

ACTUALISM AND FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

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Abstract. In what follows, I present only part of a program that consists in developing a version of actualism as an adequate framework for the metaphysics of intentionality. I will try to accommodate in that framework suggestions found in Kripke's works and some positions developed by Amie Thomasson. What should we change if we accept "fictional entities" in the domain of the actual world? Actualism is the thesis that everything that exists belongs to the domain of the actual world and that there are no *possibilia*. I shall defend that *there are abstract artefacts*, like fictional characters, and institutions. My argument could be seen as a version of Moore's paradox: it is paradoxical to say: "I made (created) it, but I do not believe it exists". Moreover, there are true sentences about them. I will examine what it means to include abstract artefacts in the domain of the actual world. I favour a use of "exist" that includes beings with no concrete occupation of tri-dimensional space; to exist, it is enough to have been introduced at some moment in history. Abstract artefacts, like fictional characters, exist in that sense. I argue that it is important to distinguish two perspectives (internal and external) in order to clarify the kind of knowledge we have of fictional characters. However, their existence presupposes a relation of dependence to a material basis and the mental activities of many people.

Keywords: Actualism; abstract artefacts, fictional characters; analytic ontology; intentionality.

In a rough and ready way the apparatus of quantification and identity over these fictional characters is available to us in ordinary language. They are *not* ghostly possible entities; they are abstract entities of a certain sort that exist in virtue of the activities of people.

Saul Kripke, 2011, p.64.

'Ah', so it is said, 'so you agree with Meinong after all! There *are* entities which have only a secondary kind of existence.' No, I don't mean that. I mean that there are certain fictional characters in the actual world, that these entities actually exist.

Saul Kripke, 2013, p.70.

1. Actualism: framework and starting point

Actualism is the thesis that all the existent objects belong to the domain D_0 of the actual world (W_0). The domain of a possible world is the set of objects existing in it. In Kripke's models, the function Ψ takes as arguments possible worlds and has, as its

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value, the corresponding domains of these possible worlds. Actualism says that for any domain D_i of any possible world W_i distinct from the actual world (for $D_i \neq D_0$), such a domain can only be equal or included in the domain of the actual world, that is: ($D_0 \supseteq D_i$). There can be actual things that do not exist in some W_i , but if something exists in any W_i , then it surely exists in W_0 . So, there are no *possibilia* (things that do not exist in the actual world, but that belong to the domain of a possible world, such that they would exist had that possible world become the actual one.) In that sober and simple view of possible worlds, we just *stipulate* possible worlds to account for the semantics of some linguistic constructions. Possible worlds are not discovered or explored. We just decide what they are. But it is far from obvious to decide what belongs to the domain D_0 . Some ontic decisions are to be made.

Actualism refuses to accommodate *possibilia* or merely possible things. It does not accept either merely possible inhabitants of the actual world. *Concreta*, or concrete things in space and time, occupying a portion of tri-dimensional space, are not an issue. They exist in the restricted sense that the word “exist” has in Meinong’s *Theory of Objects*, a sense that excludes from the realm of existence abstract objects in general, like geometrical figures and numbers. (Meinong 1904, p.79, *et passim*). However, if we take seriously Kripke’s remarks on fictional entities, there must be some important changes in our basic understanding of “exist”. Meinong’s use encompasses only *concreta* (natural objects and concrete artefacts), not *abstract artefacts*¹ like fictional characters (Hamlet, Sherlock Holmes, James Bond, etc.) or institutions. We all have a strong tendency to oppose “fictional” to “real”. I think this is wrong. Interestingly, “fictional” and “fiction” derive from the infinitive “*ingere*” in Latin which means the same as “to form”, “to shape”, or “to contrive”. Etymologically at least, there is no necessity to associate “fictional” with “unreal” or “non-existent”, only because what is formed (or shaped or contrived) is not concrete.

As we shall see, we need a more comprehensive use of “exist” that still preserves some basic intuitions feeding common and useful distinctions.² We have to keep a sharp divide between what is factual, concrete, actual, existent, and effective or real, and what is merely possible or only conceivable. But I will argue, following Kripke and Thomasson, that it is just a plain fact that Sherlock Holmes, the fictional character, exists. There are plenty factual and modal truths about Sherlock Holmes: It is true that it has been created in march 1886 by Conan Doyle; that it is the result of an intense intentional work; it is also true that, possibly, it could not have been created. The domain of the actual world contains only contingent beings that can be absent in some counterfactual situations, that can instantiate modal properties, and that can change accidental properties from one world to the next. Contingent beings also have an essence, that is, a property or set of properties they possess in all possible worlds in which they exist and which determines their identity. Contingent things have both essential and accidental properties.

The way we think and talk about things, the way we identify, re-identify, conceive and judge them is the raw material of our philosophical walk. Methodologically, this is our unavoidable starting point. Among these cognitive activities and practices, we find the one that consists in referring and characterising abstract and fictional entities or referring to institutions. Could we make sense of all these practices without any strange ontological commitment to merely possible objects? Regularly, we have to consider possible worlds (or counterfactual situations) in our thoughts and actions, in history, in linguistics, in natural sciences, and of course metaphysics.³ Most of us believe that we could have done otherwise, had we chosen to act differently. At the time of choosing my dessert, I hesitated between pudding and chocolate cake. Finally, I took the pudding, but I could have chosen the cake; so there is an alternative history of the world that includes my choosing the cake. However, this does not mean that an alternative history of the world, something merely possible, exists, or that accepting or asserting that there is such an alternative history commits oneself to the existence of merely possible things. Actions are events and events are particulars; the merely possible action of choosing the cake never took place anywhere, *at any time*. So it does not exist, full stop. It is a *merely possible* particular.

