

Grounding Fiction

by

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Abstract

Fictional characters are awkward creatures. They are described as being girls, wizards and detectives, as being famous, based on real people, and well developed, and as being paradigmatic examples of things that don't exist. It's not hard to see that there are tensions between these various descriptions — how can something that is a detective not exist? — and there is a range of views designed to make sense of the pre-theoretical data.

Proponents of some views are *fictional realists*, who hold that we should accept that fictional characters are part of 'the furniture of our world'. Others are fictional *anti-realists*, who hold instead that our world does not contain any such things. The realist and the anti-realist thus disagree about *ontology* and about which alleged entities we should be prepared to embrace an ontological commitment to. But behind this ontological dispute lies a methodological one that has all too often been left implicit. This dispute concerns the very nature of ontological inquiry: its subject matter, its aims, and its methodology.

This thesis aims to bring these methodological issues to the fore. I show how the arguments realists have offered in favour of their views rely on crucial 'metaontological' assumptions about what ontological questions are and how they should be answered. In addition to casting doubt on some of the more orthodox approaches to ontological inquiry, my positive goal is to deploy an independently motivated metaontology to defend a novel version of fictional anti-realism. On the view I develop and defend, the central task we face is that of *explaining* truths concerning fictional characters, where the relevant notion of explanation is distinctively metaphysical in character. Fictional anti-realism emerges as the plausible thesis that truths about fictional entities can be completely explained in terms of the existence and features of other things.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

FICTIONAL CHARACTERS are awkward creatures. They are described as being girls, detectives or cats in their ‘home’ fictions, but who of us has ever met Hermione Granger, Sherlock Holmes or the Cheshire Cat? No one, of course: they are, after all, *not real*. They are fictional entities, objects of imagination, created by imaginative authors, they are nothing like us. Still worse for them, it’s not even obvious that fictional characters are anything at all. Given that no one has ever come across them, given that we can neither see nor touch them, maybe fictional characters are nothing more than shadows cast by our linguistic projections onto the world, a world that is really free of such objects.

1.1 Delineating the Debate

Philosophers of fiction try to make sense of the ways in which we talk and think about fiction. While some of the linguistic data suggests that we pretheoretically do not believe in fictional characters, some seems to imply quite the opposite. Thus compare:

- (1) Some fictional characters are more famous than others
- (2) Hermione Granger doesn’t exist
- (3) Hermione Granger is a student

All of these claims seem true, but it’s not difficult to see that there is a question about how they can all be true. How can Hermione be a student if she doesn’t

exist? And if she doesn't exist, how can she be famous? Indeed, if fictional characters like Hermione don't exist, how can some of them be more famous, or more feared, or better developed than others? And if you're tempted to say that existence is a status that only some objects have, it's worth reflecting upon the fact that there are many perfectly acceptable claims which apparently have us predicating existence to fictional characters. If someone told you that many of Dickens' characters were underdeveloped, it seems perfectly reasonable to inform them that only a few such characters exist and that most of Dickens' characters are very well developed indeed.¹

Are the folk simply confused about fictional characters? Are they guilty of holding inconsistent beliefs about them? Perhaps, but theorists of fiction usually try to respect an obligation to humanity, an obligation to make people's behaviour, including their linguistic behaviour, rational.² But that leaves it open how we should make sense of the apparent tensions in our ordinary talk about fictional objects, and there are broadly two options available at this point. On the one hand, we might take seriously existence denials, reject the existence of fictional characters, and attempt to explain how claims like (1) and (3) can be acceptable despite the non-existence of characters like Hermione. On the other hand, we might be less conservative, embrace the existence of fictional characters, and attempt to explain how sentences like (2) can be acceptable despite the existence of Hermione and her ilk. It shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that both views have had their adherents, but it might surprise you to learn that the latter view has become more and more popular in recent times. This view has been described as *fictional realism*, while the opposing, conservative view has been described as *fictional anti-realism*.³

As I shall understand the notion, fictional realism is the view that fictional characters are part of a mind-independent reality. (Anti-realism is the denial of realism.) This is not to say that the world would contain fictional objects even if there were no minds at all — they might well be mind-dependent in *that* sense

¹ The example is adapted from van Inwagen (1977).

² See e.g. Lewis (1975, p.112).

³ Prominent realists include Braun (2005), Howell (1979), Kripke (1973), Salmon (1998, 2002), Schiffer (1996, 2003), Thomasson (1999, 2003a,b) and van Inwagen (1977, 1983, 1985, 2000, 2003). Prominent anti-realists include Brock (2002), Eagle (2007), Evans (1982), Everett (2005, 2007), Sainsbury (2009), and Walton (1990, 2000).

— but rather that they are “out there” in some robust sense, rather than merely images in our heads or something of that kind. This understanding compares well to the way that someone like Hartry Field (1989) understands realism about mathematical objects, or how David Lewis (1986) conceives of realism about possible worlds. Being a realist about fictional characters, or mathematical objects, or possible worlds is a matter of taking these things to belong to the “furniture of the world” — to borrow a metaphor often used in this context.

For reasons that will hopefully become clearer later in the thesis, I resist characterizing fictional realism as the view that fictional entities *exist*. Though many have thought of realism in this way, doing so prejudices important debates about how ontological inquiry should be understood. And whilst the orthodox Quinean approach to ontology might lead us to think that what’s distinctive about fictional realism is the claim that fictional characters exist, there are alternative approaches to ontology that paint a very different picture. Indeed, the later parts of this thesis will examine the prospects for an approach to the debate about fictional characters which aims to reconcile the existence of fictional characters with an ontology that is free of such things. I am happy to identify realists as those who embrace an ontology of fictional entities, and who are likewise prepared to accept an ontological commitment to such things. But it should be remembered that these are terms which philosophers can, and do, characterize in different ways.

Having characterized fictional realism *qua* genus, our next task is to identify the different species of fictional realism that have been discussed in the literature. But before we do so, it will prove useful to draw some distinctions between some different ways in which we talk about fictional characters. For one of the central challenges facing both realists and anti-realists is that of explaining how talk and thought about fiction and fictional objects — hereafter, ‘talk about fiction’ — functions. But we talk about fictional characters from two very different perspectives, each of which gives rise to specific difficulties.⁴

When appreciating a fiction, we often utter sentences that seem to be made from a perspective that is internal to the fictional world. Thus we say that

⁴ It is important to note that what Thomasson (2009, p.11) calls ‘fictionalizing discourse’ does not constitute talk about fiction as I am understanding it here. Fictionalizing discourse is what the author engages in when writing her novel and apparently creating the fictional characters. For discussion of fictionalizing discourse, see Searle (1979, p.65), Thomasson (2003b, p.210-4), and García-Carpintero (2007).

Hermione is very clever and that Monk is a detective, and the natural subject matter of such claims is the properties that Hermione and Monk have in their respective fictions. I'll call sentences of this sort sentences of **internal talk**, and follow Kendall Walton (1990, p.397) in holding that we have a piece of (true) internal talk whenever we obtain an equally true sentence when we prefix the original one with an operator of the form 'According to *F*' or 'In *F*' where '*F*' stands for the name of a fiction. (Call such operators **fictional operators**.) This criterion does its job well.⁵ It classifies 'Hermione is very clever' as an internal sentence, for example, since we can prefix that sentence with a fictional operator to yield the true sentence 'According to *Harry Potter*, Hermione is very clever'. Similarly, it classifies 'Monk is a detective' as an internal sentence since we can prefix that sentence with a fictional operator to yield the truth that Monk is a detective in the *Monk*-fiction.

In addition to talking about them from an internal vantage point, we also talk about fictional characters from an external perspective, a "a real-world point of view" as Amie Thomasson (1999, p.95) puts it. Thus the sentences 'Holmes is a fictional character' and 'Hermione was created by J.K. Rowling' are not internal sentences but external ones. Holmes is not a fictional character according to the *Holmes* stories, and Hermione was not created by Rowling in the *Potter* novels. Similarly, the claim that Holmes appears in more than one novel is not a sentence that is true according to any of the stories about Holmes, and must thereby be classified as an **external sentence** rather than an internal one.

Though the distinction between internal and external talk about fictional characters is relatively clear, there is a further distinction that can and should be drawn *within* the category of external talk. For note that most of our talk about fiction seems to involve a mixture of internal and external perspectives, as is illustrated by claims like 'Holmes is the most famous fictional detective of all time' and 'Monk has more psychological issues than Holmes'. These claims cannot be prefixed with a fictional operator, and thereby shouldn't be classified as internal sentences. But neither can they be interpreted from a *purely* external perspective since the properties that Holmes and Monk have in their stories are relevant to their assessment. It therefore seems natural to classify them as belong to the category of **mixed** or

⁵ Though see Eagle (2007) for criticism and Sainsbury (2011) for a defence of the idea that truth 'in' a fiction should not be conflated with true 'according to' a fiction.

impure external talk in the sense that they are external sentences with internal elements.⁶

The key distinction within talk about fiction is between internal talk and external talk, with the latter encompassing both pure and impure external talk. Be they realists or anti-realists, philosophers of fiction face the task of accommodating each of these ways of talking about fictional characters.

1.2 Fictional Realism and Its Species

The different species of fictional realism can be delineated in terms of the story that each tells about what kind of things fictional characters are. I'll now identify the two main species of realism that have been defended in the literature: fictional abstractism, of which creationism and eternalism are subspecies, and fictional non-actualism. The most popular of these views, as we shall see, is the creationist version of fictional abstractism.

1.2.1 Abstractism *vs.* Non-Actualism

As their name suggests, **abstractists** claim that fictional characters like Monk and Hermione are abstract objects. And even if such things actually exist, it's no wonder that no one has ever met a fictional character, since, being abstract, fictional characters are not the kinds of things that one can meet. This does not, however, entail that fictional objects are Platonic objects that exist outside of space and time. Though this view is defended by those abstractists who are **eternalists**, some fictional abstractists — **creationists** — find it pretty clear that characters are created by authors at some point in time and are thus nothing like the eternal forms that allegedly populate Platonic heaven.⁷ Moreover, creationists hold

⁶ In addition to internal and external talk, there is also talk that seems to be about feelings we have towards fictional characters. There's a considerable literature on the topic of having feelings towards fictional characters, a topic that could make a thesis on its own, and it's beyond the scope of this thesis to address how we should understand such talk. (The problems generated by internal and external talk will give us issues aplenty.) By and large, then, I will bracket this kind of 'emotional' talk, but for discussion see (e.g.) Radford (1975), Walton (1978), and Lamarque (1981).

⁷ Wolterstorff (1980) defends eternalism. Members of the creationist camp include Braun (2005), Kripke (1973), Thomasson (1999, 2003a,b), Salmon (2002), and Schiffer (2003). It's not clear whether van Inwagen is a creationist, as he claims to be sitting on the fence: see his (2003). But since his rhetoric is clearly more mocking when it comes to eternalism, I make him pick sides here and will include him as a creationist.

that fictional characters depend for their existence on authorial actions, which appears to entail that they exist only contingently (there are possible worlds with no authors whatsoever.) The idea that fictional characters are created also seems to respect the intuition that Sherlock Holmes might have failed to exist, had the actual world taken a different turn and ended up lacking stories about him.

Eternalists tend to find the creationist's metaphysical picture puzzling, since they don't really understand how abstract objects could be created at a particular time or causally dependent upon human activities. But in rejecting these aspects of creationism, eternalists are forced to give up on the idea that fictional characters are created by authors in any literal sense. And so the eternalist must hold that Hermione and Holmes were there all along, as person-kinds, roles or character-types, and what authors like Rowling and Doyle did when they wrote their stories was to 'fictionalize' these eternally existing objects. Thus when an author writes a fiction she is in effect picking out a bunch of these character-types and putting them together in a single fiction. In this sense, the eternalist thinks of authors as discovering characters rather than creating them, a view which leads Peter van Inwagen (1977) to suggest that eternalists reduce authors to mere flower-arrangers.

As should be clear, then, creationism seems to have the upper hand when it comes to accommodating a number of the central aspects of our pre-theoretical conception of fictional characters. This is further illustrated by the fact that eternalists tend to hold that the properties that a character has according to a fiction are essential to it.⁸ Thus Holmes couldn't have failed to be a fictional detective, even if Doyle had have decided otherwise. Nor could Hermione have failed to be a wizard, even if Rowling had decided to write her story differently. In both cases, the eternalist says that if the author had have given Holmes or Hermione different core features, they wouldn't have been writing about the same fictional characters that we have come to know and love. To borrow van Inwagen's analogy, they wouldn't have fictionalized the same flower in a different way, but instead would have replaced one flower with another. Given that it seems a touch strained to say such things — and I do think that it isn't that comfortable to say that what happens when an author changes her mind about the properties of her characters is that she is changing her mind about which eternally existing character will be

⁸ Perhaps this needs to be restricted to the character's 'core' properties, but I ignore that complication here. See Wolterstorff (1980) for discussion.

called by a certain name — it's understandable that most abstractists have preferred the creationist picture, which can happily accommodate the thought that the properties a character has in its fiction might have been different from those that it happens to have.

The other important realist approach, and one that stands opposed to both eternalism and creationism, can be called fictional **non-actualism**. Proponents of this approach encourage us to hold that fictional entities are non-actual individuals, merely possible objects much like you and I, which inhabit worlds much like our own. So whilst non-actualists think that Holmes and Hermione are located in space and time — just not *our* space and time — we will never be able to touch them or talk to them as the worlds they inhabit are island universes beyond our reach. This kind of view is normally associated with David Lewis, but though Lewis famously defended the existence of merely possible things, he never explicitly defended the identification of fictional characters with mere possibilia, and it's unlikely that he'd be happy with that identification taken as it stands.⁹ However, and though non-actualism is explicitly defended by Robert Howell (1979), it's fair to say that it hasn't found many fans because most find it difficult to believe that non-actual concreta exist, let alone that Holmes is one of these things.¹⁰

Since both fictional eternalism and non-actualism are relatively marginal positions in the literature, with the vast amount of realists classifying themselves as creationists, I'll take the creationist to be the paradigmatic fictional realist, and unqualified uses of the terms 'fictional realist' and 'fictional realism' should be understood in light of this. And in this setting, it will be important to have a more detailed conception of what creationism amounts to, and an initial sense of how creationists have attempted to accommodate our ordinary ways of talking about fictional characters.

