional object, at its beginning it cannot be an artifact. The question therefore remains: if *ficta* are artifacts whereas pure *intentionalia* are not, how is this to be explained?[47]

On behalf of Thomasson, one could reply that the former option has to be scrutinized more carefully. To speak of a particular mental act as what a *fictum* rigidly and historically depends on for its existence may well appear an inadequate, or at least merely partial, picture of a *fictum*'s generation. Certainly, such a dependence on mental acts can fit purely intentional objects, if there are any. But for fictional beings a rigid historical dependence must appeal to *processes* rather than to acts, to enduring rather than to instantaneous events. Intuitively speaking, it seems that in order for a *fictum* to be brought into existence, there must be a process that perhaps involves many mental acts as well as different subjects: namely, the storytelling process that leads to the composition of the work(s) that has (have) that *fictum* among its (their) main features. This process, moreover, is what lies behind a given *fictum* wherever it exists, namely in all the possible worlds where that *fictum* comes into being. At this point, one may say that such a process is not only what a *fictum* rigidly and historically depends on, but also what accounts for its artifactuality. A *fictum* is a constructed entity because it is conceived of through such a process.

Undoubtedly, Thomasson is prepared to allow for a modification of her theory that goes in this very direction. She herself says precisely that the generative process of a fictional being may be *diffuse*.[48]

Granted that appealing to storytelling processes rather than to mental acts gives a more convincing account of why we speak of *ficta* as *created* entities, it sounds more plausible to ascribe the power of generating fictional entities to the possibly intersubjective process of storytelling rather than to thought *per se*: if there is no such process, then there is no *ficta*

[47] For a similar critique, see also Sutrop (2001: 137–8).
[48] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 7, 140 n. 3).

either. Moreover, such an appeal may also provide an utterly convincing account of the *cultural* character of fictional entities; that is, an account which is even more plausible than the one sketched above in terms of constant generic dependence on literary works. Clearly, that creating a *fictum* may involve time as well as many subjects points to the fact that *ficta* need culture if they are to come into being. Nevertheless, to view the generation of a *fictum* as an intersubjective time-consuming event rather than an intrasubjective instantaneous event does not seem by itself to be helpful with respect to the present problem. For to appeal to such processes in themselves hardly explains why a *fictum* is an artifact. In order for something to be an artifact, it must be indisputably a *constructed* entity, that is an entity that derives its being from an (intentional) assemblage of building blocks. How can the mere storytelling process guarantee that a *fictum* be such an entity if what one may well regard as its natural building blocks, namely the properties attributed to it in the course of the relevant narration, are possessed by it only relatively, solely with respect to the story that is told?

One could reply that, according to our reading of Thomasson's position, there are properties that *ficta* possess absolutely: that is, the story-relative properties that emerge from the fact that those entities possess absolute properties only relative to a story. Yet even such properties can hardly work as the building blocks of such an entity. Above all, in order for properties to work as building blocks there must be a sense according to which progress in the construction of that entity, that is in the (intentional) assemblage of its blocks, affects the very nature of the entity itself. If one takes mathematical entities as constructed entities, one can say that the process by means of which new properties are attributed to that entity alters the nature of the entity: for instance, in this perspective π taken at the n-th step of the determination of its decimals is a different entity from π taken at the $n+1$-th step of that determination.[49] Yet no such thing would happen if a *fictum* came to possess a new story-relative property, which—admittedly—would be possessed by it only contingently.[50]

One might of course deny that the building blocks for a constructed entity play such an essential role. Yet when one thinks of examples for which building blocks do not play that role, only *concrete* artifacts come to mind. The straw used in making a chair is manifestly not essential to it. But this depends on the fact that a chair is a concrete, not an abstract, artifact. Furthermore, even if one were able to conceive of abstract artifacts for which building

[49] Cf. on this, for example, Wittgenstein (1978[2]: IV§9).

[50] As Thomasson herself claims, *being-P-according-to-S* is contingently possessed by a *fictum* for in a different possible world in which the story *S* had changed slightly, particularly as far as the ascription of the property *P* to that *fictum* is concerned, the *fictum* would not have possessed the above story-relative property. See shortly below.

blocks play no essential role, story-relative properties cannot be such building blocks for fictional entities, since they do not figure in the storytelling process that allegedly constitutes the construction of a fictional entity: such a process normally contains absolute, not (story-) relative, properties.