2. Williamson's knife

However, some cases are tricky. Williamson (2013, p.21) imagines the following situation: in a factory, there is a machine that takes blades and handles as inputs and delivers knives as outputs. One belt brings the blades and another brings the handles. The machine actually assembles, first, blade *B* and handle *H* to deliver knife *K*, and then assembles blade *B** and handle *H** to form *K**. Now Williamson imagines what would happen if the first belt had been delayed by one second. The machine would have assembled blade *B* with handle *H** to form a knife different from *K*, *K** and anything else in the actual world. What is interesting in this case is that the possible or counterfactual knife has all its parts existing in the actual world. All the atoms and molecules of the blade and the handle exist and are located in space and time. Then, Williamson concludes:

Perhaps, there is only one merely possible knife that could have been formed from *B* and *H** in just such circumstances. If so, our description 'possible knife that would have been assembled from blade *B* and handle *H** had the blade belt been delayed by one second' uniquely identifies *a merely possible inhabitant of space and time*. (Italics mine).

I find the example a bit hard to swallow. In the actual world, there is no single knife made of *B* and *H**. So, the merely possible knife, after all, does not exist in one single piece. Blade *B* exists as a part of knife *K*, and handle *H** exists as a part of knife *K**. But

what would we say if a masterpiece, a famous work of art, were completely destroyed so that the result would be a heap of thousands of tiny pieces on the floor? I believe the right thing to say would be that the masterpiece does not exist anymore, and not that it is still an inhabitant of space and time, albeit its parts are now distributed differently... Likewise, there is no merely possible monster, inhabitant of space and time, made out of the head of a particular real bull and the body of a particular real man.

3. Motivating an ontic decision: existence and time

To exist is to belong to the domain of the actual world. But how do we decide what belongs to D_0 and what does not? There are no magical words triggering existential or ontological commitments. Existential commitments always depend on an entire context, more or less theoretical. In particular, words like “there is” or “some”, used in a first-order language (or first-order serious and literal discourse), do not always have the effect of committing the speaker to the existence of *concreta*. The following sentence seems perfectly meaningful: “In Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, some characters are real, others not”. Asserting seriously this sentence does not commit us, paradoxically, to the existence of inexistent characters in *War and Peace*, if by “real” we mean the same as “exist”, and if by “exist” we understand something like *being located in space and time*, or being *concrete*. This understanding corresponds to the restricted use of “exists”, adopted by Meinong. However, if Kripke (*op. cit.*) and Thomasson are right, we should adopt a different use of “exists” according to which time is more fundamental than space for our ontic decisions in the sense that *having been created or introduced at some moment in the history of the world is more fundamental than to be concrete*. It is a necessary and sufficient condition for x to belong to the domain of a possible world that x is introduced or created at time t (or some interval of time $t + n$, say). To be concrete, that is, to occupy a place in tri-dimensional space, is a sufficient condition. Of course, *concreta* are also in time. Sherlock Holmes has, so to speak, a “birthdate”: Conan Doyle started writing *A Study in Scarlet*, the first novel of a notable series, in March 1886, and published it the next year. Tolstoy created characters, which have their place in time, not in space. Of course, fictional characters, like institutions, also need a material basis upon which they depend somehow, as we shall see soon. But they cannot be identified with their physical basis. Pointing at a building or a group of persons and saying “This is the Supreme Court” cannot be interpreted as a literal utterance.

We create artefacts, some are concrete, and others are abstract. They are all the result of *intentional work* (work directed at the production of something). A case in point, studied recently, is precisely that of fictional characters, but others abstract

artefacts, like institutions or ideal objects, like North Pole,⁴ could be equally considered. Taking for granted that we *make* or *create* them, my argument is simply that *it is always paradoxical to deny their existence*. It sounds strange to the extreme to say of an artefact that it does not exist, isn't it? (Of course, it could be destroyed). Compare with Moore paradox. Saying: "I made (or created) it, but I do not believe it exists" is as paradoxical as "It is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining". To deny existence to artefacts is hardly intelligible. The argument in itself is not quite definitive, but I believe it is strong enough to motivate an ontic decision. Why would it be different for abstract artefacts? But here we face some resistance that we must dissipate.

4. Three prolepses

1. "If something exists at all, then it exists independently from our mental or linguistic representations. Fictional characters exist only because of their dependence on the mental activities of their creators (and "consumers"). Therefore, they do not really exist". Well, those who believe this to be true are living in a different world! A world with no artefacts and no institutions... The independence from the mind, as a criterion of existence, would oblige us to deny existence to any artefact, concrete or abstract. Artefacts in general are usually defined by their proper function and the proper function refers to the beliefs, desires, intentions and needs of potential users. As an institution, the Supreme Court of Brazil, for instance, cannot be identified with a building, or with the eleven judges that compose the court. The Supreme Court cannot be destroyed by destroying the building in Brasilia, or by killing all the judges working in it. The building and the judges can be replaced. The text of the Constitution defines the Court and its functioning, and it represents the desires of the People and its representatives in the constituent assembly. The proper function of the Court is to give the last word on any legal issue. The Supreme Court cannot be identified with a building or a group of judges. However, its proper function could not be fulfilled without a material basis, a place to work and the activities of well-trained people. Once more: abstract artefacts need a material basis, and that material basis, of course, exists independently of the mind. Now, as a fictional character, Sherlock Holmes has a proper function? Well, if I were pressed upon to answer this question, I could say something like this: the entertainment of people with some special literary taste. If this is correct, Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot could be assigned pretty much the same "proper function". The same could be said of Jack Ryan and Jason Bourne for people with slightly different taste.

2. "If something exists at all, it must be fully determined, with all its properties instantiated. But this is not the case of fictional characters". Well, abstract artefacts

are abstract, and as such they always suffer from some indeterminations. Wanting a glass of wine of any variety (Crane's example), Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet or Pinot, is to want something indeterminate, and therefore, according to some metaphysicians, something non-existent. (The desire, of course, can only be satisfied by a determined wine). What exists has infinitely many (instantiated) properties, is fully determined. Of course, we can know only a small part of it.