⁹ If you piece together Lewis's (1986) realism about merely possible objects with his (1978) discussion of fictional truth, a non-actualist treatment of fictional characters emerges. But Lewis certainly wouldn't have thought that there was a single possible object x such that x is determinately identical to Holmes. Rather, there will be a range of possible objects each of which play the Holmes-role and the reference of the term 'Holmes' will be indeterminate in reference between those candidates. Compare Stone (2010).

¹⁰ It's probably also fair to say that non-actualism is unpopular due to the influence of Saul Kripke's (1973) argument to the conclusion that fictional characters are essentially fictional, meaning that the unicorn-like non-fictional objects that exist in other worlds are not really unicorns. For a recent defence of non-actualism against this charge, see Stone (2010).

1.2.2 Fictional Creationism

Creationists hold that fictional characters are literally created by authors and are therefore — since the author might have failed to exist or might have decided to write the story at a different time — contingently existing entities which exist at some but not all times. To the extent that they agree on all of this, creationists are united in their endorsement of a certain metaphysical picture. But distinctions within the creationist camp can be traced to (i) the positive reasons each gives in defence of their creationism and (ii) their specific proposals about the proper interpretation of our talk about fiction. Since the two most vocal defenders of creationism in recent times have been Amie Thomasson and Peter van Inwagen, I'll begin by contrasting their respective approaches, which will provide a basis on which we can build in the coming chapters.

Thomasson tells us that fictional characters are *abstract artifacts*, and labels her view as the ‘artifactual theory’ of fictional characters. The artifactuality of fictional characters, for Thomasson, is rooted in the similarity which fictional characters have to more familiar artifacts like tables and chairs, viz. that they are contingent members of the actual world that depend for their existence on the acts and intentions of human beings. But although created and contingent, Thomasson also holds that fictional characters are abstract entities, “where ‘abstract’ means just lacking a spatio-temporal location (although they may have certain temporal properties such as a time of creation)” (2003a, p.140). On the resulting view, fictional characters are “relevantly similar to other social and cultural entities including particular laws of state (the U.S. Constitution, the Miranda Laws), works of music (Nielsen’s Symphony No.4, Op.29, “The Inextinguishable”), and the works of literature in which fictional characters appear” (2003b, p.220), all of which, Thomasson thinks, “fall between traditional bifurcations of categories into real (spatio-temporal) and ideal (platonistic) entities” (2003a, p.140).

Whereas Thomasson tells us that fictional characters are abstract artifacts, van Inwagen (1977, p.302) tells us that they are the *theoretical entities of literary criticism*, on a par with literary works, rhyme schemes or plots. Of course, saying that is not itself to say anything against Thomasson’s metaphysics — for all that’s been said so far, the theoretical entities of literary criticism may well be abstract artifacts. So one might rightly wonder exactly where the differences between these

two creationist views lie.

One difference — though not, I think, the most interesting one — may lie in some of the more specific claims that Thomasson makes about the connection between fictional entities and human activities. For one thing, Thomasson (1999, p.9) explicitly defends the view that fictional characters can not only *come* to exist but can also *seize* to exist, which might happen were all the copies of a fiction destroyed and no memories of the character were left. For another thing, Thomasson (1999, p.35-38) also holds that there is a particularly robust link between a fictional character and the author of the stories in which that character appears, since fictional characters are *dependent for their existence* on the activities and intentions of authors. Finally, the existence of a fictional character is *modally* dependent upon the existence of its creator, meaning that (e.g.) the only worlds containing Hermione Granger are worlds which also contain J.K. Rowling: “if [Rowling] does not exist in some world, then [Hermione] is similarly absent (1999, p.39). (So Hermione really is *Rowling’s* creation; no-one else could have created her.) It should be clear that these extra claims go beyond the mere slogan that fictional characters are abstract objects, and one might find them peculiar. In this setting, there may be genuine metaphysical differences between Thomasson’s approach and van Inwagen’s.

Another difference — a more interesting one in the context of this thesis — lies in how Thomasson and van Inwagen attempt to accommodate the various things we say about fictional characters; that is, in their respective accounts of internal and external talk. For instance, in order to account for the fact that no abstract object is a detective or a wizard, van Inwagen distinguishes two ways in which fictional characters can be related to properties.¹¹ On the one hand, a character can *exemplify* or *have* a property in just the same way as you and I can. And though Hermione, *qua* abstract object, does not exemplify the property of being a wizard, she does exemplify the property of being a fictional character and the property of being created by Rowling. On the other hand, fictional characters can *hold* properties in the sense that they can be fictionally represented as exemplifying properties. So whilst Hermione might not exemplify the property of being a wizard, she does hold the property of being a wizard.¹² And with this distinction

¹¹ van Inwagen (1977, p.305-6).

¹² Some properties are both held and exemplified by fictional characters: Hermione both holds and

in place, van Inwagen is able to offer an explanation of the distinction between internal and external talk. Thus when we talk about characters from an internal point of view, we are talking about the properties that they hold. But when we talk about characters from an external point of view, we are talking about the properties they exemplify. Thus there is no tension between saying ‘Monk is a detective’ in one breath and ‘Monk is a fictional character’ in the next, for being a detective is a property Monk holds and being a fictional character is a property he exemplifies. van Inwagen does not offer an account of impure external sentences in his published work, but I think that it is clear how he’d treat them. ‘A fictional detective is Doyle’s most famous creation’ would, e.g., be interpreted as saying that there is a character who holds the property of being a detective but exemplifies the property of being Doyle’s most famous creation.

Unlike van Inwagen, Thomasson does not distinguish between the properties that a character exemplifies and the property a character holds. Or to phrase that a little more carefully, Thomasson does not appeal to a *primitive* distinction of this sort. Thomasson does allow that when we are talking about a fictional character, we are sometimes interested in the properties that an abstract object exemplifies. But when we’re talking internally about a fictional character, we are not interested in the properties that character ‘really’ has, but the properties it *fictionally* has, the properties it exemplifies *in* its home fiction. Of course, Thomasson could define a new way in which a character can be related to a property, one which corresponds roughly to van Inwagen’s notion of holding, by means of the following stipulation:

x holds the property of being $G =_{\text{def}}$ According to F , x exemplifies G

(Where F is x ’s home fiction.) But van Inwagen himself doesn’t accept this definition, though he might accept the corresponding biconditional, and takes the distinction between the properties Hermione has and those she holds to be a piece of primitive ideology.¹³ This difference won’t matter too much in what follows, however. The crucial point is that van Inwagen and Thomasson both interpret external sentences in terms of exemplification, and offer a different treatment of internal sentences, one which isn’t couched in terms of exemplification *tout court*.

exemplifies the property of being self-identical, for instance. Some properties are neither held nor exemplified by fictional characters: Hermione neither holds nor exemplifies the property of being a dog, for instance.

¹³ See van Inwagen (1977, p.304-7) and Hanley (2003, esp. pp.126-8) for discussion.

For our purposes, the semantic differences between their approaches can be seen as cosmetic ones.

A final difference — and the most interesting one, I think — lies in the reasons and arguments Thomasson and van Inwagen offer in defence of their respective versions of creationism. Since this theme will receive extensive discussion in the later chapters of this thesis, I'll limit myself to just a few words at this stage.

What's true is that both van Inwagen and Thomasson hail their respective accounts as offering the best explanation of the data, the best account of our ordinary talk and thoughts about fictional characters. Thomasson (2003a, p.139), e.g., tells us that her defence of the artifactual theory is “based largely on its ability to better preserve central elements of the common conception of fictional characters embodied in our literary practices” and van Inwagen (1977) makes similar remarks.¹⁴ But these remarks mask a fact that's often missed (or at least neglected) in the literature: that van Inwagen and Thomasson approach the question of whether fictional characters exist in very different ways from a methodological point of view. So even if they agree on the answer to the first-order *ontological* question — *are there fictional characters?* — they disagree on the answer to the second-order *metaontological* question of how we should go about answering the first-order ontological question. van Inwagen, for instance, thinks of himself as an arch-Quinean, and tell us that

All ontological disputes in which the disputants do not accept Quine's strategy of ontological clarification are suspect. If Quine's “rules” for conducting an ontological dispute are not followed, then — so say those of us who are adherents of Quine's meta-ontology — it is almost certain that many untoward consequences of the disputed positions will be obscured by imprecision and wishful thinking. (1998, p.31)

We don't need to worry too much at this stage about exactly to what the Quinean strategy amounts: that will become apparent in due course. The present point is simply that given that Thomasson's approach to ontology *isn't* Quinean in character, van Inwagen will think that Thomasson's route to her fictional realism is

¹⁴ As Thomasson is well aware, that's not to say that there aren't problems — we'll see in the next chapter that the creationist faces difficulties accommodating claims like ‘*Monk* is about Monk’ and ‘Holmes doesn't exist’.

suspect even if it has managed to get herself to the right destination.¹⁵ Of course, Thomasson and van Inwagen each think that their respective theories are better than their rivals. But to say that isn't to say very much: they wouldn't accept them if they thought otherwise! In any case, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that their respective approaches to all things *meta*-ontological differ in quite radical ways.

1.3 Emptiness and Anti-realism

Fictional names are often taken as paradigmatic cases of 'empty' names: names which lack denotations. But given a compositional semantic picture according to which the referent of a sentence (i.e. its truth-value) is a function of the referents of its constituent subsentential expressions, the emptiness of names like 'Hermione' *prima facie* entails that sentences like 'Hermione is a fictional character' lack a truth-value. On the face of things, however, this is in conflict with the edicts of common sense, which has it that 'Hermione is a fictional character' is true.

The realist's way out of this predicament is simple and elegant, but comes at a heavy cost. For even if names like 'Hermione' do have denotations, the realist should be honest and admit that the *semantic* simplicity of her account is rooted in its *ontological* complexity. But in any case, and as I noted a moment ago, perhaps the main reason cited in defence of realism is the comparatively easy time that the realist has accommodating talk about fictional characters. But it's worth pinpointing exactly where the problem cases for the anti-realist lie.

My initial presentation of the troubles presented by empty names was a little misleading in this regard. For whilst all anti-realists face a problem when it comes to accommodating external talk about fictional entities, they don't face as many problems when it comes to accommodating internal talk. For remember that internal sentences can always be understood by means of a fictional operator like 'According to *Harry Potter*' or 'In the *Monk*-fiction'. But in this setting, two prominent approaches to fictional names can allow that internal sentences express truths.

Consider, for instance, a Fregean view of names according to which names refer to their own senses in indirect contexts.¹⁶ Then because a sentence like

¹⁵ And just to be clear: Thomasson (2003a, p.152) explicitly characterizes her approach to the debate about fictional entities *in contrast* to the orthodox Quinean setting.

¹⁶ See Frege (1952/1892) for the original presentation of this approach. See Künne (2007) and

'Hermione is a young wizard' is interpreted as being elliptical for a claim regarding the contents of a story like *Harry Potter*, the Fregean can happily admit that 'Hermione' does actually refer in such sentences because, and despite appearances, internal sentences are actually cases in which names are used in indirect contexts. In this setting, the initial puzzle is blocked since 'Hermione' does not lack a denotation in the case at hand.

Similarly, consider a Russellian treatment of names according to which names are analyzed in descriptive terms, so that 'Hermione' is a covert definite description such as 'the young female wizard who has such-and-such properties'.¹⁷ Then even if there is nothing which satisfies that description *in reality*, the Russellian can allow that it's true *in the fiction* that there is an x such that x satisfies the description associated with the name 'Hermione'. So on the Russellian approach the mere fact that 'Hermione' lacks a denotation doesn't have the consequence that no sentences involving that name are true.

The *prima facie* problem to which empty names give rise, then, needs to be handled carefully. On a Fregean treatment of names, names which lack a referent in direct contexts do not lack a referent in indirect contexts, so even given a compositional semantics, it won't follow that all sentences involving that name lack truth-values. On a Russellian treatment of names, names are analyzed in terms of definite descriptions and so the very most we can conclude is that when names like 'Hermione' are used in direct contexts, the resultant sentences will very often be false. So what hasn't been established is that the emptiness of fictional names entails that uses of those names in internal sentences is a problem: both the Fregean and the Russellian have ways of dealing with these cases.

Whilst the Fregean and the Russellian can accept that internal sentences involving empty names express truths, what neither theorist can accept, at least at first blush, is that sentences like 'Hermione is a fictional character' express truths. For such sentences cannot be understood as covertly using fictional names in indirect contexts, and that's a consequence of the fact that such sentences resist interpretation in terms of fictional operators. So if appearances are not to be misleading, external sentences use fictional names in direct contexts. But if we assume that

Sainsbury (2005) for defences of broadly Fregean treatments of fictional names.

¹⁷ See Russell (1905) for the original theory. For an extended discussion of descriptions, see Neale (1990).

there is no such thing as Hermione, then it seems that both the Fregean and the Russellian will be forced to accept that such apparent truism as ‘Hermione is a fictional character’ and ‘Hermione was created by Rowling’ are untrue. For the Fregean, such sentences lack truth-values; for the Russellian, they’re systematically false.

It’s not really a surprise, then, that fictional realists have identified the challenge of accommodating external talk as being the major challenge facing the anti-realist who rejects an ontology of fictional entities. While she still has to offer plausible semantics for this kind of talk herself, the realist’s justified hope is that the task she faces is significantly easier than that which faces the fictional anti-realist, since she allows for quantification over and reference to fictionalia.