As a last attempt to defend the idea that the artifactuality of a fictional object lies in the diffuse storytelling process that allegedly brings that object into being, one can take into account the very general issue of what makes something an artifact, whether an abstract or concrete artifact. Regarding this issue, the fact that something is an artifact only if it is a constructed entity naturally prompts one to invoke constructive intentions in the identity of an artifact. This is because an entity is constructed insofar as it involves some constructive intentions; hence, an artifact must likewise involve such intentions. As some put it, an artifact is such insofar as it has an externally determined proper function, one that, unlike biological individuals, the artifact has been *externally* designed to perform by its planners.[51] For example, if a chair is to be an artifact, it must have a certain externally determined proper function; it must fulfil the planned intentions that lie behind its creation. Now, as the example of the chair clearly shows, these intentions cannot but occur in the generative process that brings the relevant artifact into existence. As a result, with Thomasson one may say that if there are such intentions in the generative process underlying a *fictum*, it is clear why such an entity is an artifact.

It is true that this proposal is very far from the typical approach adopted by artifactualists to the issue of artifactuality.[52] Nevertheless, appealing to constructive intentions would be a good way to ground a *fictum*'s artifactuality in its origins. Yet how can such intentions lie behind the generation of a fictional being? Undoubtedly, the coming into existence of a *fictum* may fulfil several goals, for instance aesthetic ones. But fulfilling these goals represents no proper function for the *fictum*. In point of fact, it is hard to find a proper function for a *fictum*: what is the function which the *fictum* was designed to carry out? Hence, no constructive intention can be found either. So, appealing to constructive intentions risks undermining the very possibility of conceiving a *fictum* as an artifact.

To sum up, Thomasson may be seen as legitimately stating that a *fictum* differs from a pure *intentionale*—whether Brentanian or Ingardenian—in that it rigidly depends historically on cultural processes rather than on mere mental acts. Yet it is not clear if and how this kind of dependence may account for the artifactual character that, from her perspective, *ficta* possess.

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[51] Cf. Millikan (1984: 1–2, 17).

[52] According to Nathan Salmon, one may create an abstract artifact without even being aware of it due to the mistaken belief that one's creative thinking acts are "directed" at a concrete entity. Cf. Salmon (1998: 304–5), (2002: 112).

3.3 Individuation and Existence of a Fictional Being from the Artifactualist Perspective

With respect to Thomasson's theory, then, we need to clarify the issues of the generation and the artifactuality of a fictional being. This could easily be dispensed with, however, if Thomasson provided satisfactory criteria at least for the existence, if not the individuation, of a fictional being. Yet, as we will now see, this hardly seems to be the case.

Let me start by recalling that the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist position foundered on the "no-*ficta*" and the "many-*ficta*" problems. These problems may now be viewed as follows. A collection of properties does not yield *sufficient* conditions for a *fictum*: there may be such a collection and no *fictum* at all—the first problem—or there may be such a collection and different *ficta*—the second problem. But these problems do not neutralize another claim that the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist position is inclined to defend, namely that the existence of a collection of properties is a *necessary* condition for a *fictum*. If you change the collection, Neo-Meinongians say, you will no longer obtain that fictional individual but a different entity instead.

Now, talking about necessary and sufficient conditions for something may be meant in two distinct ways: it is either a discourse about necessary and sufficient conditions for the *existence* of something or a discourse about necessary and sufficient conditions for the *identity* of something. In the first case, one says that a certain item exists if and only if certain conditions are satisfied. In the second case, one says that an item *x* and an item *y* are one and the same entity if and only if certain conditions are met. Conditions of existence are ontologically weaker than conditions of identity since both necessary and sufficient conditions of existence fail to provide conditions for the *individuation* of an individual, for what makes that individual the individual it is. This is precisely what necessary and sufficient conditions of identity for an individual do provide.[53] They encapsulate the individual essence of that very entity, that is the essence that only that entity can possess.[54]

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[53] Often, necessary identity conditions yield constituents of the entity for which they are conditions. Pointing to necessary conditions of identity rather than of existence, one may speak of individuation-dependence instead of existence-dependence: see, for example, Edwards (1994: 17 n. 16).

[54] For this notion of an individual essence, see the texts quoted in n. 28 of the previous chapter. As many have pointed out following Kit Fine, for example (1995), essence in general is not reducible to modality, which, rather, characterizes a dependence relation. An *essential* property is not simply a necessary property of an object but more a *constitutive* property of it, or better still, a property whose predication on an item is true in virtue of the identity, or the nature, of that item. See Fine, for example (1995: 273).