I shall defend that that is not quite accurate, that fictional characters are indeterminate under many aspects, but nonetheless they exist. I agree that they are never fully determinate. For all I know, Conan Doyle never said a word about the size of Holmes' shoes or the trademark of his undies. In spite of all its indeterminations, Sherlock Holmes (the character) is always grasped as *unique*. When we think about fictional characters, we do not worry about the details just mentioned. We suppose tacitly that Holmes had grandparents, always has enough money in his wallet, has shoes of a determinate size, changes the strings of his violin with some regularity, etc. We tacitly complete the picture or feel free to ignore these details. It is not hard to do. We do not have access to all the properties of *concreta* either. But we treat Holmes and Watson like persons with characteristics that determine their identity as characters. They are *intended as if they were fully determined*. (There are portraits of Holmes and even a statue in Edinburgh to help people to see him just like a person). Different actors with different physical features can interpret Hamlet. They are Hamlet's avatars. Once again, this does not affect the identity of the fictional character.

3. "If we accept fictional characters in our ontology, should we not accept, also, everything that belongs to them? Holmes possesses many things: a violin, a watch, a strange cap, a pipe, etc. Are they abstract artefacts too? Holmes' violin is not an occupant of tri-dimensional space no more than its owner. Are we not too liberal ontologically speaking?" Having a violin, wearing a strange cap, smoking a big pipe are features attributed to Holmes through a bunch of descriptions used by Conan Doyle and the illustrators of his stories to characterize Holmes. We learn that Holmes has these features when we read and enjoy Conan Doyle's novels, when we *feign* that Holmes is a person of flesh and blood. But when we look at the character from the "external perspective" (more on this soon), we *know* that Holmes does not *really* have a violin, does not really wear a strange cap, etc. Holmes' violin has no concreteness. It is true "according to the story", as Kripke says, that Holmes possesses and plays a violin, and that could be part of a *true report* on such a story. But the story is indirectly part of Holmes' material basis; it is written in books and the written sentences express thoughts that can be entertain by anyone. But the properties of having a violin and being able to play violin are, in that case, "representation-dependent properties". (Crane 2013; more on this soon).

5. Dependence from a physical basis

From the fact that Conan Doyle wrote novels in which he used the name “Sherlock Holmes” in a pretending way typical of fictional narratives, we are allowed to infer that Conan Doyle created the fictional character Sherlock Holmes. And once the fictional character exists “in its own right”, (Schiffer’s words) we can ascribe to it many different properties, like being a fictional detective, being more famous than Sir Ian Blair (Crane’s example), being a Londoner-in-Conan-Doyle’s-stories, etc. This is what Schiffer (2003) calls a “something-from-nothing transformation”. But do abstract entities like fictional characters exist “in their own right”?

I think they are *entia per alio*, that is, things whose identity depend on the identity of something else, like holes and shadows; so they are not fully autonomous beings (if there are such things). You can refer to a shadow, describe it, you can measure it, but it would be nothing without an object standing in the way of a source of light. Nonetheless, from a pretending use of a proper name, a character is created, with many specific attributes attached to it. Once this is done and made available, each one of us can think about it, refer to it and speak about it. The character cannot be changed, or enriched, without changing something in the material or physical basis. The entertainment industry produces regularly new adventures involving traditional old characters, like Robin Hood. This is possible by enriching the material basis with new scripts. The material basis may include token-books, scripts, comics, rolls of film, DVDs, portraits, statues, the gestures, costumes and voices of actors on the stage, etc. But all this material would be nothing without the mental activities of creators, performers and consumers. A character can be adapted to new circumstances through an enrichment of the material basis. In the BBC series “Sherlock”, Holmes is leaving in London today in the twenty-first century, and Watson is writing their adventures in his blog! Because it is impossible to change the character without changing the material basis, the relation seems to be, roughly, that of *supervenience*. Be that as it may, one thing seems to be obvious: *there would not be abstract artefacts without their corresponding concrete artefacts*. There wouldn’t be a Hamlet without Shakespeare’s scribbles. The relation could also be seen as one of the type called “*embodiment*” by Joseph Margolis (2009, p.11). All cultural objects (institutions, works of art, etc.) are two-tier: they need a material basis, in which they are embodied, but they cannot be identified with that basis. Donatello’s David could be reproduced in wood or in bronze; it will continue to be, recognisably, the “same” work of art, that is, the same “David”, not as precious as the original, of course, but with exactly the same traits, the same represented attitude. Otherwise, there could not be an industry of counterfeit and forgery.

6. Knowledge of fictional characters: the two perspectives

How do we know what we know about Holmes? It is through a bunch of *descriptions* we find in Conan Doyle's books, and other representations in movies and series. There cannot be *de re* knowledge of a fictional character, although we can have, of course, *de re* knowledge of its material basis. There are no possible worlds in which a unique Sherlock Holmes of flesh and blood exists and satisfies uniquely all these descriptions. There would be too many candidates:

Several distinct possible people, and even actual ones such as Darwin or Jack the Ripper, might have performed the exploits of Holmes, but there is none of whom we can say that he would have been Holmes had he performed these exploits. For if so, which one? (Kripke 1980, p.158)

Like the famous Nostradamus prophecies, for which it is not hard, in each case, to find different historical events matching the very same prophecy, many candidates could match the same bunch of descriptions characterizing Holmes. We certainly do not have *de re* beliefs about Sherlock Holmes. But the set of all descriptions we have of Holmes does not denote a "possible" Holmes. There is no merely possible Holmes. Of course, the position I am defending here, actualism, does not allow me to accept the existence of a Sherlock Holmes of flesh and blood in any possible world distinct from the actual world. Assuming that a Sherlock Holmes of flesh and blood could exist in a possible world would be assuming that if that world would be the actual world, we would have a Sherlock Holmes of flesh and blood doing the exploits we admire so much. But this is absurd: Holmes is just a fictional character created by a British writer. *If Holmes exists in a possible world different from the actual, it can only be as a fictional character.* A Sherlock Holmes of flesh and blood just irrupting in our world would seriously disturb its causal order. So what are we doing when we characterize Holmes as being a detective, playing violin, getting easily bored, having a secret passion for Irene Adler, using cocaine or living on Baker Street? It is important to note that, by the same token, *we know with clarity and for sure that Holmes does not really play violin, does not really use cocaine, and does not really live on Baker Street.* What's the way out?