1.4 What Next?

Despite the challenges they face, anti-realists haven’t simply laid down and died. Indeed, in the coming chapters, we’ll encounter a variety of anti-realist proposals, each of which attempts to show that there is no convincing reason to think that we should accept an ontology of fictional entities. But my goal in this chapter has just been to introduce some of the most important issues that arise with respect to fictional characters, thus providing a backdrop against which the ensuing discussion can take place. In particular, I’ve distinguished various ways in which we talk about fictional characters, introduced the distinction between realist and anti-realist accounts of fictional characters, and suggested that the problems that the anti-realist has accommodating external sentences provides some motivation for realism. Exactly what kind of realists we should be is a separate question, but the most popular move in the literature is to hold that fictional characters are abstract objects which are created when authors write stories.

Having delineated the debate, I shall close by providing brief chapter summaries in order to give you a sense of where we’re heading.

- Chapter 2. Fictional Realism, Attacked and Defended
 - My goal in this chapter is to demonstrate the resilience of fictional realism by means of showing that a number of recent and important objections to realist proposals can be overcome. In particular, I’ll argue

that the realist can make sense of the intuition that fictions are *about* their characters and that the realist can accommodate the intuition that fictional characters like Holmes don't exist.

- Chapter 3: From Indispensability to Metaontology
 - When a realist defends the thought that we should embrace an ontology which includes fictional characters, they do so whilst assuming a certain conception of how ontological inquiry should be conducted. My goals in this chapter are to introduce the standard conception of metaontology — *Textbook Quineanism* — and to assess van Inwagen's deployment of it in his defence of fictional realism.
- Chapter 4: Paraphrasing
 - The Quinean approach to ontology provides the anti-realist with a certain strategy for avoiding ontological commitment to fictional entities: the anti-realist can try to show that talk about fictional entities can be *paraphrased away*. My goals in this chapter are to characterize this strategy in detail and assess its merits. Along the way, I'll examine van Inwagen's skepticism about the availability of any way of paraphrasing away fictional characters.
- Chapter 5: Grounding Fiction
 - My goal in this chapter is to make room for a distinctive approach to the debate about fictional entities, one which requires jettisoning certain aspects of the Textbook Quinean approach to ontology. I'll argue that even if truths about fictional characters cannot be semantically reduced (as the paraphraser hopes in vain that they can), they can be reduced in a more metaphysical sense. On the ensuing picture, there might be facts about fictional characters, but these facts are *grounded* by facts that do not involve such things. Fictional anti-realism thus emerges as the view that fictional characters are not fundamental.
- Chapter 6: Rivals

- This chapter compares the account of fictional characters developed in chapter 5 to some of the others that are on the market. In particular, I'll compare my view to the *pretense fictionalist* version of anti-realism defended by Anthony Everett (2007) and Kendall Walton (1990), and the non-Quinean *minimalist* account of Thomasson (2007). Doing so will enable me to both clarify the nature of my account and set it in the context of the wider debate.

Chapter 2

Fictional Realism, Attacked and Defended

DESPITE its obvious ontological costs, fictional realism has proven to be an extremely popular position in the literature, being endorsed by such notable philosophers as Saul Kripke, Peter van Inwagen, Amie Thomasson and Nathan Salmon. But it is unsurprising that in addition to finding proponents, fictional realism has also found many opponents, and my goal in this chapter is to illustrate the resilience of realism by showing how a number of recent objections against it can be addressed. I should stress that my goal isn't to show that *every* objection to fictional realism can be overcome. That task would take a thesis in itself. My aim is the modest one of showing that the fictional realist can overcome some objections to her view, and I shall take this to show merely that fictional realism is not as crazy as it may seem and is thereby worthy of serious attention. For the record, I'm not convinced that anyone has ever come up with a damning objection to fictional realism, and this chapter is meant to complement the extant literature which defends fictional realism from its attackers.¹ But please don't take my defence of fictional realism to reflect my endorsement of the view. Indeed, and as I hope that we shall see in the later chapters of this thesis, the more interesting issues arise when we move from the defensive task of showing that fictional realism can overcome its attackers to the offensive one of showing that fictional realism should be accepted. And that will force us to examine the metaontological

¹ See, e.g., Schnieder and von Solodkoff (2009) in response to Everett (2005).

question of how ontological inquiry should be conducted in the first place.

2.1 A Question of Denotation

The postulation of an ontology of fictional entities, conceived of as abstract objects, is meant to be justified in part by its alleged ability to provide us with a simple semantics, simpler not only than the anti-realist's proposals, but also than those offered by rival forms of realism like non-actualism. In recent work, however, Reina Hayaki (2009) has argued the (abstractist) realist cannot make sense of the idea that fictional names denote fictional characters, and suggested that the realist is wrong to claim that her semantics is more attractive than those offered by her rivals. The worries which Hayaki raises constitute important explanatory challenges that the realist had better be able to meet. In this section, I will argue that they can indeed be met.

2.1.1 Monk, 'Monk' and *Monk*

Everyone, be they fictional realists or not, faces a question regarding how claims like 'Monk is a detective' are to be interpreted. Many of us intuit that such sentences are true, but it is difficult to see how such claims can be taken at face-value. For if 'Monk' refers to an abstract object, as the abstractist holds, then we look forced to claim that Monk *isn't* a detective, since detection isn't the kind of thing that an abstract object can do. But if 'Monk' doesn't refer to anything at all, as the anti-realist holds, then we look forced to deny the truth of 'Monk is a detective' on the grounds that its subject term lacks a denotation. Either way, then, trouble ensues.²

² You might think that things look alot rosier from the point of view of a non-actualist. For can't she just say that 'Monk' refers to a non-actual individual which really is a detective? The issues here are delicate, but it's worth noting that proponents of non-actualism can only say this once they've answered a very tricky question: that of how 'Monk' gets to refer to one non-actual individual rather than another. And it's worth noting that the most prominent defender of an ontology which includes merely possible things, David Lewis, precisely thought that singular reference to merely possible objects wasn't something that was very easy to achieve at all. (See Divers (2002, p.77-85) for discussion of this aspect of Lewis's possibilism.) Moreover, in his recent discussion of fictional non-actualism, Jim Stone (2010) explicitly denies that 'Monk' should be understood as definitely referring to a single merely possible detective, but rather as partially referring to a variety of Monk-candidates. So even non-actualists concede that the accommodation of fictional names may not be straightforward.

A variety of responses to this problem have been developed, but the most common and attractive is to interpret such claims such as ‘Monk is a detective’ as being elliptical for claims regarding the content of some contextually relevant fiction. Thus instead of uttering

(1a) Adrian Monk is very clever,

I could have taken a deeper breath and claimed:

(1b) According to the *Monk*-series, Adrian Monk is very clever.

However, despite the obvious attractions that this interpretation has, the worry remains that it just pushes the question back to that of what the name ‘Adrian Monk’ refers to when it appears *within* the scope of the fictional operator. And Reina Hayaki (2009) has argued that the abstractist faces problems when it comes to answering this question. (Takashi Yagisawa (2001) raises similar worries, but my default concern is with Hayaki.)

In a nutshell, Hayaki’s worry takes the form of a dilemma. On the one hand, the abstractist might deny that ‘Monk’ refers to the fictional character Monk when it appears within the scope of a fictional operator. (Perhaps, e.g., it is ultimately analyzed in terms of an empty description which is subsequently given a Russellian treatment.) But it should be clear that pursuing this option is at least dialectically awkward for the realist. For remember that part of the motivation for realism in the first place was its ability to provide a simple and systematic semantic treatment of fictional expressions. But now we’re being told that fictional names, even when they appear in critical sentences like (1b), don’t always refer to fictional characters, and the realist is now having to perform some fancy footwork to accommodate the truth of sentences involving names like ‘Monk’. But this is exactly the kind of semantic trickery that the fictional realist was trying to avoid and so, at the very least, it seems like her previous claims to semantic superiority were somewhat overstated. With respect to a huge swathe of sentences about fictional characters, the realist is no better off than the anti-realist.

On the other hand, the abstractist might accept that ‘Monk’ refers to the character Monk when it appears within the scope of the fictional operator. But if she says that, she seems forced to accept that the *Monk*-canon is “massively false”

about Monk, as Yagisawa (2001, p.158) puts it. That is, according to *Monk*, Monk is a real life, flesh and blood detective whereas, in reality, the fictional character Monk is none of these things. Yagisawa and Hayaki are united in finding this result implausible.

I think it's pretty clear which horn of Hayaki's dilemma the abstractist will grasp. For given the dialectical awkwardness that's involved in grasping the first horn, the abstractist will seek to grasp the second horn, hold that 'Monk' refers to the fictional character Monk in (1b), and then attempt to defuse the problems which Hayaki (and Yagisawa) associate with this option. In light of this, my goal in the remainder of this section is to argue that the fictional abstractist can hold that fictional names refer to fictional objects when they are used within the scope of fictional operators.

Before we proceed, however, it's important to note that to accept that 'Monk' refers to the character Monk in sentences like (1b) is not to accept that 'Monk' *always* refers to that fictional character. For given the essential role that pretense and make-believe play with respect to fiction, the realist is well advised to allow for the possibility that fictional names are sometimes used in a *pretend* way, and she may want to make room for the idea that when fictional names are used in this way, they don't denote anything at all. Indeed, many realists already allow for this possibility in so far as they agree that the *author* of the relevant novel uses the names in a quasi-referential, pretend way — i.e. the author is only pretending to refer to a real woman or a real detective — in order to introduce the fictional character to her audience. So, e.g., Thomasson (1999, p.46) tells us that “although originally in the telling of fictions there is merely a pretense that names such as ‘Sherlock Holmes’ refer, ordinary language eventually supplies a referent by inventing an ontology of fictional characters”.³ Similarly, Stephen Schiffer (2003, p.51-2) writes:

Joyce was not trying to refer to a man named ‘Buck Mulligan’ and failing miserably; he was, in the way characteristic of fiction, *making as if* to refer to a man with that name and to tell us something about him, and we, in reading the novel, collude in this make-believe when

³ Thomasson is outlining Kripke's (1973) discussion of fictional names in this passage, but it becomes clear in Thomasson (2003b, p.214) that she thinks this option is an attractive one for the realist to take.

we read the novel as a novel. What is remarkable is that this *pretending use* of the name ‘Buck Mulligan’ should create the existence of something whose name is ‘Buck Mulligan’, thereby making it possible to use the name in a genuinely referential way in true statement about that referent. The thing brought into existence is a certain abstract entity, the *fictional character* Buck Mulligan.

So even if we, as critics and appreciators of the *Monk* series, are naturally taken as expressing something about the content of the fiction when we say that Monk is a detective, the author of the *Monk*-fiction was up to something very different. Indeed, it’s very unnatural to think that the author of the *Monk*-fiction was even trying to make an assertion when she used the term ‘Monk’ for the first time, even though when she did so it was in a declarative sentence like ‘Monk lives in San Francisco’.⁴ Exactly how to understand what is going on in such contexts is a subtle matter, admittedly, but the point remains that the present issue concerns the referent of ‘Monk’ in sentences like (1b), and the realist is not thereby committed to holding that fictional names refer to fictional characters in absolutely every context of use.

Remember that Hayaki found it implausible to hold that ‘Monk’ referred to the fictional character Monk in (1b) because that entails that the *Monk*-fiction is massively false when it comes to the properties Monk has. One fictional realist who seems committed to accepting this consequence is Nathan Salmon. For Salmon (1998, p.300) accepts that ‘Monk’ as that term is used in the TV show refers to the “the very same thing” as the thing which is referred to by ‘Monk’ in critical contexts: in both cases, it refers to an abstract entity, the fictional character Monk. But abstract objects cannot be people or introverted, obsessed consultants or former detectives, they cannot mourn the loss of their wives or chase villains called ‘Dale the Whale’. Indeed, the canon is nearly completely wrong about Monk. (‘Nearly’ because it is right about Monk being existent, being self-identical, being famous, etc.) But it’s worth asking: does the realist have to con-

⁴ For instance, suppose that the realist accepted Kendall Walton’s (1990) treatment of (1b), according to which to say that it is fictionally true that Monk is a detective is to say (roughly) that there is a prescription to imagine that ‘Monk’ refers to a detective. Then even if our uses of (1a) are understood as *reporting* that there is a prescription, when the author of the story utters (1a) when writing the story, it’s natural to think of her as *issuing* the prescription to imagine.

sider this consequence to be as dreadful as Hayaki and Yagisawa make it out to be?

Well, given what fictions are, it shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that they typically involve a massive amount of falsehood. This is fiction, after all. We actually *expect* fictions to tell things as they are not. Note that this doesn't entail they lie or mislead us, or that they are somehow incredible attempts to deceive us from the truth, as Hayaki (2009, p.142) seems to conclude. Fiction isn't there to try to get us to believe propositions that happen to be false. (It's not like fiction is bad non-fiction.) When we're told a story, we're suppose to *imagine* that certain things are the case, even if we're fully aware that they are not. So even if it's false that Monk is a detective, that false proposition is only something that we're supposed to accept in the context of a game of make-believe. And so fictions, at least most fictions, are as we intuitively expect them to be: filled with falsehoods. Even if the *Monk*-canon represents the world to be a way that it is not, what's the problem with saying that just as the fiction is massively false about San Francisco (where the story is set), it's also massively false about its protagonist, Adrian Monk? Wouldn't the real surprise be if the fiction were filled with nothing but truths about Monk?