It is true that the distinction between existence and identity conditions is not particularly relevant for the best Neo-Meinongian abstractionist theory of *ficta*. According to this theory as outlined above, the existence of a set of internally possessed properties is a necessary and sufficient condition both for the existence and for the identity of a fictional entity.[55] Therefore, the problems on which such a theory founders involve the fact that even though the existence of a property set is a necessary condition both for the existence and for the identity of a fictional entity, it is not a sufficient condition for either.[56]

On the other hand, the distinction between existence and identity conditions is relevant for the artifactualist position. Thomasson believes that her theory is able to provide only necessary conditions for the identity of a fictional entity across literary works. Yet she does not consider this as a problem since, in her view, her theory provides both necessary *and* sufficient conditions for the existence of such an entity. Let us address these questions in detail.

Regarding identity conditions, Thomasson obviously intends to part company with Neo-Meinongians. It is definitely the case that for her, unlike Neo-Meinongians, what I have called "absolute properties" cannot determine either sufficient or necessary identity conditions of a fictional entity. On her account, such properties are possessed by fictional entities only *relatively*: that is, not with respect to real but to fictional contexts, and, specifically, only with respect to some fictional contexts and not to others. For instance, according to Thomasson, it is true that Mademoiselle d'Escalot falls in love with Lancelot not with respect to reality (that is, the concrete part of our world) but with respect to some novels of the Breton cycle, and, moreover, only those novels: in other words, with respect to *Lancelot-Grail*, the late prose compilation belonging to the Breton cycle, but not with respect to an altogether different story (say, *Hamlet*) and, perhaps more interestingly, not with respect to *Lancelot*, Chretien de Troyes' earlier poem which also belongs to the Breton cycle. Moreover, such properties are relatively possessed only *actually*, that is, only with respect to the actual world in general, but not with respect to all possible worlds. For instance, they are obviously not possessed in this way in possible worlds in which the *fictum* in question does not exist—worlds in which no creation by its actual creator has occurred—as well as in worlds in which the *fictum* exists but is differently

[55] In the diluted version of the best Neo-Meinongian theory that makes a *fictum* a one-one set-*correlate* rather than a set, the existence of a property set is taken to be merely a necessary condition for the existence, if not also for the identity, of a *fictum*.

[56] In this respect, the diluting of the best Neo-Meinongian theory is equally ineffective. Since it ultimately solves neither the "no-*ficta*" nor the "many-*ficta*" problem, it still fails to provide sufficient conditions for both the existence and the identity of a fictional entity.

characterized, since it is kept in existence by means of different literary works.[57] As a result, absolute properties are not necessary properties of a *fictum*. Thus, they do not provide necessary conditions for its identity.

Moreover, for Thomasson story-relative properties could not fare any better. At first sight, one might think that a property such as *being P according to story S* is a necessary property of the entity which possesses it absolutely: that is, a property that the entity in question possesses not only actually, but in all possible worlds. For this normally holds with a world-relative property such as *being F in possible world W*: trivially, the entity which possesses one such property in a certain possible world also possesses it in all the remaining worlds. Yet Thomasson suggests that a story *S* remains the same even in possible worlds in which it is slightly altered.[58] Suppose that, in a different possible world, the story in question is altered precisely in that the *fictum F*, which had been characterized as *being P*, is no longer characterized in this way. (Imagine, for example, that in another possible world Shakespeare writes *Othello* so differently that Desdemona is not the owner of the famous handkerchief but of certain underclothes instead.) As a consequence, in such a world that *fictum* does not possess the property of *being P according to S*. That property, therefore, is not necessary for that *fictum*; hence its instantiation does not belong to the necessary identity conditions of that *fictum*.