Knowledge is usually construed as involving a broad content. How can I know, for instance, that Mount Denali is the highest mountain in North America if the mountain does not exist? I possess that knowledge only because the mountain exists. Moreover, propositional knowledge is usually understood *seriously and literally*. A discourse is serious when speakers/writers and hearers/readers do sincerely worry about the conditions of satisfaction of the speech acts performed (if an assertion is true, if a promise is kept, if an order is obeyed, etc.). Do they obtain or not? Most of the time we worry about satisfaction conditions because it matters for our daily affairs. The language of

a novel is the same as ordinary language, the one we use in everyday life. There is no regimentation in both cases, and when we read a novel we don't have to learn a new language. In contrast, scientific theories are construed literally and their language is always regimented. I think Frege (1892) is essentially correct when he discusses existential presuppositions, and brings idealists and sceptics into the discussion concerning the existence of *Bedeutungen*. “[H]ow do you know that the name “the Moon” has any *Bedeutung*? How do you know that anything whatsoever has a *Bedeutung*?” (Frege 1892, p.156). Frege's answer has the simplicity that only geniuses sometimes perceive: we just *presuppose* a *Bedeutung*. When we read a reliable report in a good newspaper, this is what we do. When we read a novel, we stop doing this, because it does not matter anymore. We do not worry anymore about satisfaction conditions. Nothing personal is at stake when we read a novel.

I think we have to distinguish two kinds of perspectives. First, there is an *internal perspective*, when we get involved in the reading of a novel or attending a play; then we start playing a game of pretence or make-believe.⁵ We enter a different temporality; the time of the narrative starts when we open the book and stops when we close it. We get involved in mind-reading with the characters described by the author; we attribute to them all sorts of mental states, acts and events. As long as we do it we *do not* think about Holmes as a fictional character. And we do not care about the kind of properties our favourite character instantiates (if they involve concreteness or not); rather we feign it/he is a *person*. In “A Scandal in Bohemia”, for instance, we are told that Holmes has been hired by the King of Bohemia; that his mission is to go after a blackmailer; that he is missing Irene Adler and we sympathize with him for that; we understand how disappointed he was when she married Norton, etc. We just play the game. This is how we learn so much about Holmes, Watson, and all the characters in the story. This is how fictional characters get fully *characterised*. We collude, so to speak, with the author. There is no other way to *enjoy* the novel. After reading a novel, we can make *true reports* about what happened “according to the story”. (See S. Kripke, *Reference and Existence*, p. 60.)

Now consider Meinong's *Principle of Independence*. It says that the set of all the properties an object has (that is, its *So-sein*) is independent from its existence or non-existence. Meinong's example is the set of properties of a geometrical figure. The figure does not exist in (real) space and time, but has all its properties all the same. Meinong says also that an object has the properties that are used to characterize it. So, the Golden Mountain is a mountain and is made of gold, and the round square, is square and circular. More recently, Routley and Priest proposed the *Characterization Principle*, which says, roughly: “. . . an object has the properties that it is characterized as having. . .”, “. . . plus whatever properties follow from these” (Priest 2005, p.vii). The golden mountain, therefore, also has the property of being a material object, and Sherlock Holmes, for being a detective, should have a body belonging to the species

homo sapiens. There is clearly something wrong with these principles. However, they might be correct when applied in the relevant context, which is the *internal perspective* of the narratives in which the fictional entities are introduced and characterized.

Now, the beliefs and judgements we form when reading a novel *are not genuine*; rather they are “mock beliefs”, as Frege and Evans called them. We never act upon such “beliefs”, and rarely would we plan any course of actions on such a basis. If knowledge involves belief, it should be genuine belief, not mock beliefs. So, what kind of knowledge do we get from the internal perspective? Is this knowledge at all in the first place? It seems there is no other way to learn, *inter alia*, that Holmes is a detective, that his lone friend is Watson, etc. Someone who believes that Sherlock Holmes is a fisherman doesn't seem to have *knowledge* of the character; that would be a false report on the story and its main character. However, there is something wrong with the sentence: “Sherlock Holmes is a detective” *if we take it seriously and literally as conveying knowledge*. As a predicate, a serious and literal application of “... is a detective” normally *entails concreteness*. The same holds for “... is a horse” or “... is a secret agent”, etc. Only *concreta* can instantiate these properties. So, after all, Holmes is not really a detective; but “he” is a fictional detective. And Pegasus is not really a horse; it is a mythical horse.

Now, there is a second perspective, which is *external* to the narratives, and thence we refer to Holmes as a *fictional character*, as an abstract artefact, not as a (feigned) person. This is the perspective adopted by Kripke when he says, of fictional characters: “They are *not* ghostly possible entities; they are abstract entities of a certain sort that exist in virtue of the activities of people” (Kripke 2011, p.64). They are inhabitants of our world. It seems to me that Stephen Schiffer (2003) is going in the same direction.