Indeed, it's not even clear to me that the fictional realist needs to accept that there is no sense in which the *Monk*-fiction gets the facts about Monk right. What's true is that the properties which the fiction ascribes to Monk are not properties that Monk has. But as I noted in the previous chapter, fictional realists will distinguish the properties that a fictional character *has* from the properties he *holds*.⁵ Thus Monk *has* the properties of being an abstract object, being a fictional character, and being less famous than Sherlock Holmes, but *holds* the properties of being a concrete object, being a detective, and having an assistant called Natalie. And when it comes to characterizing the having/holding distinction, the following definition seems acceptable:

x holds the property of being G =_{def} According to F , x is G

(Where ' F ' is x 's home fiction, as you'll recall.) Now, if 'Monk' refers to an abstract object within the scope of a fictional operator, notice that the fiction will be false

⁵ van Inwagen (1977). Compare Zalta's (1983) distinction between the properties an abstract object *exemplifies* and those it *encodes*.

about Monk in the sense that the fiction will say that Monk has properties that he does not actually have. But notice also that whenever the fiction says something false about the properties Monk has, there will be something true in the vicinity about the properties he holds. And in that sense, the fiction is absolutely right about Monk in all but one respect. For the fiction is right that Monk is a detective, and a widower, and so on. But the fiction is wrong in so far as these are all properties that Monk holds rather than properties he has.

This point is important because there is something right about the thought that the fiction ‘gets Monk right’ — it’s the *Monk*-fiction after all. But in light of the distinction between the properties Monk has and those that he merely holds, there are two ways that the fiction might get Monk wrong. It might get him wrong by ascribing to him properties that he does not have, and in this sense the fiction is massively wrong about its star. But the fiction is absolutely accurate about Monk in the sense that every property it ascribes to him is a property which he holds. And of course it would be crazy to hold that the fiction could be wrong about the properties Monk holds: that would be tantamount to saying that there are lots of properties that Monk has according to the story that he doesn’t have according to the story. But to lose sight of the distinction between having and holding is to lose sight of the resources available to the realist when it comes to accommodating the intuition that the *Monk*-fiction gets the facts about Monk exactly right.

In light of these considerations, I submit that it’s far from clear that the realist cannot make sense of the idea that fictions ‘get their characters right’, even if she accepts that fictional names denote fictional characters in critical sentences like (1b). That’s not quite the end of the story, however, since Hayaki outlines a further objection against the abstractist’s treatment of fictional names, and it is to this objection that I now turn.

2.1.2 What’s There to Talk About?

Anyone familiar with light entertainment knows that the *Holmes* stories are about Sherlock Holmes, the *Harry Potter* novels are about Hermione Granger and Harry Potter, and that the TV show *Monk* is about Adrian Monk. But if fictional names like ‘Monk’ denote fictional objects then, Hayaki (2009, p.144-7) wonders, doesn’t (2) turn out to be false?

(2) *Monk* is about Adrian Monk

After all, the fictional realist holds that Adrian Monk is a fictional object, and that fictional objects are abstract objects. As Hayaki (2009, p.145) puts it: “we want to say the Canon is about Sherlock-Holmes-the-man, not Sherlock-Holmes-the-abstract-object, because the Canon is not about an abstract object.” So how can it be that *Monk* is about Adrian Monk given that it’s not about an abstract object?

At first blush, it looks as though the fictional realist only has two options. Either she accepts that the series is about an abstract object, or else she goes down the less charitable route and insists that the sentence is not true because *Monk* is about the man Monk and thereby not about *anything* at all. But which unattractive option should she pick? Happily, I’ll argue that there is a third way for the realist.

Hayaki’s argument seems to be based on a perceived inconsistency between the following three claims:

(2) *Monk* is about Adrian Monk

(3) Adrian Monk = the abstract object Monk

(4) *Monk* is not about the abstract object Monk

Given her commitment to (3), and spotting for the moment that the tension between the trio is genuine, the realist only has the two options sketched above: either she rejects (4) and holds that *Monk* is about the fictional object, or she rejects (2) and holds that *Monk* isn’t about Adrian Monk.

Now, there is something right about the thought that *Monk* isn’t about an abstract object. What we want to say is that the fiction is about a detective, and a flesh and blood detective at that. But the fictional realist can explain what’s going on in this case. To begin, note that whether or not Hayaki (2009, p.145) is right to say that it “strains the ordinary usage of ‘about’ to say that [*Monk*] is about [Monk]-the-abstract-object”, it certainly doesn’t strain ordinary usage to say that *Monk* is about the fictional detective Adrian Monk. After all, we do say at times that this-or-that fiction is about this-or-that fictional detective, fictional woman or more generally, fictional character. For instance, during the media coverage of the latest *Holmes* film, such claims were commonplace. Thus

a report in *The Sunday Times* claimed that “Sacha Baron Cohen has signed up to play Sherlock Holmes in a new Hollywood film about the fictional detective” and a later report in the *Telegraph* claimed that “The producer of Guy Ritchie’s forthcoming Sherlock Holmes film has said that they are not in competition with a rival film about the fictional detective”.⁶ So I don’t think that it strains our ordinary usage of ‘about’ too much to say that the *Monk*-canon is about a fictional character. True, the fiction does not present Monk as a fictional character and even less so as an abstract object, but there is a sense in which it’s ok to say that the series concerns and is about a fictional consultant rather than a real consultant.

This observation is important because it puts pressure on a principle that Hayaki (2009, p.146) offers as underpinning our judgements about what a fiction is about:

For all x , the fiction is about x iff according to the fiction, x exists.

And since it’s true according to *Monk* that Adrian Monk exists, it follows that *Monk* is about Adrian Monk. But if I’m right that there is a good sense in which *Monk* is about Monk-the-fictional-character, then Hayaki’s principle seems to entail that it’s true according to *Monk* that Monk-the-fictional-character exists. Given that Monk-the-fictional-character is an abstract object, however, that would mean that *Monk* has it that this abstract object exists. And this does sound wrong: the fiction doesn’t say anything about whether abstract objects exist, let alone that the abstract object Adrian Monk exists.⁷

Now, Hayaki seems to think that this all adds up to an argument against fictional realism. But the puzzle disappears once we remember that our judgements of ‘aboutness’ are highly inconstant. Consider the following analogy. Suppose that Juan has various beliefs about water — he believes it’s a clear liquid that is commonly found in rivers and lakes, that it falls from the skies, and so on. But Juan is only four years old and doesn’t have any beliefs about the chemical prop-

⁶ The reports are from July 2 2008 and October 1 2008 respectively.

⁷ It’s doubtful whether Hayaki’s principle is plausible as it stands. For we may want to say that its true according to *Monk* that not only Monk, but also airplanes, houses, Easter Island, and the president of the USA exist: after all, the *Monk*-series is supposed to be set in our San Francisco in the early 21st century. But it sounds plainly wrong to say that the *Monk*-series is about the president of the USA and Easter Island. Moreover, it’s not obvious that a fiction can’t be about something which doesn’t exist according to it. A satire or parody of someone’s life might be about that person even if they aren’t a character in the story.

erties of water, lacking as he does the chemical concepts he'd need to form those beliefs. And now ask yourself: does Juan have any beliefs about H₂O?

There are two perfectly appropriate answers to this question. On the one hand, we might say that Juan doesn't have any beliefs about H₂O: 'H₂O' isn't even an expression of Juan's idiolect and he lacks the concepts of oxygen and hydrogen that he'd need to possess in order to form beliefs about H₂O. But on the other hand, we might want to say that Juan does have beliefs about H₂O: he has beliefs about water, after all, and water just is H₂O.⁸

But all this shows is that we have two very different notions of aboutness. In one sense, Juan does have beliefs about H₂O because he has beliefs about something (water) that is identical to H₂O. But in other sense, Juan doesn't have beliefs about H₂O because even though he has beliefs about water, he doesn't have the chemical concepts he'd need to even think about water (or anything else) as H₂O. When faced with the question of whether Juan has any beliefs about H₂O, the answer is: 'in a sense, yes, and in a sense, no.'

Next, recall Hayaki's objection to the fictional realist. Hayaki claims that the realist is committed to holding that *Monk* is about Monk-the-abstract-object. Now, there is a sense in which this is true. *Monk* is about the abstract object Monk in exactly the same way that Juan's beliefs are about H₂O: *Monk* is about the abstract object in the sense that it's about something — Adrian Monk — which is in fact identical to the abstract object, just as Juan's beliefs are about H₂O in the sense that they are about something — water — which is in fact identical to H₂O. But just as there is a sense in which Juan's beliefs are not about H₂O, there is a sense in which the realist can deny that *Monk* is about the abstract object Monk. Let's say that Juan has no beliefs about H₂O in the sense that no H₂O-involving statement is true *according to Juan*. Then just as no H₂O-involving statement is true according to Juan, no Monk-the-abstract-object statement is true according to *Monk*. And that remains the case even though there are statements which are true according to *Monk* that involve singular terms denoting Monk-the-abstract-object. After all, there are statements which are true according to Juan that feature terms denoting H₂O despite that fact that there is a clear sense in which Juan has

⁸ It might be tempting to put the point in terms of a *de dicto/de re* contrast. But without getting into it, the point here is rather that our notion of aboutness is very loose. Even if we concentrate on one of Juan's *de dicto* water-beliefs, there seems to me to be a perfectly ordinary sense in which that belief is about H₂O in virtue of being about something (water) which is identical to H₂O.

no beliefs about H₂O.

Hayaki might question this line of response by asking how the fictional realist can claim that it's not true according to *Monk* that Monk-the-abstract-object exists. After all, it is fictional that Monk exists and the realist holds that Monk just is Monk-the-abstract-object. So how can the realist avoid the conclusion that Monk-the-abstract-object exists according to *Monk*? And without that, doesn't the analogy between *Monk* and Juan break down?

This question admits of an easy answer. The mere fact that it is fictionally true (i.e. true in the fiction) that Monk exists doesn't entail that it is fictionally true that Monk-the-abstract-object exists, even if we assume that these two things are one and the same. For the fictional operator is non-extensional: one cannot substitute co-referential terms within its scope *salva veritate*. For instance, suppose its true according to a fiction that the president of the USA in 2010 is a woman. It doesn't follow from this that it's fictionally true that Barack Obama is a woman, despite the fact that 'the president of the USA in 2010' and 'Barack Obama' refer to the same object. So the mere fact that two terms co-refer doesn't imply that we can substitute them within the scope of a fictional operator. So the mere fact that 'Monk' and 'Monk-the-abstract-object' co-refer doesn't allow us to conclude from the fact that it's true in the fiction that Monk exists that it's true in the fiction that Monk, the abstract object, exists. Indeed, even if those two terms *necessarily* co-refer, the inference doesn't go through since the fictional operator is *hyper-intensional* in the sense that one cannot substitute necessarily co-referring terms within its scope *salva veritate*.⁹ However, the mere fact that water exists according to a story doesn't obviously entail that H₂O exists according to the story too, and it's far from clear that every impossible proposition is true according to a story which depicts a contradiction. But both of these entailments would go through if fictional operators failed to be hyperintensional. So even if 'Monk' and 'Monk-the-abstract-object' necessarily refer to the same object, the fictional realist has independent motivation to reject the inference pattern which gets us to

⁹ The idea that 'Monk' and 'Monk-the-abstract-object' necessarily refer to the same thing is associated with Kripke (1973). Even if we go to another possible world and find an object that has all the Monkish features ascribed to Monk in the fiction, that thing, according to Kripke, wouldn't be Monk the fictional character.

the conclusion that Monk-the-abstract-object exists according to *Monk*.¹⁰

Time to take stock. Hayaki argued that the fictional realist runs into trouble when it comes to accounting for our intuitions about what a fiction is and isn't about. For how can *Monk* be about Monk given that it's not about Monk-the-abstract-object? In response to this challenge, I've argued that the realist can make sense of the idea that *Monk* is about Monk even if 'Monk' refers to an abstract object. I distinguished two notions of 'what a fiction is about' and suggested whether the fictional realist is committed to accepting that *Monk* is about the abstract Monk depends upon which notion is in play. What's true is that there is an abstract object which is identical to something which exists according to the story, and in that sense, the story is about Monk-the-abstract-object. But what isn't true is that according to the story there exists an abstract object that is identical to Monk, and in that sense, the story is not about Monk-the-abstract-object. In this way, our ordinary intuitions can be accounted for, since there is a perfectly good sense in which stories are not about abstracta.

2.2 Fictional Realism and Negative Existentials

One of the most attractive features of fictional realism is that it so well fits common sense when it comes to the popular activity we call *literary criticism*. Consider the following piece of critical talk: 'Some fictional characters are better known than others'. Common sense commits itself to the truth of this sentence and fictional realism can accommodate this by offering a straightforward interpretation of the claim. By contrast, anti-realists who reject fictional characters need to find a way to reconcile their view with common sense. When it comes to accommodating literary criticism, fictional realists have a far simpler story to tell than their rivals, and thereby seem to enjoy an advantage over fictional anti-realists.

When realists point out how well their view fits with common sense, anti-realists like to insist that realism looks a lot less commonsensical when we move away from literary criticism and consider *negative existentials*, such as the following sentences:

¹⁰ There are accounts, most prominently that of Lewis (1978), of the fictional operator on which the operator is merely intensional rather than hyperintensional. But the standard line in the literature seems to be that fictionality is a hyperintensional phenomenon (see, e.g., Currie (1990), Proudfoot (2006) and others).

- (5) a. Hermione Granger doesn't exist.
b. There's no Hermione Granger.
- (6) a. There are no hobbits.
b. Hobbits don't exist.

As you will have noted, the first pair of sentences feature a singular term which purports to refer to a fictional object, and second pair of sentences contain a general term purporting to refer to a fictional kind. In contrast to some critics (Yagisawa (2001), e.g.), I think negative existentials of the second kind allow for a rather straightforward and unproblematic interpretation, but I shall delay discussion of this until later on in the chapter. For now, I shall focus on singular negative existentials.¹¹ It is here where the realist faces the explanatory challenge of showing how she can reconcile her realism about fictional entities with the apparent truth of negative existentials.