What, then, replaces properties in Thomasson's exposition? She says that one may provide a criterion that yields sufficient conditions for the identity of fictional entities *within* literary works: *x* and *y* are the same fictional entity if they appear in the same literary work and are ascribed the same properties in it.[59] Yet, since in her view one and the same *fictum* may appear in more than one literary work, this criterion definitely does not provide necessary identity conditions *across* literary works. Certainly, for her in order to account for such cases one can put forward the following criterion for identity across literary works: in order for *x* and *y* which appear in literary works *K* and *L* respectively to be the same fictional entity, the author of *L* must be competently acquainted with *x* of *K* and intend to introduce *x* into L as *y*.[60] Yet, as she herself acknowledges, this criterion at most provides a necessary but not a sufficient identity condition across literary works.[61]

Nevertheless, for her this is not so problematic as it may seem. Even if there are both no necessary and no sufficient conditions for a *fictum*'s *identity*, one can find such conditions for a *fictum*'s *existence*. In order to find these

[57] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 39, 110–1).
[58] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 110 n. 25).
[59] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 63).
[60] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 67).
[61] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 68).

conditions, Thomasson appeals to her theory of *ficta* as dependent entities. First of all, what a *fictum* depends on, both rigidly and generically, for its very existence—namely, both the *specific* mental act by means of which its author creates it and the *generic* literary work that keeps it in existence—provides *eo ipso* its necessary conditions of existence. In every possible world in which the *fictum* exists, that particular mental act which actually originated it as well as a work in which that *fictum* is spoken of will also exist.[62] In addition, she holds that such factors provide also sufficient conditions for a *fictum*'s existence.[63]

As regards her first claim, it may be immediately questioned whether a *fictum* really depends rigidly on the particular mental act that originates it or, what amounts to the same thing, whether the existence of that mental act really is a *necessary* condition for the existence of that *fictum*.

To begin with, it is not clear whether this can really be the case for Thomasson herself. Since she says that *every* absolute property is contingently possessed by a *fictum*, this will also hold true for the very first property actually attributed to it by its creator. Yet this entails that the act by means of which the creator conceives of the *fictum* in a possible world in which that *fictum* lacks such a property has a different content. Can such an act then be the very same particular act as the act by means of which the creator *actually* starts to conceive of that *fictum*? For instance, suppose a world in which a certain author, Carlo Collodi for instance, generated a *fictum* by thinking not the sentence by means of which he actually generates Pinocchio, namely:

(5) How it happened that Mastro Cherry, carpenter, found a piece of wood that wept and laughed like a child

but rather a different sentence. As such an act of thought would then have a different content, could it be the very same thought-token as the act by means of which he actually thinks the above sentence?

In fact, Thomasson is silent about how a particular creative act of thought must be individuated. Since she says that one and the same character may appear in different works in different possible worlds, provided that the creative act is the same, one may legitimately suppose that for her the mental particular which constitutes such an act is individuated regardless of its content (so that it may have different contents in different worlds). Yet even if, on the contrary, she required that the particular act of thought by means of which a *fictum* is generated keep the same content throughout all the possible worlds where it obtains, it would still be the case that in a possible world in which the particular mental act by means of which a *fictum* is

[62] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 39, 109).
[63] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 39).

actually conceived by its creator did not obtain, that *fictum* would not exist either. This appears to be hard to accept. For it clearly seems that a *fictum* might have been brought into existence through a different particular mental act endowed with the same content. For instance, Shakespeare might have written *Hamlet* some years later than he actually did. So, by simply occurring later, the particular thought by means of which in that possible world he creates Hamlet would be different from the thought that purportedly brought Hamlet into existence in the real world. As far as the character Hamlet is concerned, this apparently makes no difference. Yet, if the dependence of *ficta* on particular mental acts were rigid, we would have a world without Hamlet.

Thomasson rightly thinks that if creative mental acts are different, *ficta* are different too. This enables her to solve the "many-*ficta*" problem in Borges' idealized case of the syntactically identical yet distinct "Don Quixote" thoughts of Cervantes and Pierre Menard by saying that in this case there are two Don Quixotes. But this case does not, as she believes, *eo ipso* speak in favor of *ficta*'s rigid dependence on particular mental acts.[64] It may also be accounted for by the fact that the dependence on mental acts is a *historical generic* dependence.[65] If a *fictum* depends historically and generically on some mental act of a certain type that brings it into existence, then if there really are *two* such particular acts of a different type, there actually are also two fictional entities.

Let us, however, assume that the doubt in question may be circumvented so that the specific mental act (however it is conceived by Thomasson) and the generic literary work provide effectively necessary conditions for the existence of a fictional being. The real question is another: do those factors provide not only necessary but also *sufficient* conditions for the existence of a *fictum*? What is definite is that they are not *individually* sufficient conditions. Imagine, for example, that after "directing" a certain thought at an individual, the subject of that thought stops thinking and never comes back to that same thought so that it does not give rise to any story at all. In such a case, one might perhaps follow Brentano's famous intentionality thesis—the claim that every mental act has an object it is "directed" at—and say precisely that there is a, rather ephemeral, intentional object that thought is "directed" at.[66] Yet, as we have seen in the previous sub-section, one could not say that such an object is a *fictional* object in any significant sense of the term "fictional".