So, the name “Sherlock Holmes”, from the internal perspective, is used *as if* it were denoting a person; a correct report on any Sherlock Holmes adventures would say that the name denotes a person, a detective, who is so and so. But the names in the internal perspective, in my opinion, are not really empty. *There is not even an attempt made to refer*. Conan Doyle is just pretending to refer to a person; he is not “failing miserably to refer” (Schiffer's words) to someone in that game of make-believe. He knows that and his readers as well. He is using the linguistic institution of proper names to entertain the readers, and the readers already know the rules of the game. What we get from the internal perspective is *knowledge of the characteristics* attributed to the fictional character. But it is from the external perspective that we get genuine knowledge about the characters; and therein the name denotes a fictional character. In the internal perspective, when Watson writes down the adventures of his friend Sherlock, he never says something like: “and Sherlock has been created in 1886...” We get such genuine knowledge when the characteristics are seen as *representation-dependent properties*. A fictional character cannot be truly a detective,

and cannot instantiate any *property entailing concreteness*.⁶ Of course, it can be a fictional detective. It can instantiate all sorts of representation-dependent properties. The properties mentioned in a report made on a play or a novel are all representation-dependent properties. They usually have the form: *according to the story, α is F , or α is a fictional F* . But being famous is another property in the same category (Crane 2013).

From the internal perspective, we only form “mock beliefs”, beliefs on which no one would reasonably act. Taking the external perspective, we form genuine beliefs on which we can act (*e. g.* to form the project of developing a character in new adventures, for instance). It is literally true that Sherlock Holmes is a character created by Conan Doyle, and that Pegasus is a mythical horse. These propositions do not contain modal operators. At that point the theory of intentionality must get into the picture to complete actualism, the idea that all existent objects are in the actual world, to complete our metaphysical framework. It is a mistake to believe that there are possible worlds corresponding to all the crazy things we can imagine. But there are true sentences about fictional characters and their truth must be explained. Tim Crane in *Objects of Thoughts* (2013) exposes the problem with all clarity.

7. Abstract artefacts and the traditional platonist view

Interestingly, the traditional Platonist view of abstract objects does not get it right when it comes to abstract artefacts. They do not seem to be: 1) mind-independent; 2) world-independent; 3) eternal or never changing, or existing necessarily; 4) causally inert.⁷ This might be true of numbers, sets and functions, but even this is not beyond contestation (think of the number 0 introduced first in India and then by the Maia. Platonists would say that the numeral was introduced, not the number. But was it there all the time waiting to be named?) Sherlock Holmes, like all artefacts, has a “birthdate”. Therefore, its existence is contingent. Holmes does not exist in all possible worlds. Not in the worlds in which Conan Doyle does not exist (just stipulate a world in which Conan Doyle’s parents never met). So, Sherlock Holmes should belong to the domain of the actual world, besides concrete and other contingent objects, or so it seems.

Moreover, an abstract artefact, like a concrete artefact, can be destroyed, and in that case we should say that it does not exist anymore. The destruction of a fictional character requires the destruction of its material basis, and then we have to make sure that it will fall in complete oblivion, which is not an easy task. If all the books and movies on Sherlock Holmes’s adventures were destroyed, and if no one ever think again about Holmes or imagine him, then the fictional character itself would cease to exist. Who knows how many fantastic fictional heroes transmitted by oral tradition

alone have been lost forever. May be thousands! The reason is clear enough: the memories of the storytellers do not constitute a very strong material basis. Sherlock Holmes is among the best-known fictional character ever; we refer to him, we think, imagine, and remember many things related to “him”. And when we stop thinking about him, there is a large physical basis (books, movies, memories) that makes him and his adventures accessible at will to anyone, and that secures, so to speak, the continuity of its existence.⁸

So, we have some reasons to believe that fictional characters exist and are parts of the domain D_0 . What would be the criterion for rejecting them? We saw that independence from our mental or linguistic representations would eliminate concrete artefacts as well, and institutions too. This is clearly not the world in which we live. Those who want to practice “serious metaphysics” by translating problematic ontic assertions to assertions involving reference to just a few secure metaphysical categories — especially those including spatiotemporal particulars and their properties — are not always respecting the methodology we have chosen: to make sense of our most common practices.

I think this strategy has the virtue of keeping our philosophical apparatus simpler than other strategies, e. g. using two words (“exists”, for the *concreta* and “subsists” for the *abstracta*) instead of a unifying use, or to distinguish two kinds of existential generalisation, or two kinds of predication, etc.⁹

8. To be intended as an individual: are there any abstract artefactual fictional species?

Holmes, the fictional character, does not occupy a portion of the tri-dimensional space like concrete things. He does not have real parents, no DNA, no fingerprints. But we do recognize easily the character in many different imaginary situations. The identity of all those interpreting the character (Christopher Lee, Jeremy Brett, Robert Downey Jr., Benedict Cumberbatch, etc.) does not matter or alters anything. They are just Holmes’ avatars, so to speak. The same character can be developed and get involved in new adventures, not written by its creator. Sometimes, they are adapted and brought to a completely different setting, like London of the XXIst Century. Of course, something must change in the material basis (new scripts by different authors). But the character, recognizably, remains the same. And it has the potential to appear in new scripts. So it has an identity, and should have an individual essence. Moreover, fictional characters, most of the time, are what make a fictional narrative fictional at all. With the exception of Sci-Fi, when the surroundings are very different from what they are on Earth, fictional narratives describe a succession of events taking place in environments that could be part of documentaries. So, what makes a narrative fictional, most of the time, are the characters.