One may wonder whether the realist really needs to go through the hassle of trying to accommodate negative existentials. The reason why we might want to answer in the positive is that fictional realists not only take pride in their ability to accommodate common sense but also attempt to justify their view on the basis of this ability. If the realist were to simply dismiss negative existentials as being false then she would, at the very least, seem to place herself in the dialectically awkward position of attempting to dismiss part of the very phenomenon to which she is trying to appeal to justify her account. It's no wonder, then, that realists and anti-realists alike have thought that negative existentials are hugely important dialectically. Thus Kendall Walton warns that if sentences like 'The Big Bad Wolf doesn't exist' are literally true, then "it is hard to avoid concluding that those fictitious things are nothing at all, that they simply are not, period" (2003, p.241). And Amie Thomasson, one of the most vocal defenders of fictional realism, has acknowledged that handling negative existentials is the "central problem" facing the realist (2003b, p.214).

Of course, fictional realists haven't ignored the fact that we utter negative existentials. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to assess all of the extant proposals that realists have offered, but the goal of the next section is to introduce two

¹¹ I shall drop 'singular' in the following, it should be clear from context when I talk about negative existentials that are not singular ones.

prominent strategies with the view to develop a novel solution to the problem of negative existentials later in the chapter.

2.2.1 Negative Existentials within a Realist View

How can the realist acknowledge the truth of (5) given that her ontology certainly contains Hermione? Initially, it might appear attractive to interpret (5) as saying that Hermione is a *fictional character*.¹² But this proposal seems to render negative existentials trivial in contexts where they don't seem to be. Consider the sentence 'Hermione doesn't exist, she's a fictional character'. On the present proposal, this sentence would be understood as saying that Hermione is a fictional character and that she is a fictional character, which means that neither conjunct adds any information to the other. But our sense of the sentence's meaning doesn't chime with this proposal: the second conjunct adds a piece of information to the first we did not possess before.

An alternative proposal, suggested by Peter van Inwagen (1977, p.308), looks more promising:

[The speaker of 'Mr. Pickwick does not exist'] would probably be expressing the proposition that there is no such man as Pickwick, or, more precisely, the proposition that nothing has all the properties ascribed to Pickwick.

On this proposal, an utterance of 'Hermione doesn't exist' is interpretable as expressing the proposition that there is no thing that has all the properties that Hermione has according to the fiction. This proposal seems to work in a host of cases, but troubles begin when we suppose a speaker is suddenly confronted with a woman who has all and only the properties that Hermione has according to the novel, a situation that is imaginable for all intents and purposes. If van Inwagen's proposal were adequate, we would be within our rights to expect our speaker to withdraw his previous claim immediately. But that would be a mistake. Even if there were someone who has all these properties, *Hermione Granger*, the fictional character created by J.K Rowling, still wouldn't exist.¹³

¹² This was suggested by van Inwagen in personal communication.

¹³ Compare Kripke (1973), who tells us that if we came across creatures which had most of the

Moreover, van Inwagen's proposal is also incompatible with what sounds like a perfectly consistent sentence: 'Though Doyle's Holmes doesn't exist, I happen to know someone called 'Holmes', who is exactly the way Holmes is described in Doyle's books.' If the current proposal were adequate, I would contradict myself when uttering this sentence, claiming initially that there is no one who has all the properties ascribed to Holmes in the fiction, and then following that up by claiming that I know some such person. But while my utterance expresses a falsehood, this is not due to its being contradictory. We need a proposal that has something to say about such unlikely, but perfectly coherent, cases.

Despite its troubles, van Inwagen's proposal is initially attractive: after all, there was some plausibility to the idea that the speaker who asserts that Hermione doesn't exist is claiming that there is no woman who studies to become a female wizard and has all of the other properties fictionally ascribed to Hermione. But the possible doppelgänger ruins the show and forces us to search for another remedy. And indeed, things look promising when we consider the following suggestion by Amie Thomasson (1999, p.112):

Statements like 'there is no Lear' [are] quite naturally interpretable as [claiming] that [...] 'there is no (real) person who is Lear'.

Thomasson does not face the embarrassment that van Inwagen faces when presented with a Lear-doppelgänger. For not even the Lear-doppelgänger is *identical* to the fictional character Lear.¹⁴ At the same time, Thomasson's proposal has the same initial ring of plausibility to it as van Inwagen's. It's one of these interpretations where the folk would happily respond: 'Yes, that's exactly what we meant'.

Thomasson (1999) only tackles a very limited range of negative existentials, and it's noticeable that she is mainly concerned with quantificational 'there is' constructions as opposed to predicative 'exists' constructions. But in an attempt to give Thomasson's approach a broader application, Anthony Everett (2007, p.65)

properties ascribed to hobbits or unicorns, those things still wouldn't be hobbits or unicorns. To be sure, things might well be different if Rowling had led us to believe that Hermione was her creation when she was really writing about the person with whom the speaker is confronted. But that's not the kind of case we're considering.

¹⁴ Of course, talk of a doppelgänger is strictly speaking inappropriate; if there were a real man Lear he would not be anything like Lear. For one thing, the fictional Lear would be abstract while the man would be concrete. Grant me poetic license.

suggests a proposal along the following lines (in what follows I shall refer to it as Thomasson's proposal, but bear in mind that it's really Everett's interpretation of Thomasson):

A speaker may use an utterance of the form '*a* does not exist' to convey the claim that *a* is not a K, where (i) K is a conversationally salient kind and (ii) *a* is fictionally characterized as being a K in a conversationally salient fiction.

Fictional objects are usually fictionally described as being women or detectives or animals or horses, and many more kinds are conceivable as being the salient one in a conversation. (Note that 'kind' here is not limited to natural kinds, indeed, the notion should be understood in a much wider sense, where blue candles, e.g., might well form a kind too.) So Thomasson's proposal makes the right predictions with paradigmatic negative existentials, as there's always a kind that a fictional object belongs to in the fiction and to which we can fix the value of K.

Things, however, don't go as smoothly when we encounter some less paradigmatic cases, and Everett confronts Thomasson's proposal with one of these. Everett asks us to consider cases in which the fiction remains silent about the kind to which the fictional object belongs. Suppose an author wrote a rather unusual story about Yugo (and let us suppose there he's not writing about a real thing). For all you as a reader know Yugo could be a person or an animal or even a mineral! But despite the fact that Yugo is not fictionally described as belonging to any particular kind (and, hence, clause (ii) is not fulfilled), the following is certainly true:

Yugo doesn't exist.

We have no trouble recognizing the negative existential as being true, but when pressed to come up with a conversationally salient kind, we struggle. But then what explains the truth of the negative existential? It seems that cases such as these fall into an explanatory gap if we adopt Thomasson's proposal, and it's not hard to see why. For Thomasson's approach makes it mandatory that the fictional object in question is described as belonging to some particular kind in the fiction;

and the Yugo-fiction doesn't meet this demand. Clause (ii), then, is the source of the trouble.¹⁵

Once we keep in mind the restrictions that clause (ii) places on the kinds that are candidate semantic values for K, it's not too difficult to construct additional examples that are problematic for Thomasson's proposal. Consider, e.g., Braingirl, the fictional character invented by the protagonist of Salman Rushdie's *Fury*. While Braingirl is a fictional character in *Fury*, she's also a fictional character 'in reality'. But it seems as though we'd speak truly if we were to say:

Braingirl doesn't exist.

Thomasson's proposal, however, seems unable to accommodate the truth of this sentence. For since Braingirl is fictionally ascribed the property of being a fictional character (surely the most salient kind she is described as belonging to in the fiction), the defender of this approach is forced to say that a speaker who claimed that Braingirl doesn't exist would be interpretable as saying that no real fictional character is identical to Braingirl. But given that the fictional realist accepts that Braingirl is a real fictional character — and it is *prima facie* difficult to see how she can deny that — then Thomasson's proposal commits the realist to holding that 'Braingirl doesn't exist' is false. And, as should be clear, that's hardly the result the realist was after.

In both the Yugo case and the Braingirl case, the troubles are generated due to the demand that the semantic value of K is a kind that the target fictional character belongs to in the relevant story. And so a natural response would be to simply drop clause (ii) from the proposal. It's important to note that this doesn't itself change anything about the semantic claim that is integral to Thomasson's proposal. For that is just the following:

'a does not exist' is true in context c iff a isn't a K_C

But as Everett (2007) interprets her, Thomasson's proposal involves more than a simple semantic recipe that we can follow in order to specify the truth-conditions

¹⁵ The idea that Yugo is not described as belonging to any kind may invite the response that Yugo is surely described as belonging to some kinds in a weak sense; e.g. Yugo is described as a thing which meets some condition. Perhaps, but it's worth seeing if the realist can resolve the problem without questioning Everett's example. And as we'll see, there are other problem cases which have a similar form.

for negative existentials: it also involves a substantial claim about the range of kinds from which the value (in a context) of K_C is fixed. That is, the only candidate values are those to which the target character belongs in her fiction. And whilst Thomasson's own examples were suggestive of a constraint like this, it's far from clear that the fictional realist needs to wed herself to anything so strong. What's true is that the fictional realist can't simply try to explain away negative existentials by appealing merely to the above semantic proposal: she clearly needs to say something about what the semantic values of K_C actually are in a variety of contexts, and we'd expect a relatively systematic story at this point. But the problems that we have outlined only show that one attempt to enrich the semantic proposal fails to generate the right results in a number of cases. And as should be clear, that leaves it very much open whether the semantics can be enriched in some other way to give more palatable results.

2.2.2 Towards a New Proposal

Suppose that the fictional realist frees Thomasson's proposal from the chains of clause (ii), and no longer holds that the candidate values for K are restricted to those that Yugo belongs to in their associated fiction. What the realist needs to show is that there's a kind which can plausibly be the value of K in a context in which 'Yugo doesn't exist' might be uttered.

At first glance, fixing the value of K to the kind *real man* seems to get the right result: whatever he is, Yugo is certainly not a real man. However, the realist should not be blinded by the ready availability of this assignment. For one thing, if the realist holds that K is assigned the value *real man* (in a context) it seems like she's plucked a semantic value out of thin air for no other reason than that doing so allows her to maintain that 'Yugo doesn't exist' expresses a truth (in that context). For another thing, interpreting 'Yugo doesn't exist' as expressing the proposition that Yugo is not a real man yields too weak an interpretation. When an ordinary speaker claims that Yugo doesn't exist, it's natural to think that they are not only ruling out that Yugo is a real man. They seem to be saying something stronger: that Yugo is neither a real man, nor a real human, nor a real animal, nor a real mineral etc. And that's because he — or rather *it* — is not a *real thing*!

The previous point also has direct consequences for Thomasson's original idea

that a speaker who says that Holmes doesn't exist is claiming that no real man is identical to Holmes. Even though this interpretation is charitable, it also seems too weak. And to see that just note that if Thomasson were right, a speaker who said that Holmes doesn't exist would be allowed to immediately follow that denial with the flat out assertion that Holmes is a real woman. That is, it should be felicitous to utter 'Holmes doesn't exist, and he isn't a real woman'. But, once again, this seems off-limits and not for the trivial reason that Holmes isn't a real woman: Holmes' being a real woman (or alien, or mineral, or...) is ruled itself out by speakers when they deny the existence of Holmes. What speakers seems to be ruling out in denying Holmes' existence, once again, is that Holmes is a real thing.

'But hold on', Everett may reply, 'saying that Yugo is not a real thing isn't a viable option for the fictional realist'. For,

in so far as the [fictional realist] seems committed to holding that fictional abstract objects such as [Yugo] exist, she is presumably also committed to holding that fictional objects are real things. For one thing, it seems decidedly odd to claim that fictional objects exist and are abstract objects but not real things... the abstract object theorist herself needs to allow that fictional abstract objects such as [Yugo] are real things. (2007, p.70)

What might actually strike us as the most natural understanding of negative existentials such as 'Hermione doesn't exist' — Hermione is not a real thing — has to be strongly opposed by the fictional realist if the folk's usage of 'not real' is taken to mean 'not existent' or 'not part of one's ontology'.

But as the vagaries of natural language go, 'real' is a rather slippery term with more than one or two entries in the dictionary, and the most relevant for our purposes include: existent; occurring in the physical world; not imaginary, fictitious, pretended or theoretical; actual. And even if Everett is right to point out that the realist accepts that there is one reading of 'real thing' on which Holmes is a real thing, it's open to the realist to deny that this is the same sense of reality that is relevant when an everyday speaker denies the reality of Hermione and her ilk. But even if the realist denies this, she has plenty of plausible options left.

For instance, the realist may interpret an ordinary speaker who claims that Hermione isn't real as saying that Hermione is a *pretend* object. In doing so, the fictional realist does not compromise her realism. For even if the fictional realist accepts that fictional objects are pretend objects, she may insist that the relevant notion of a pretend object is consistent with the hypothesis that such objects exist. That is, the adjective 'pretend' can be taken to narrow down the class of objects being talked about. (The adjective 'pretend' thereby contrasts with an adjective like 'fake'. A pretend object (in the present sense) is still an object, but a fake barn is never a barn.) After all, recall that we're assuming that the fictional realist is also a creationist and will thereby accept that pretense plays an important role in the creation of a fictional character. The core idea here is that authors, when writing a fiction and using fictional names pretend to refer to a woman or a detective or a hobbit, depending on what the object in question belongs to according to the fiction. And again, even if there is a sense in which the realist holds that Holmes isn't a pretend object — there are uses of 'pretend' whereby it works like 'fake' and in this sense the fictional realism will deny that Holmes is a pretend object — that's not to say that there is sense in which she may hold that he is. Not even the fictional realist thinks that pretense is irrelevant to fiction. This might be a more technical notion of 'pretend' than ordinary speakers have in mind when they say that things are 'only pretend' but it's a notion that makes sense within the context of fictional realism nonetheless.