Thomasson would undoubtedly agree with this. As seen above, she suggests that an intentional object ends up as a fictional entity provided that

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[64] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 8).

[65] For such a thesis, see Sosa (1985/6: 486). It is also envisaged by Lamarque (2003: 41–2).

[66] Cf. Brentano (1924: 88).

after *coming* into being through the mental act "directed" at it, it is *kept* in being by figuring in a literary work.[67] There is no real problem here for Thomasson. She says explicitly that the above factors—specific mental act and generic literary work—do not provide sufficient existence conditions individually, but at most *jointly*.[68]

The situation is, nonetheless, still problematic. Given that, according to Thomasson, a *fictum* depends specifically on a mental act whereas it depends generically on a literary work, she prompts us to suppose that the same fictional object exists both in the actual world and in a possible world in which the very same author conceives of a certain intentional object by means of the very same mental act as in the actual world, but makes it the central element in a totally different story. In more theoretical terms, we are inclined to suppose that, for her, the specific mental act and the generic literary work jointly yield *metaphysically* sufficient existence conditions for a *fictum*, that is, conditions the satisfaction of which in *any* world is enough to guarantee that something exists as the *fictum* in question in that world.[69]

However, imagine that after having written (or thought) the sentence that actually begins *Pinocchio*, namely (5), Collodi wrote a story that from that point on was completely different from the *Pinocchio* we know. It seems to me that the protagonist of that story in this possible world would hardly be the same as our character Pinocchio. Without doubt, in this world as well as in the actual world we would have a genuinely constructed entity. But the construction involved would be utterly different from the actual construction. With respect to concrete artifacts, if, identity of plans notwithstanding, the construction had given rise to something entirely different from what was actually built, we would say that distinct individuals were involved in the actual case and in the possible case. Why should matters be different with respect to *abstract* artifacts?

On behalf of Thomasson, one might think that this problem could be circumvented by expanding the first factor along the lines indicated in the previous sub-section concerning the generation of a fictional entity. That is to say, if one takes what a *fictum* rigidly depends on not as a specific mental act but rather as a (possibly intersubjective) process of storytelling, then this process provides a broader necessary condition that may also work, together with the appearance of the *fictum* in a literary work, as a metaphysically sufficient condition for the existence of a fictional entity.

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[67] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 7, 88–9).

[68] Cf. Thomasson (1999: 39).

[69] Indeed, as Thomasson herself puts it: "the character is present in *all and only* those worlds containing all of its requisite supporting entities" (1999: 39).

Nevertheless, I strongly doubt that the creative act (however broad) and being fixed in a literary work can jointly provide metaphysically sufficient conditions, at least if one sticks to Thomasson's characterization of what a literary work is, namely something for whose existence it is sufficient that a certain storytelling practice exists. Suppose that immediately on completion of a certain act of storytelling, its agent(s) could not talk about his or her (their) literary project to anyone else because he or she (they) dropped dead. According to Thomasson, a literary work would still have existed, albeit ephemerally, even in such a situation. The reason is that, in order for such a work to exist, it suffices for Thomasson that a copy of it exists, whether realized in a physical form—a written copy—or merely realized in the mind—the mental conception of the whole story. Now, in our case, before dying the author(s) did at least definitely conceive the whole story. Yet in such a situation, there would have been nothing more than a certain practice of storytelling, whose teller(s) make-believe(s), among other things, that there are certain individuals endowed with certain features. Hence, it is inexact to say that a *fictum* would have been generated out of that practice.[70]

That the existence of such a practice is not a sufficient condition for the existence of a *fictum* may be easily seen when the case is stated as follows. If that practice were a dream or a hallucination, one might perhaps legitimately