At first sight, it does not seem very promising to go after any kind of “thisness” or haecceity of a fictional character. Some uses of the word “haecceity” in the metaphysics of modal logic presuppose the concreteness of the object or particular; it is certainly the case with “Socrateity” or the property of being identical with Socrates. But we cannot point at something abstract, and the property of being identical with Holmes cannot be instantiated by anything concrete (not even by “his/its” avatars). However, it is not so hard to find a set of well-known properties to individuate the character, starting with a property relative to the origin of Sherlock Holmes as a character; so we might consider the property of having been created in 1886 by Arthur Conan Doyle, the property of being a fictional detective with fabulous observational and inferential capacities, together with the property of getting bored easily. Some relational properties, like having the fictional Dr. Watson as his sole friend can also be added. The origin and creation of a character seems to be a good candidate for its individual essence. It does not seem possible for one thing to have more than one origin. The origin “rigidifies” the set of available descriptions associated with the character in all its appearances. So, using the λ -notation, we could get something like this:

Sherlock Holmes Individual Essence: $\lambda x[x$ having been created by Conan Doyle in 1886 & x being a fictional Londoner detective with fabulous observational and inferential powers & x getting bored easily in the stories & x having the fictional Dr. Watson as his sole friend].

Of course, Holmes has many accidental properties, like wearing, sometimes, a strange cap, or being a smoker. This is enough to determine Holmes identity *as long as there is no radical change in the material basis*. I use “fictional” or “in-the-stories” in the λ -schema to make clear that the complex property is a representation-dependent property. Holmes cannot be a detective; “it” can only be a fictional detective.

Now, someone might ask ironically: Should we accept angels in our ontology? Well, like “unicorn”, “angel” certainly is not a natural kind term. We never got a sample of unicorn or angel DNA. We know nothing about their evolutionary ancestors. The same holds for Lewis Carroll’s fictional species, snarks and bandersnatches, and you may add dragons to the list, if you like. Ghosts and poltergeists seem to be in a different category; for all I know, no one created them intentionally. Ghosts are a product of our fears, superstitions and mistakes. By that criterion, *they are not artefacts*. By the same criterion, *natural* languages, like ghosts, are not artefacts. No one created intentionally English or Portuguese. As such, they do not qualify as artefacts. Formal languages, of course, are artefacts. So it is (has been) a mistake to believe in the existence of ghosts, or the Eldorado. A mother who tries to calm down her child by saying: “There are no ghosts, believe me!” is making a perfectly acceptable negative ontological commitment. But Holmes and Hamlet are not the result of ac-

tivities based on mistaken beliefs. They have been created intentionally. They are the product of hard work and honest toil. Shakespeare and Conan Doyle did not try to fool their readers.

One essential or defining trait of any species is the reproductive system. Bander-snatches are described as fast, aggressive and “frumious”,¹⁰ but we know nothing about the way they reproduce. (Dragons are an exception; they look like reptiles, so they are oviparous . . .). Different from real species, they don’t have a phylogenesis. I have no strong argument to rule out “artefactual abstract species”. Perhaps, we can enrich the descriptions or expand what Lewis Carroll said about bandersnatches. I can only say that beyond the fact that they are abstract, *they are not intended as individuals*. When we try to imagine a snark, the intentional object is always an individual specimen. We frequently rely on artist imagination, illustrators, or filmmakers, etc. *The jabberwock*, like Pegasus, seems to be one of a kind and consequently is intended as an individual. Fictional characters depend for their existence upon the mental activity of many people—first the mental activity of their creators, and then the mental activity of those who entertain the characters— and upon a material basis—copies of books, newspapers, films, etc. Our intentional experience only targets abstract artefacts as individuals, one at a time or in very small groups.

We saw that most abstract artefacts are incomplete or indeterminate under many aspects. Not only the individuation of these abstract species, *qua* species, is usually poor, but in that case we do not feel any obligation to “complete the picture”, to guess or suppose tacitly the presence of what is lacking. When it comes to abstract species, so many things are left unspecified and cannot be taken for granted. I’m not sure we know enough to recognize something as a specimen of snark or bandersnatches. What’s the diet of a snark? Do they have a specific smell? Do they sleep at night? Are they carnivorous? Are they tameable? Nothing is lost for the reader if we left unanswered these questions. We know these creatures only through a few descriptions. It is completely different with individual abstract artefacts. We just suppose tacitly that Holmes has shoes of a determinate size, wears undies, has money in his wallet, changes the strings of his violin regularly, etc. When we think about a fictional character, we rarely think about these things, because we take them for granted. But nothing of what precedes speaks against abstract artefactual species in a decisive manner. We can truly say that, *according to the story*, bandersnatches are “frumious”. Now, when we look at the matter from the external perspective, we find a stronger argument: they don’t have an identity, they don’t have an essence.

There is no possible *de re* knowledge of snarks and unicorns. What essential property something must instantiate in order to be a snark? As long as second-order essentialism is concerned (which consider the essence of species or classes of individuals), I would say that there are no unicorns, snarks or angels. Their individuation is too poor, too vague, and too many fundamental properties are lacking. But why is it

different with fictional characters? We know them only through a few descriptions too and there is no possible *de re* knowledge of them either. I think the main difference can be identified when we bring the theory of intentionality into the picture: Archangel Gabriel, like Sherlock Holmes or James Bond, is *intended* or *meant* as an individual. The difference, I suggest, is *noetic*, to use Husserl's term.

9. Holmes in Other Possible Worlds

I can imagine Socrates as a carpenter. After all, it is intuitively true that Socrates could have been a carpenter. It seems natural to say that there is a possible world in which Socrates *exists* and *is* a carpenter. An actualist would say that we just stipulate a counterfactual situation in which *our* Socrates—the one who married Xanthippe, fought in the Peloponnese war, taught to many Athenians, drank the hemlock, etc.—, has an accidental property, that of being a carpenter. I can also imagine Sherlock Holmes surfing in a psychedelic swimsuit somewhere near Florianópolis. Are the two counterfactual situations on the same footing? Is there a possible world in which Holmes exists and instantiates the accidental property of being a surfer?