Moreover, the realist may also interpret an ordinary speaker who claims that Hermione isn't real as saying that Hermione isn't a concrete object. After all, we normally think of real things as being the kind of things you can meet, bump into, and interact with in the physical world. And since the fictional realist was already committed to holding that Hermione isn't a concrete object, she can maintain that there is a sense in which Hermione isn't a real object without thereby compromising her realism. Indeed, there is a *prima facie* case in favour of fixing the value of K to *concrete object* whenever possible. It is, after all, plausible to suspect that the folk usually picture a concrete object when confronted with a name. You hear me say 'Let me reveal to you the truth about Esther..', and you probably prepare yourself for insights about a person. 'I heard a rumor concerning Glueburg..', might trigger pictures of people as well as cities or locations in you. You are encouraged to imagine something, to picture an object. (The same, in fact,

applies to Yugo. When Everett announces ‘I’ll tell you a story about Yugo..’, then I will acknowledge his efforts by picturing a man or maybe a cat or possibly even a semi-precious gemstone — in any case I’ll picture a concrete thing.) So even though *concrete object* is oftentimes not the only value that can be assigned to K in order to predict the right results, it may well be the first choice whenever it is among the available values.

Next, notice that if we interpret a speaker who denies the existence of Yugo as denying their reality, and we understand the real objects as being either the non-pretend objects or the concrete objects, we can handle the Yugo case easily. For the proposal tells us that the relevant value for K in such a context is either the kind *non-pretend object* or the kind *concrete object* and so a token utterance of ‘Yugo doesn’t exist’ would, depending on context, either express the true proposition that Yugo is not a non-pretend or the equally true proposition that Yugo is not a concrete object. In exactly the same way, a speaker who denies the existence of Braingirl can either be interpreted as claiming either that Braingirl isn’t a non-pretend object or as claiming that Braingirl isn’t a concrete entity. In other cases, where a fictional object is abstract in the fiction, we might prefer to assign *non-pretend object* rather than *concrete*. Imagine, for instance, a fiction featuring the largest prime number Isnuq. If there were a largest prime number, it would be abstract, so we might feel most comfortable to interpret ‘Isnuq doesn’t exist’ as claiming that there’s no non-pretend object identical to Isnuq. But note that fixing K to *concrete object* would deliver the right result just as well.

To be clear: the proposal is not quite that ordinary speakers who deny the existence of Hermione are expressing the proposition that Hermione is not a real thing. Rather, the idea is that ordinary speakers will naturally regard ‘Hermione doesn’t exist’ and ‘Hermione isn’t real’ as being interchangeable in everyday contexts. And even if Everett is right to point out that there is a sense in which the fictional realist holds that Hermione does exist and is real, the crucial point is that there are a variety of ways to understand the notion of a real object, and on some of these the fictional realist can happily agree that Hermione isn’t real. The upshot is that the bare bones of Thomasson’s semantic proposal are retained: ‘x doesn’t exist’ is true in a context c iff x isn’t a K_C . What has changed is that the original proposal about the interpretation of K, which tied the candidates to the kinds that Hermione fictionally belongs to, has been replaced by a proposal ac-

according to which everyday existence denials are interpreted by means of the kinds *non-pretend object* and *concrete object*. And as we've seen, this proposal delivers acceptable results in cases Thomasson's proposal breaks down. Moreover, the proposal also makes sense of why speakers who deny the existence of Hermione are ruling out more than her mere humanity, for it provides the realist with a way to make sense of the idea that Hermione isn't a real anything.

Though Everett disparages the thought that the fictional realist can legitimately interpret negative existentials as claiming that the target characters are not real things, I contend that the realist can make sense of the idea that Hermione and her ilk are not real in a perfectly ordinary sense of that term. Indeed, a very natural option for the realist is to hold that, when speakers deny the existence of a fictional entity, they are claiming that the target entity is not a K, where the candidate values for K include at least two — those of *non-pretend object* and *concrete object* — that offer charitable and plausible interpretations by the lights of the fictional realist, and, moreover, interpretations which do not fall apart when faced with cases such as Yugo and Braingirl.

2.2.3 More Cases to Manage

So far, we have only looked at simple cases in which speakers deny the existence of a single fictional character. But the linguistic data are clearly not limited to such cases, and the present proposal needs to be shown to be adequate not only to the basic examples but to more complex ones too. Take, for example, the following claim:

Neither Holmes nor his violin exist.

Everett suggests that this case is troubling for Thomasson because she must scramble around trying to find some kind to which both Holmes and his violin belong in the fiction, since the sentence appears to deny existence of Holmes and his violin in exactly the same way. On the new proposal, things look far more straightforward: the relevant value of K in this case may either be the kind *non-pretend object* or the kind *concrete object*, and since neither Holmes nor his violin are either, the proposal verifies the sentence correctly.

The new proposal can also handle more complex sentences. Take an example that Everett considers particularly tricky for the realist:

Bush exists but Raskolnikov and the round square don't.

Everett argues that we must accept that this sentence denies existence of Raskolnikov in exactly the same way as it denies of the round square. But because the fictional realist usually feels only committed to fictional characters, rather than also to other figments of imagination, it seems that she needs to interpret the sentence as denying existence of the round square in the ordinary sense which excludes the object from the stock of reality. But then we seem forced to interpret the speaker as excluding both the round square and Raskolnikov from her ontology — an interpretation that isn't to the realist's taste.

On our current proposal the truth of the sentence can be explained without putting the realist in a compromising situation. For the truth condition it associates with the sentence can be specified as the following:

‘Bush exists but Raskolnikov and the round square do not’ is true in context c iff Bush is a K_C but neither Raskolnikov nor the round square is a K_C

What is true is that the fictional realist cannot hold that the relevant value of K_C is the kind *non-pretend object*. For given the way I cashed out that term, the fictional realist does not hold that the round square was created by an act of pretense, meaning that it is false that the round square is a pretend object in the relevant sense. However, not all is lost, since the fictional realist can hold that the sentence expresses a truth in any context where the relevant value of K_C is the kind *concrete object*. After all, whilst Bush is a concrete object, neither Holmes nor the round square are. Again, the new proposal verifies what we expected it to verify: that the sentence can be used to express a truth.¹⁶

One might worry about this explanation. Suppose that one is in a context c_1 where the value of K has been fixed to the kind *concrete object*. Then this seemingly predicts that ‘The number 9 doesn't exist’ will also be true in c_1 . But that, the thought goes, is an unhappy consequence.

¹⁶ I'm obviously bracketing issues about what happens if ‘the round square’ fails to refer anything. But I hope that this is dialectically appropriate — accommodating empty terms is a problem for everyone, not just the fictional realist, and so it seems a little unfair to object to the fictional realist on this score.

In response to this worry, I think it's worth remembering that our post-theoretic intuitions are just that: *post*-theoretical. In my experience — and others have reported similar experiences — introductory metaphysics students tend to be a little *confused* about mathematical objects. (Amongst other things.) They tend to say things like “they exist, but not in the way that we do” and it's not unheard of them to say things like “Numbers don't really exist”. And I think this is just a reflection of the fact that there is less agreement in ordinary uses of ‘exist’ than philosophers sometimes tend to assume.

Putting that point to one side, I concede (as I must) that if c_1 is a context in which the value of K has been fixed to the kind *concrete object* then ‘The number 9 doesn't exist’ will also be true in c_1 . But what this doesn't show is that any ordinary speaker has ever spoken truly when uttering ‘The number 9 doesn't exist’. To establish that conclusion we'd also need to know that someone has uttered ‘The number 9 doesn't exist’ in a context where the value of K was fixed to the kind *concrete object*. But it might just be an interesting fact that using the term ‘the number 9’ tends to make salient a different kind and thereby shifts the value of K away from the kind *concrete object*. This isn't unprecedented. In a different context, David Lewis (2003) suggests that merely by using one name to refer to an object rather than another a speaker can thereby create a new context. Thus if I refer to Obama using the term ‘Obama-*qua*-6ft-tall’ then certain *de re* modal predications (‘Obama is essentially 6ft tall’) will be true in the context I have created simply in virtue of my choice of words making salient certain features of Obama. (If you don't like this example, think of which *de re* modal predications are appropriate if we refer to something as ‘the statue’ compared to those that are appropriate if we refer to that thing using the term ‘the lump of clay’.) Moreover, Lewis (1979) is happy to think this kind of phenomenon means that context will often change *during* a sentence, so if I start a sentence saying ‘Hermione doesn't exist...’ one kind might be relevant (*concrete object*, say) even though by the time I finish my sentence ‘... but the number 9 does exist’ a different kind might be relevant. So I submit the following two points: (i) the mere fact that ‘The number 9 doesn't exist’ is true relative to c_1 doesn't itself show that any speaker has spoken truly by using those words: to establish that we'd need c_1 to be the context of utterance rather than the context of assessment, and (ii) it's not without precedent to hold that using certain expressions can itself have effects on context. So whilst I do

admit that cases like ‘The number 9 doesn’t exist’ are tricky, I don’t think that they decisively rule against the proposal I’m developing.

What about the following troubling case?

The fictional character Harry Potter doesn’t exist.

Well, I can’t speak for everyone, but my intuitions about this sentence are far from clear. At the very least, there seems to be one reading under which this sentence is false: it’s the reading we get when we transform the sentence into a ‘there is’-construction to arrive at ‘There is no fictional character Harry Potter’. It seems to me more clear that this sentence is false when interpreted straightforwardly: if I told someone that there is no fictional character Harry Potter, I’d expect to be told to go to the fiction section at my local bookshop and buy the *Potter*-stories.

In light of this, I’m tempted to conclude that ‘The fictional character Harry Potter doesn’t exist’ has a false reading. But what is it? The relevant value of K in its truth condition cannot be fixed to either *non-pretend object* or *concrete object*, since either interpretation would entail that the sentence expresses a truth. However, if we fix the variable to *fictional character* we obtain the desired result.¹⁷ The realist who adopts the present proposal can interpret ‘the fictional character Harry Potter doesn’t exist’ as saying that no fictional character is identical to Harry Potter — a claim that is false. Of course, that’s not to say that the sentence lacks a very natural reading on which it turns out to be true — even though it might not be the most natural reading in *all* cases — under which it can be interpreted analogously to the sentences we looked at previously, namely as ‘The fictional character Harry Potter is not a real thing’. As in the previous cases, the kinds *concrete object* and *non-pretend object* may be assigned, resulting in the interpretation of the sentence that no concrete/non-pretend object is identical to the fictional character Harry Potter, which is obviously true.

2.2.4 Superheroes and Kryptonite

Takashi Yagisawa (2001, p.169) objects to Thomasson’s proposal on the grounds of two observations that puzzle him:

¹⁷ Notice the analogy with the mathematical case: it may be that saying things like, ‘the F, x , doesn’t exist’ forces the value of K to F.

[Thomasson’s proposal] has counterexamples: e.g., ‘[Superheroes] do not exist.’ When we deny the existence of [Superheroes] on the grounds that they are fictional, we need not be able to give a sortal or other kind term to fill the gap in ‘There are no such () as [Superheroes]’ except for such an empty kind term as ‘things’ or ‘entities’. Since [fictional realists] maintain that [Superheroes] exist... it is false to say that there are no such things, or entities, as [Superheroes].

The first worry, then, concerns how we generalize Thomasson’s proposal to cover negative existentials that don’t feature singular terms but instead feature terms like ‘hobbits’. But Yagisawa doesn’t think the troubles end here. He continues:

Another difficulty with [the proposal] is that it is unable to account for the apparent truth of some general statements: e.g., ‘All fictional individuals are unreal,’ ‘All fictional individuals are non-existent,’ ‘No fictional individual exists,’... The paraphrasing strategy of [Thomasson’s proposal] does not apply here.

Let’s see how the new proposal handles these alleged problem cases in sequence.

Now, Yagisawa misunderstands the realist’s approach, since he takes her to accept that there are things that instantiate the property of being a superhero. We can see where this thought comes from. Fictional characters exist. Superheroes are fictional characters. So there are such things as superheroes. But of course realists would not accept *that* reasoning. Rather, realists commit themselves to the idea that there are objects, fictional objects, which *hold* the property of being a superhero, or that are such that *according to their associated fiction* are described as being superheroes.¹⁸ But contra Yagisawa, they do not maintain that superheroes or hobbits or magic rings exist.

One natural thought, then, of how to handle such general negative existentials is to interpret them as follows — call it the ‘naïve proposal’:

‘Fs don’t exist’ is true iff there is no x , such that x is an F .

The naïve proposal delivers the right results in the sense that it correctly verifies that, e.g., ‘Superheroes don’t exist’ and ‘Neither hobbits nor magic rings exist’

¹⁸ The former is how van Inwagen would reply to Yagisawa’s objections, the second one might be appreciated by Thomasson.

express truths. But it has the disadvantage of not fitting into the new proposal all too well. For the view I defended earlier held that negative existentials are interpreted by means of reference to kinds. In order to obtain a uniform semantical theory this had better applied to singular and general negative existentials alike.

There's no need to worry, however, for the realist may interpret general negative existentials in the spirit of the new proposal. When the folk deny existence of superheroes, we can interpret them as saying that superheroes don't belong to the contextually specified kind; a kind which is among the range of the ones available for interpretation, such as *concrete object* or *non-pretend object*. This endows the realist with the following truth-condition:

‘Fs don't exist’ is true in c iff there is no x , such that x is a K_C and an F

Applied to our superheroes, an utterance of ‘Superheroes don't exist’ would be true in a context iff nothing is both a K_C and a superhero. This proposal fits neatly with the previous suggestion of how to interpret singular negative existentials. Moreover, and like the naïve proposal, it verifies what we expect it to verify. What comes in handy is that here we don't even need to worry about what the value of K gets fixed to in a given context. For the falsity of the second embedded conjunct — remember that nothing has the property of being a superhero, even on the realist's view — ensures that the truth-condition obtains and, hence, that the target claim expresses a truth.