[70] Thomasson would probably reply that if such a situation occurred, it would not be a *fictum*'s existence that was threatened but, rather, its *persistence*. In such a case, in fact, once a certain work exists through the existence of a single copy, the *fictum* in question also exists. Yet, since that work then immediately disappears, so does that *fictum*. I doubt, however, that this answer is viable. First, the problem with such a broader story-thinking (-telling) is not that it may exist ephemerally, but rather that, once again, its mere existence does not suffice to ensure that a *fictum* will exist. Second, the reason I wanted to formulate my counterexample in terms of an immediately vanishing story-thinking (-telling) process was precisely that, as I stated above, Thomasson allows such a process to be a sufficient guarantee that a certain literary work exists. Now, I agree that if such a sufficiency claim were correct, then Thomasson's rejoinder referred to above would be reasonable enough. In fact, she invites us to conceive of a certain literary work directly in *semantic* terms: see (1999: 65). In Chapter 7, I precisely endorse this conception. Since I also assert there that literary or (better) fictional works conceived in this way are to be *individuated* in terms of the fictional entities they are about—that is, *ficta* belong to the identity conditions of literary or (better) fictional works—it would be trivial to regard works as yielding conditions of existence for fictional entities. However, I doubt that the above sufficiency claim is correct for a storytelling practice is hardly individuated in semantic terms (as will be seen in Chapter 5, that practice consists in a conniving use of fictional sentences, which allows these sentences to have fictional, but not real, truth conditions). Or, to reformulate the point I am making: even if there were a, really nonsemantic, sense of "literary work" for which the existence of a storytelling process is a sufficient condition of existence—a sense which not even Thomasson can endorse—in that sense a literary work would not be a sufficient condition for the existence of a *fictum*.

assert that these delusory mental processes have generated dreamt-of or hallucinatory objects, that is the intentional objects of those states. Yet nobody could justifiably maintain that, over and above those *intentionalia*, the processes have generated further objects, namely things that we may call delusory objects. Now, apart from its length and (possible) intersubjectivity, in what does the storytelling practice substantially differ from those processes?[71] In both cases, what happens is that subjects imaginatively put themselves either consciously, as in the storytelling practice, or unconsciously, as in the delusory processes, in a context different from that in which they ordinarily utter sentences. As a result of this imaginative shift, sentences are to be taken as uttered by the agent of the fictional or of the oneiric context—in other words, the imaginary narrator or the oneiric subject.[72]

Notice, lastly, that no improvement would be obtained if Thomasson were to claim that the creative act (however broad) and being kept in a literary work jointly provide mere *factually* sufficient conditions, that is, conditions the meeting of which in a *certain* world (typically, our world) is enough for something to be the *fictum* in question in that world. For the above-mentioned supposition does not question the existence of a *fictum* already existing in certain possible worlds but, rather, raises doubts about whether in a particular world (typically, our world) in which things were as the above-mentioned supposition describes, such a situation would be able to generate a *fictum*.

Now, if I am right in maintaining that Thomasson does not provide necessary and (admittedly, jointly) sufficient conditions for the existence of *ficta*, then the theoretical situation becomes definitely more problematic for her than it already is because of her acknowledged failure to provide both necessary and sufficient conditions for the identity of *ficta*. In the absence of viable necessary and sufficient existence conditions, the situation she describes in ontologically committal terms (a certain author generates a *fictum* while telling or writing a story about it, and later other people join in that author's project by their intention to import that *fictum* into other stories) may theoretically be described also in the following, ontologically noncommittal, terms. An individual pretends to refer to something by employing (mentally or orally) certain terms; then other individuals join in the feigned reference by employing those terms again while in turn pretending to refer to that same something. Yet, in this description, only a chain of referential uses has been established. No fictional entity has been generated by that chain

[71] For an analogous comparison between make-believe games and dreams, see Walton (1990: 43–50).

[72] For this idea of storytelling practices as context-shifting practices, see Recanati (2000: 215–6). For the notion of an imaginary narrator, see Currie (1990: 123–6).

since it ends in a mere mock-reference.[73] Thus, for want of both necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of *ficta*, the whole artifactualist conception of fictional entities risks being seriously undermined.

Let me now summarize. We saw in the previous chapter that the best Meinongian abstractionist theory of fictional entities was unable to solve certain problems. Since the artifactualist abstractionist account of fictional entities can indeed deal with those problems, one might think that such an account must replace the best Meinongian theory. Yet we have just seen that artifactualism raises different problems of its own.

At this point, one could adopt a negative stance toward both abstractionisms and look instead for an altogether different theory of fictional entities. But this assumes that these approaches are mutually exclusive. I believe that this assumption is in fact false: the two theories are, or can be made, wholly compatible. In the next chapter I try to show how this is possible by developing my own syncretistic theory of fictional entities.

[73] This is what Donnellan (1974: 22–5) originally described as a "block". For a defense of such an antirealist perspective, see also Künne (1990: 267).