The concept of Intentionality cannot be univocal without a unified view of the possible objects of thought or intentional objects (Meinong 1904; Crane 2013). The Socrates-carpenter and the Holmes-surfer are both objects of my intentional experience. But it is easy to argue that there is no possible world in which a Sherlock Holmes of flesh and blood exists and is a surfer. There is no Sherlock Holmes of flesh and blood that would have existed had that possible world be the actual one. We cannot have *de re* beliefs about Sherlock Holmes, and certainly no one ever had knowledge by acquaintance of the famous character. “Sherlock Holmes” is not a rigid designator for an individual with a body belonging to the species *homo sapiens*. We know what “he” is and what “he” does from a bunch of descriptions, thanks to Conan Doyle's activity as a writer, starting in 1886. But this does not mean that “Sherlock Holmes” cannot be a rigid designator for an abstract artefact. It has been created; it has an origin. Holmes exists in D_0 , has a contingent existence and surely exists in all the possible worlds that differ from the actual one under aspects that leave untouched the relevant part of the history of British literature that includes Conan Doyle's works. Holmes (the character) exists in any possible world that differs at most from the actual world by the fact that Churchill won the post-war election, for instance. And there is a possible world in which Holmes is hired by the NYPD to resolve crimes involving serial killers. For being abstract, the changes that Holmes can undergo are possible only if its material basis is changed. The only limit is the individual essence: the changes cannot affect Holmes' individual essence. So, there is a possible world in which Holmes resolves crimes on a different planet in the 22nd

century. Just produce the corresponding script! A fictional character has no proper life.

Now Holmes, the character, is a contingent being and as such, should be able to instantiate modal properties. What should we say of a sentence like “Sherlock Holmes could have been a fisherman” or “Sherlock Holmes could have been a surfer”? Of course, Holmes cannot change any one of the property that composes its individual essence. So, if Holmes goes fishing (according to a story), it would not be as a fisherman, and if he goes surfing (according to a story), it would not be as a surfer (if by “fisherman” and “surfer” we mean professional activities.) It could be on a given occasion, or even as a hobby (according to a new script). But this will not happen unless something changes in the material basis (new scripts, for instance). Once more, if Holmes exists in a possible world different from the actual one, it can only be as an abstract artefact. Now, modal properties are complex; they involve simpler properties as constituents. Some properties can be instantiate only by *concreta*. I call them “concreteness-involving properties”. Holmes, the character, cannot instantiate such accidental properties in any possible world, but “he” can instantiate any property people usually have, *according to a story*.

10. Intentionality and Crane’s Reduction Program

There are many literally *true* sentences about abstract artefacts. Consider the following sentences (these are all stock examples):

- a. Sherlock Holmes is more famous than most today’s detectives.
- b. Pegasus is a mythical winged-horse.
- c. Hamlet is a character created by Shakespeare.

Crane puts in the same list the following sentence:

- d. Vulcan was postulated by Leverrier in 1859.

Vulcan, according to our own criterion, would not count as an abstract artefact, because there is something wrong in the postulation. Vulcan is an intentional object all the same, like Holmes and Hamlet, but it does not exist, full stop. Many people died in search of the Eldorado. But the Eldorado they imagined has no special ontological status. It simply never existed. But their thoughts were about a golden city and the content of these thoughts could not be specified in the sentence of a public language without mentioning the Eldorado *in modo obliquo*. In languages with declensions, like Latin, the nominative is the case of categorical reference. The other oblique cases suspend the categorical reference. “Plato’s beard” refers to a special beard, not to Plato,

“Plato” appearing only in the genitive case. The sentence “Sir Walter Raleigh imagines the Eldorado”, specifies the content of a mental state ascribed to Walter Raleigh, and the intentional object is the Eldorado, but there is no categorical reference made to the golden city that appears as accusative (an oblique case) of the verb “imagining”. This, I believe, was Brentano’s position after 1905.¹¹ Some intentional objects exist and we tried to show that fictional characters and other abstract artifacts like institutions exist and depend upon a material basis created intentionally. Others intentional objects are the results of mistakes, fears or superstitions. They simply have no ontological status and they don’t belong to the domain D_0 of the actual world.

What makes the a-d sentences true? Where are the truth-makers? Tim Crane’s strategy, anticipated a bit by Kripke, appeals mainly to representational activities. Holmes, Pegasus and Hamlet owe their existence as fictional characters to representational activities. And the predicates in the list express representation-dependent properties, including “ x was postulated by Leverrier in 1859”. Crane, however, treats Holmes, Hamlet and Pegasus as he does for Vulcan, that is, they are all “non-existent objects”. On that score, I have to disagree.

If they are all “non-existent objects”, then the Frege-Strawson conception of presupposition gets it wrong (the a-d sentences are intuitively true, not neither-true-nor-false), and it is far from clear that Russell’s theory of descriptions could provide the correct treatment (they would come out false). When it comes to fictional discourse, the Frege-Strawson conception seems to me much superior. Conan Doyle did not want to fool his numerous readers; he just wanted to entertain them! And from the external perspective, the proper names in the a-d list denote abstract objects, except “Vulcan” which is really an empty name; therefore, the corresponding proper names (“Hamlet”, “Holmes”, “Pegasus”) are not really empty or ambiguous. As we have seen, some properties are concreteness-entailing: Being a carpenter, being a philosopher and being a horse, are such properties. But being a fictional character, being famous, being a mythical horse and being a postulated planet are not existence-entailing or concreteness-entailing. They are properties whose instantiation depends on the representational activities of cognitive agents. When we refer mentally or linguistically to Holmes, Hamlet and Pegasus, or when we imagine their adventures, we perform many different actions, and actions are events that take place somewhere in space and time. Of course, this is not enough: to secure the existence of a fictional character, a material basis easily accessible is required: books, journals, oral tradition and memories, microfilms, disks, data travellers, projectors, libraries, etc. How many fantastic characters disappeared forever because the material basis has been destroyed?