That the present treatment of general negative existentials fits well with my earlier account of their singular relatives is an attractive feature of the proposal. But that's not all, for the proposal also allows us to deal with Yagisawa's second objection and to accommodate one case with which the naïve proposal struggles.

The thought behind Yagisawa's second objection is that some apparently true sentences predicate properties to fictional character which the fictional realist thinks that they don't really have. So, for instance, in addition to denying the existence of Hermione and her ilk, we appear to predicate unreality or non-existence to fictional characters. And such claims look to be true by ordinary standards, but unacceptable by the lights of the fictional realist. Now, I take ‘Fictional characters are unreal’, ‘Fictional characters are non-existent’, ‘Fictional characters are not real’ and ‘Fictional characters don't exist’ to be four different ways to convey the same claim. As I noted earlier, this seems to be natural, since ordinary

speakers find it extremely natural to switch between claiming that something ‘is not real’ and claiming that that thing ‘doesn’t exist’.

In light of this, let’s focus on the following example, since it appears to be paradigmatic of the problem that Yagisawa takes himself to have identified:¹⁹

Fictional characters don’t exist.

Even though the defender of the naive proposal does not think that anything has the property of being a superhero, he does of course believe that things have the property of being fictional characters. But that means the present case is one that the naive proposal cannot handle, for the realist simply cannot hold that ‘Fictional characters don’t exist’ is true iff there is no x such that x is a fictional character. After all, the core of the realist’s view is precisely that there are fictional characters.

On the new proposal things are a lot rosier, however. For the proposal assigns the following truth-condition:

‘Fictional characters don’t exist’ is true in c iff there is no x such that x is a K_C and x is a fictional character.

In the earlier cases of general negative existentials, the fictional realist had an automatic guarantee that the truth-condition for (e.g.) ‘Hobbits don’t exist’ obtained because nothing, on her view, has the property of being a hobbit. Not so in the present case: according to the realist, some things do have the property of being a fictional character. But the truth-condition obtains nonetheless, because the first embedded conjunct fails to be true. Thus if the value of K is fixed to the kind *non-pretend object*, then a speaker who uttered ‘Fictional characters don’t exist’ would express the true proposition that nothing is a non-pretend object and a fictional character — which gives us the right result since it verifies the original sentence.²⁰

The final range of problem cases I shall consider are those negative existentials which involve mass nouns as in:

Neither Kryptonite nor Atlantis exist.

¹⁹ Everett, too, presents this sentence as being particularly tricky for the fictional realist. See Everett (2007, p.68–70).

²⁰ We are here only talking about *mere* fictional characters, which excludes Napoleon and Queen Victoria. If we were to include them, the sentence were intuitively false, which is also what the proposal predicts.

Everett considers this sentence tricky for the realist, since the sentence

seems to deny existence to both [Kryptonite] and Atlantis in exactly the same sense. So our account of the existence predicate must allow that it functions in exactly the same way when it combines with singular terms and when it combines with mass terms. (2007, p.67).

Now, we know what to say about the second element taken for itself. ‘Atlantis doesn’t exist’, as uttered in *c*, is true when and only when no *x* such that *x* is a K_C and *x* is identical to Atlantis. But Kryptonite can’t be simply treated as a singular term denoting an individual, for it’s not a countable thing. As a result, there is *nothing* such that *it* is identical to Kryptonite.

But it’s far too quick to conclude from this observation that we have found a spectre for the realist’s treatment of negative existentials.

For one thing, the problem seems to be about mass terms in general. After all, the problem that Everett raises also arises in simple cases which have nothing to do with fiction, such as ‘Both water and the moon exist’. So it’s natural to look first at how mass terms are treated semantically and then develop a treatment of Everett’s example on that basis. And one mainstream view in the literature on how to understand mass nouns semantically thinks of mass nouns as referring to *portions* or *quantities* of stuff when they are used in conjunction with quantificational expressions.²¹ Thus, the mass noun ‘water’, as in ‘All water is transparent’ is taken to denote portions/quantities of water, and the sentence is true just in case all portions/quantities of water are transparent. And if that’s right, then we can say the same about ‘Kryptonite’, the fictional mass noun too denotes portions of Kryptonite. The realist may then suggest the following truth-condition for the above original sentence:

‘Neither Kryptonite nor Atlantis exist’ is true in *c* iff no portion of Kryptonite is a K_C and Atlantis isn’t a K_C either.

Note that just as the realist holds that nothing has the property of being a hobbit, she will also hold that nothing has the property of being a portion of Kryptonite,

²¹ ‘Portion’ is Montague’s (1979) preferred term, Zimmerman (1995) thinks ‘mass’ is more adequate, Burge (1972) and Chappell (1970) choose ‘quantities’ and ‘parcels’ respectively. See the first part of Zimmerman (1995) for a broader discussion of the literature on this topic.

and so no quantity of Kryptonite will be a K_C whatever the relevant kind is in context. But that doesn't mean that the complex sentence is verified, since there is a fictional entity referred to by 'Atlantis', and so the value of K does matter in this particular case. But as before, the realist does not have to look very far for a plausible interpretation: *concrete object* and *non-pretend object* are both readily available. Hence, if the realist adopts the new proposal she can happily accept that 'Neither Kryptonite nor Atlantis exist' can be used to express a truth.

2.2.5 Walton's Objection

As Everett interprets her, Thomasson's original proposal has it that the truth conditions of sentences that deny the existence of fictional characters can be rendered as negated existential quantifications such as ' $\neg\exists x(x=\text{Hermione})$ '. And when we take such claims to be true, the idea is that the relevant domain of quantification is implicitly restricted to less than all that there really is.²²

Kendall Walton (2003), however, has suggested that Thomasson's proposal is inadequate because it cannot explain important differences between the ways in which we use quantificational expressions on the one hand and the existence predicate on the other. He writes:

Although domain restrictions on quantified 'there is no' and 'there are no' constructions are perfectly common and ordinary, predicative statements concerning existence do not admit of correspondingly restricted readings... Suppose 'Charlie' is the name of a particular Cheetah. 'Charlie doesn't exist' is hardly a comfortable way of saying just that Charlie is absent from the Taronga Zoo, that he is somewhere else, if anywhere... This suggests that the use of 'exists' prevents the quantification from having a contextually determined domain restriction. (p. 240-1)

So given that the existence predicate cannot be restricted to a particular domain in the way that quantificational expressions can, Thomasson's proposal cannot be right.

²² See Everett (2007, p.67). The objection from Walton that concerns us below seems to interpret Thomasson in this way too.

This objection needs to be handled carefully. For as Friederike Moltmann (MS.b) has recently emphasized, the existence predicate does tolerate explicit restrictions. She offers the following examples:

- Giraffes exist (only in Africa),
- Wild ponies do not exist (in Germany),
- Pure air doesn't exist (in China) anymore, and
- Socrates doesn't exist (anymore)

But whilst these cases cast doubt on Walton's claim that the use of 'exists' itself prevents the quantification from having a contextually determined domain restriction, that doesn't itself remove the force of the worry. For even if the existence predicate does tolerate some restrictions, it doesn't seem to tolerate the same kind or variety of restrictions that are familiar from paradigmatic cases of quantifier domain restriction. For instance, when I open my fridge and find no beer, it's perfectly okay for me to say 'There is no beer'. But the corresponding existence denials — 'No beer exists' and 'Beer doesn't exist' — are badly infelicitous. And as Everett (2007, p.67) points out, this seems unfortunate given that Thomasson's proposal is precisely that we understand the true claims expressed by claims like 'Hobbits don't exist' as cases of quantifier domain restriction. Or to put that point otherwise, even if Moltmann is right that the existence predicate tolerates *explicit* restrictions to locations or time, it doesn't seem to tolerate the range of *implicit* restrictions that our quantifiers tolerate.

To be fair to Everett and Walton, Thomasson *does* tell us that negative existential claims can be understood in terms of implicit restrictions on the domain of quantification. Thus directly after suggesting her treatment of 'There is no Lear' she writes:

Implicitly limiting the sort of entities one is quantifying over is in fact something we do all the time in our discourse, when our audience normally understands us to only be referring to relevant items. (1999, p.112)

But the cases that primarily concern her when she does so are quantificational claims like 'There are no hobbits' and 'There is no Lear'. And in these cases,

Thomasson’s claim is accurate. However, to say that ‘There are no hobbits’ involves an implicit restriction on the domain of quantification isn’t to say that the sentence ‘Hobbits don’t exist’ involves a similar restriction on the domain of quantification. Indeed, it’s difficult to see what that claim even means given that no quantificational expressions figure in the sentence. So in that sense Thomasson’s characterization of the proposal is misleading, and at best only obviously applies to quantified negative existentials rather than explicit existence denials too.

Since she restricts her attention to ‘there is/there are’ constructions, it’s difficult to tell exactly how Thomasson is conceiving of her proposal. But it is emphatically *not* true on my proposal that the negated existential quantifiers of the metalanguage range over a restricted domain. For the semantic proposal serves up the following truth condition:

‘Hermione doesn’t exist’ is true in context c iff $\neg\exists x (x \text{ is a } K_C \wedge x = \text{Hermione})$

And notice that the domain over which the metalinguistic quantifier ranges is not restricted at all — there isn’t even any mention of a domain in the truth condition. And notice next that this is very different from the view that Walton and Everett associated with Thomasson, according to which the right hand side of the truth condition for ‘Hermione doesn’t exist’ was ‘ $\neg\exists x(x = \text{Hermione})$ ’ and then we plead domain restriction for the quantifier in the metalanguage. Indeed it is not even clear to me that this way of setting up the proposal makes sense in the first place. When we specify the truth conditions for context-sensitive expressions, we do so in a metalanguage that is itself free from any (relevant) implicit context-sensitivity. And the only context-sensitivity involved in the proposal is associated with the relevant kind in terms of which the existence predicate is interpreted.

Nevertheless, the proposal will appeal to quantifier domain restriction when dealing with negated quantifications like ‘There are no hobbits’ and will generate something like the following truth-condition:

‘There are no hobbits’ is true in context c iff $\neg\exists x(x \text{ is in } D_C \wedge x \text{ is a hobbit})$

Here the interpretation of the target claim does appeal to a restricted domain of quantification: thus the domain over which the object-language quantifiers range is taken to be unrestricted. (Ignoring complications regarding the coherence of absolutely unrestricted quantification.)

Now, in some cases, the relevant domain over which our quantifiers range may be the set of absolutely all the K s, where K is the kind that is contextually relevant to the interpretation of the negative existential (the concrete objects, say). In this context, it'll turn out that both ' n doesn't exist' and 'There is no n ' will express the very same proposition. But this case is the exception and not the norm. If I quantify over the set of things that are in my fridge, my quantifiers don't range over the set of absolutely all the concrete objects. So whilst it will be acceptable for me to say that 'There is no beer' (because my quantifiers are restricted to what's in my fridge) it won't be acceptable for me to say that beer doesn't exist.

In sum, even if Walton's objection, which Everett also endorses, is fatal against Thomasson's proposal — and I'm inclined to think that her account is so under-specified that it is difficult to tell exactly how she wants to handle various claims — the spirit of her account can be retained. The view I have defended here does not make any important use of the phenomenon of quantifier domain restriction when interpreting existence denials. For whilst it is true that the truth conditions are quantificational in character and appeal to a particular kind K that is relevant for the interpretation of the negative existential, it is not true that the quantifiers appealed to in the metalanguage are implicitly restricted to the set of K s.

2.2.6 Summing Up

I have argued that, despite recent criticism, the fictional realist can well account for the truth of many negative existentials about fictional entities. My proposal borrows an idea from Thomasson in that it involves the claim that negative existentials may be interpreted by reference to particular kinds. Hence, 'Hermione doesn't exist' will be true in a context iff Hermione is not a K_C . The value of K in a given context will be typically fixed to a semantic value that may be chosen from a range of appropriate values, most prominently *concrete object* and *non-pretend object*. Plural negative existentials are equally understood with reference to kinds. Thus, 'Superheroes don't exist' will be true in a context c iff there is no x such that x is a K_C and x is a superhero. I showed how this proposal can handle the cases that Everett and Yagisawa consider problematic for the fictional realist and argued that Walton's objection to Thomasson's proposal doesn't apply to the one I advocate here. In light of this, I submit that negative existentials are not the

Achilles heel of fictional realism.²³

2.3 Conclusion

Proponents of fictional realism are often met with incredulous stares. But an incredulous stare is not an argument, and it's difficult to know how to defend oneself against a stare. But in addition to staring, opponents of fictional realism have levelled objections against the realist, and I have examined a number of these in this chapter, focusing in particular on the problems Hayaki thinks the fictional realist faces when it comes to accounting for the reference of names like 'Monk' and the difficulties Everett thinks the fictional realist faces when it comes to accounting for negative existentials like 'Monk doesn't exist'. I have attempted to show that the fictional realist can overcome these objections.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, however, showing that the fictional realist can overcome some objections to her view is not to show that she can overcome all objections to her view. But I hope that in showing that fictional realism can be defended from some prominent attacks — and it's worth noting that the objections I've considered are often worries that people express, at least in my own experience, about fictional realism in conversation — fictional realism emerges as a resilient view which is not easily dismissed. Which is not, I stress, to say that we should be fictional realists. Rather, it's just to say that fictional realism is worthy of consideration, and the arguments that realists offer in favour of their view are worth taking seriously. That sets the stage for the next chapter of this thesis, where I will examine an *indispensability argument* which Peter van Inwagen offers in defence of his fictional realism. And as we shall see, part of the reason van Inwagen finds this argument powerful is because he accepts a certain view about how ontological inquiry should be conducted, a view I'll call *Textbook Quineanism*.