Crane’s strategy is a kind of reductionism. When we hear that “the average Brazilian family has 1.6 children”, we are not induced to believe that there are families with 1.6 children. But if the information is correct and precious, it is because of some facts (some families have just one child, others have three, etc.), and the way the aver-

age is calculate. What needs to be true is that the number of children divided by the number of families be equal to 1.6. Thus we get a paraphrase that explains the truth of the original sentence. In the same way, there are facts explaining the truth of sentences a-d. Sherlock Holmes stands in the relation of *being more famous than* to any living detective. Fame is a representation-dependent property that comes in degrees, as Crane observes, and it depends on the intensity with which people hear about a certain person, imagine that person, read about that person, etc. So many people have heard about Holmes, have read the stories, watched movies, etc. This is enough to make it true that Holmes is more famous than any today's detectives. Conan Doyle stories (in books, movies, series, etc.) and people mental representations are enough. They create the possibility to refer to something very well characterized. Crane would say that Holmes is a "non-existent object". I prefer, like Kripke, van Inwagen, Schiffer and Thomasson, to treat Holmes, Hamlet and Pegasus as abstract objects, or, more precisely, like Amie Thomasson, as abstract artefacts, introduced in narratives at a certain moment in the history of the world.

A knowledge ascription requires a true proposition as its content. Conan Doyle's novels are all the source of the knowledge we have about Sherlock Holmes. But at the same time, we *know* that he does not really play violin, does not really use cocaine, etc. We know the "he" is characterised as such, but we do not really believe that he plays violin, uses cocaine, etc. So our knowledge of Holmes is not simply taken from the novels. We need a step back. What we do believe and know is that Holmes is a character created by Conan Doyle, and that fictional character is a fictional detective, whose best friend is a fictional Medicine Doctor and writer, and that they both get involve in fictional courses of actions and adventures, etc. If there are facts of the matters, they are to be found in the novels, and the true reports we can do; in that case, the facts are all metalinguistic facts. The rest depends on our intentional experience.

11. Conclusions

I think the metaphysical framework provided by Actualism is broad enough for a theory of intentionality and of intentional objects, existent or not, even in the simple and sober view I presented. We should avoid strange ontological commitments to *possibilia*, but I believe abstract artefacts must be included in the domain of the actual world, together with all contingent beings, past and present, and artefacts, concrete and abstract. So we would have in the domain not only concrete things, but also a variety of abstracts artefacts introduced at a certain moment in our history. Some abstract artefacts instantiate a huge variety of representation-dependent properties. To resolve the problem of the characterisation of fictional characters and the knowledge

we have of them we must distinguish two perspectives: the internal perspective is the one where they are fully characterised, and thereof there are many true reports relative to the stories in which they are presented; the external perspective is the one in which we refer to them as abstract artefacts. Finally, the truths about abstract artefacts can be explained in terms of truths about their respective material basis.¹²

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Notes

¹ For the artefactual theory of fictional characters and other abstract artefacts, see Thomasson 1999. I am grateful to Otavio Bueno for the reference.

² In Leclerc 2006, I defend a contextualist approach to the predicate of existence, suggesting that we should first scrutinize a variety of uses as an introduction to ontology. Now I believe that there is a minimum use, so to speak, according to which time is more fundamental than concreteness. To exist, it is enough to have been introduced at some moment in the history of the world.

³ A description of our mental life would be incomplete without what has been called “counterfactual thinking”. Some people get seriously depressed and sick just by entertaining compulsively thoughts like: “If I had been more careful, the accident would not have happened, and she would still be alive”. Sometimes one corrects one’s own behaviour by saying to oneself something like: “If I had acted differently, the result would have been much better. So, next time, in similar circumstances, I’ll follow a different plan”. Historians are interested today in counterfactual situations (“What would have happened if the United States had not threw the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?”). Many other practical and theoretical contexts appeal to or require counterfactual situations.

⁴ Meinong (1904, p.80) seems to deny existence to “the antipodes”. But he seems to take “antipodes” to denote a single point in space. I doubt this is the meaning the word has in ordinary language. Most of the time, by “antipode” we mean something like a whole region. Moreover, “antipodes” clearly has a demonstrative component in its meaning. The case is different with an ideal object like North Pole, which supervenes on the planet and its axis of rotation. So it is not “created”, after all. But a lot of scientific work was necessary to establish it. In this paper, I set aside the case of ideal objects.

⁵ On the game of make-believe, see Evans 1982, p.353 and ff.

⁶ The usual expression is “existence-entailing property”, (Priest 2005), but I prefer, for reasons that should be clear now, to use “concreteness entailing property”.

⁷ See Parsons 2008, p.1: “Roughly speaking, an object is abstract if it is not located in space and time and does not stand in causal relations”. Wisely, Parsons adds: “This criterion gives rise to some uncertain cases and would not be accepted by all philosophers”.

⁸ In the last two sentences, I used the indirect pronoun “him” standing for a “fictional character” instead of “it” that would be more correct, but, in this context, “it” sounds unbearably artificial!

⁹ For these strategies, see mainly Zalta 1988.

¹⁰ In Lewis Carroll’s lexicon, it means the same as “fuming and furious”.

¹¹ This is how I interpret Brentano after the “immanent crisis”. See my “Intentionality or Consciousness?” (Leclerc 2015, p.43).

¹² I want to thank Leonardo Weber Castor de Lima, Marcos Silva, Luís Estevinha Rodrigues, Alex Calheiros, Hilan Bensusan, José Gabriel Trindade Santos, Clarisse E. Leclerc, and the members of the research group Pensamento, Cognição, Linguagem, of the Federal University of Ceará for their useful critiques on former versions of that paper.