²³ I don't mean to deny that there are other promising looking proposals of how to treat negative existentials out there. In particular, Thomasson (2007, pp.45-8) now defends an approach that generalizes Donnellan's (1974) idea that a chain of reference may end in a so-called 'block' (cp. Thomasson (2003b, pp.214-8)). But which semantical theory is the best amongst a range of equally adequate ones is a question that needs to be settled by considering *metasemantical* issues — a task that goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

Chapter 3

From Indispensability to Meta-Ontology

NO first-order ontological inquiry can be conducted without making some second-order assumptions. We can think of first-order ontological questions as things like ‘Do numbers exist?’ and ‘Are there really electrons?’, and the project of ontology emerges as that of answering these questions. We can then think of second-order questions as questions like ‘How do we find out whether there are really electrons?’ and ‘Is the debate about the existence of numbers substantial?’, and the project of metaontology emerges as that of answering these second-order questions.

Perhaps the most central metaontological question is that of how we ought to conduct ontological inquiries in the first place. Drawing on Quine’s answer to this question, van Inwagen presents us an argument to the effect that we ought to believe in fictional characters. In particular, van Inwagen argues that quantification over fictional characters is indispensable in an important way — it is indispensable to our best theories about the world.¹ Before we examine how this argument works and whether it is successful, I will start off by drawing a path through van Inwagen’s Quinean metaontology and see how his indispensability argument fits in. I’ll then argue that this argument has some seriously undesirable consequences and should therefore be rejected. This line of response will be ‘local’ in the sense

¹ The argument was first given in van Inwagen (1977); it gets restated in various ways in van Inwagen (1983, 1985, 2000, 2003).

that it's intended to show that even those sympathetic to a Quinean metaontology should be suspicious of van Inwagen's defence of fictional realism. This will set the stage for the next chapters of this thesis, in which more global worries about Quineanism will be identified.

3.1 Textbook Quineanism

The Quinean has high-reaching ambitions. The subject of her inquiry is nothing less than reality itself, and her goal is to find out what belongs to the furniture of the world, to limn the structure of reality. These notions might be metaphorical in character, but it is sufficient for our purposes here to note that the Quinean wants to get at something substantial when engaging in ontology. But in addition to identifying the subject matter of ontological inquiry, the Quinean also gives us an account of how ontology should be conducted. Her answer, as her name suggests, is drawn from Quine's work. But I emphasize that my goal here is to character how ontologists working in the Quinean tradition typically think of ontological inquiry, and we shall occasionally see that Quine may not have been a 'textbook' Quinean.

3.1.1 The Question of Ontology

The ontological question, Quine (1948, p.21) tells us, is curious in its simplicity. Not only can it be asked using merely three words — *What is there?* — but it can be answered using just one: *Everything*. This doesn't, however, mean that ontological inquiry is trivial. For whilst Quine thinks that the one-word answer is trivial in the sense that it merely says that there is what there is, there remains room for disagreement about cases. Thus a platonist might disagree with a nominalist over whether there are any numbers, or a nihilist might disagree with a universalist over whether there are any tables. Each side will, of course, agree that there is what there is. But the disputants disagree nonetheless, since they disagree about what there is, and thereby about what 'everything' amounts to.

In fact, the question which Quine identifies as the question of ontology can be asked using only two words — *What exists?* — and the answer remains the same: *Everything*. Again, this doesn't mean that ontological inquiry is trivial,

since different philosophers can disagree about particular cases. Thus the platonist holds that numbers exist whereas the nominalist holds that they do not, and the nihilist holds that tables do not exist whereas the universalist holds that they do. Each side can, of course, agree that the one-word answer to the existence question is right: there exists what there is. But the disputants disagree nonetheless, since they disagree about what exists, and thereby about to what ‘everything’ amounts.²

Indeed, the ontological question can be rephrased again. Instead of asking what there is, or what exists, we could instead ask a different question — *What has being?* — and the answer remains the same: *Everything*. Again, this doesn’t trivialize the project of ontology, since it doesn’t settle particular cases. Even if our three questions amount to the same thing, none of them entail that Platonists are right or that nihilists are wrong. Each side can, of course, agree that the one-word answer to the question of being is right, but that doesn’t settle particular disputes one way or the other.

So far, the Quinean has told us what the subject matter of ontological inquiry is, and has identified the question about this subject matter that she is trying to answer — a question which, as we have seen, can be phrased in various ways. We’ve also seen that despite the fact that Quine provides us with an answer to this question, the job is long not done. For whilst his answer trivially states that there is what there is, it doesn’t tell us whether there are numbers or chairs or fictional characters; that is, it doesn’t settle particular cases. And so the crucial question is now that of how we should go about answering the question *Do Fs exist?* in a particular case. Note that this question is a normative one, and it can be rephrased as follows: what should norm or guide our beliefs about whether there are numbers, tables, properties, or fictional characters? This, in essence, is a metaontological question, a question that concerns the very foundations of ontology.

Now, the Quinean has a device at hand that is supposed to help her with her inquiry: quantification. And the role which quantification plays within her approach is wrapped up in the infamous slogan *to be is to be the value of a variable*. To see how this gets its bite, it’s useful to compare the Quinean emphasis on quan-

² Not everyone agrees with the Quinean thought that there is no difference between the claim that there are *Fs* and the claim that *Fs* exist. See, e.g., Routley (1980) and Priest (2005) for recent defences of this kind of view, and van Inwagen (2003, pp.131-57) for a reply.

tification with a contrasting view, associated with Frege, on which it is reference with a singular term that matters when it comes to ontology.

The natural thought that motivates the Fregean is that if one accepts a claim which involves reference to a particular object then one ought to believe in the existence of that object. Thus, if I accept the truth of ‘Paul is a table’, then it seems I should also accept that there is something that’s Paul. Quine, however, is suspicious that names and definite descriptions matter when it comes to questions of ontology, mainly because he is a fan of the idea that names can be eliminated in a broadly Russellian fashion. But then, how can we ever communicate what we believe to have being? Quine (1948, p.31-2) considers this question and answers as follows:

We can very easily involve ourselves in ontological commitments by saying, for example, that there is something (bound variable) which red houses and sunsets have in common; or that there is something which is a prime number larger than a million. But, this is, essentially, the only way we can involve ourselves in ontological commitments: by our use of bound variables.

What emerges in this passage is a distinctive feature of Quine’s metaontology. It’s the idea that we state our ontology by quantifying over the objects that we take to be in our ontology, rather than by picking them out with a singular term.³ Thus one doesn’t state that tables are in one’s ontology by declaring Paul to be a table, but by declaring that there are tables. (Or, perhaps, ‘Paul is a table’ is committed to tables only because it entails that there is (bound variable) at least one table.)

But notice that whereas the original metaontological question was how ontological inquiry *should* be conducted, this slogan does not involve any normative concepts and only tells us that quantification and being are tied together. Similarly, the Quinean’s insistence that to be is nothing other than to exist doesn’t itself have any obvious bearing on the question of how we ought to conduct ontological inquiry. The above passage tells us only which form the sentences that matter for our inquiry have; i.e. they are quantificational. But it doesn’t tell us anything about which particular quantificational claims we ought to accept. Are

³ For an overview of this aspect of Quine’s approach to ontology, see Rayo (2007).

there glints and pink elephants? What about missed opportunities and changes of heart? Are there numbers and tables and fictional characters? Quine's slogan, famous as it is, doesn't help us decide one way or the other in any particular case.

3.1.2 How to Answer the Ontological Question

One might think, however, that once one has Quine's famous slogan in place — that is, once we've accepted the connection between existence and quantification — an answer to the normative question can be given. That is, this seemingly descriptive slogan might be understood as the claim that we ought to believe in whatever entities serve as the semantic values of our bound variables. That might be right. But again, saying that doesn't give us any advice about which quantificational sentences we ought to accept: it doesn't tell us e.g., that we ought to accept that there are (bound variable) tables or fictional characters. So even if Quine's slogan is part of his answer to the normative question, it can't be the end of the story.

But hang on, aren't the cases easily settled? Isn't it just *obvious* that we should accept claims like the following:

1. There are holes (in the cheese)
2. There are numbers (which are divisible by 5)
3. There are properties (which all humans share)
4. There is a table (in the kitchen)

Quine (1948, p.32), however, resists the idea that the mere truth of any of these sentences is sufficient to establish that we ought to believe in things like holes, numbers, properties, or tables.

At first glance, this is puzzling: didn't Quine just tell us that we state our ontology by stating which quantificational sentences we think are true? Well, he did, but the puzzle disappears when we remember that not all sentences which apparently quantify over *Fs* really involve quantification over *Fs*. That is, Quine allows that one can accept an apparently quantificational sentence like 'There are *Fs*' is true whilst also accepting an ontology that is free of *Fs*. And the reason that Quine allows for this is because appearances can be deceiving. That is, Quine

allows that even if one accepts that a sentence like ‘There are holes’ is true, one can avoid ontological commitment to holes by showing how that sentence can be ‘paraphrased’ by a sentence which doesn’t involve quantification over tables. So, e.g., one might think that talk of tables is a convenient way of talking that can be eliminated in favour of talk of simple objects and their arrangements. Or perhaps talk of holes doesn’t commit us to holes because what we’re really getting at when we say that there are holes in the cheese is that the cheese is perforated a certain way. Exactly what paraphrase amounts to is difficult to pin down, admittedly, and we will return to this issue in due course.⁴ But the present point is simply that Quine, in allowing for paraphrase, resists the idea that the ontological project is trivialized by ordinary language. Ontology, as one might put it, isn’t that easy.

Quantification, for the Quinean, is clearly important, but not any old quantification will do. But then we’re still lacking an answer to the question of how I should decide whether to believe that there are (bound variables) tables, numbers, properties, or holes. So what should, according to Quine, guide my beliefs about whether there are (bound variables) such things? To cut to the chase, the Quinean answer is that one ought to believe that there are such things iff our *best theories of the world* quantify over them. This answer makes sense, since, as we saw, the project of ontology is to limn the structure of reality, and to find out what things the world contains. But by the same token, the possibility of paraphrase makes it difficult to take the idea at face value: we can’t just look at our best theories and read off directly what’s in our ontology. So the idea is rather that we ought to believe in whatever things our best theories quantify over *once* those theories have been appropriately regimented, where ‘regimentation’ takes care of whatever paraphrasing can be done. And these regimented theories — to have a term, I’ll call them *privileged* theories — are likely to quantify over less entities than we do on an everyday basis; even if talk of numbers or properties remains, it’s possible that talk of tables and holes won’t (because it can be paraphrased) and surely glints will go (because we can just give up talking that way).

⁴ If you want a model, think of the paraphrase as revealing the logical form a sentence. The point is then that ‘There are holes in the cheese’ doesn’t have a logical form that requires us to believe in holes to serve as the semantic values of bound variables. All we need is the cheese. To stress: such a ‘syntactic’ conception of paraphrase isn’t mandatory and it’s far from clear that it’s what Quineans have in mind when they offer paraphrases. We’ll examine paraphrases in more depth in the next chapter.

We are a large step closer to the Quinean answer to the metaontological question of what should norm our beliefs about what there is. The answer we've arrived at — though it will need to be tweaked — is that we ought to believe in all those entities that our (regimented) privileged theories quantify over. This, of course, leaves room for disputes about what exactly *are* our privileged theories and here the Quinean does not have to agree with Quine's own position on this issue. Quine himself is convinced that science, more precisely physics, will tell us everything we want to know about reality and, hence, that our privileged theories are physical theories. But Quine doesn't leave his choice unexplained. In *Theories and Things* he writes:

Why, Goodman asks, this special deference to physical theory? This is a good question, and part of its merit is that it admits of a good answer. The answer is not that everything worth saying can be translated into the technical vocabulary of physics; not even that all good science can be translated into that vocabulary. The answer is rather this: nothing happens in the world, not the flutter of an eyelid, not the flicker of a thought, without some redistribution of microphysical states. (1981, p.98)

Quine here comes close to accepting the claim what makes the language of physics special is that the physical facts are a base upon which all other facts supervene, i.e. that there can be no change without physical change. Quine wouldn't have liked putting the point this way — he was famously skeptical of all things modal and intensional (Quine (1951)) — but with the emergence of possible worlds semantics, modal notions have been somewhat rehabilitated and the Textbook Quinean will most likely be friendlier towards modality than Quine. In any case, notice that the core thought is just that physics is at the bottom of it all and that physical vocabulary is privileged because of the foundational role of physical facts. If we assume, as Quine seems to, that science aims at investigating and explaining what reality is like then paying close attention to our best physical theories begins to seem like a very good idea.⁵

As I said, the Quinean does not have to accept Quine's deference to physics and indeed not everyone does. So even though the Quinean will agree that our

⁵ We'll return to this aspect of Quine's approach to ontology in Chapter 5.

ontological commitments are laid open when we consider our privileged theories, she may well think that this theory is not (solely) physical in character. But whatever she thinks it is, she is expected to argue for her choice. And notice that Quine told us a story why he thinks that the title of the privileged theory goes to a physicalist one.

Still, even physical theories might sometimes talk about entities to which we just don't want to be committed. Maybe, for instance, they talk about properties, which won't be to the tastes of nominalists. But even if our best theories talk about properties, Quine gives us one final escape route: we can try to show that talk of properties is dispensable to our best theories. That is, why can't we try to show that even though our best theories talk about properties, they don't have to do so.

It's important to note that the option that Quine is offering the enemy of properties isn't the same one he offered us earlier. The earlier strategy, i.e. the way of paraphrase, was that of showing how talk of properties (e.g.) could be replaced by talk that doesn't involve quantification over properties, just as talk about tables might be replaced by talk of simple objects arranged in a tablewise fashion, or talk of the holes in the cheese might be replaced by talk that only involves quantification over the cheese. In a sense, the point is that if there was a way to paraphrase talk of properties, then we have the option of denying that our best theories of the world involve quantification over properties. For remember that the theories are themselves *regimented* theories, written in something like a first-order language, and the regimentation takes care of any paraphrasing that can be done. For instance, suppose that our theory apparently includes talk of tables. Then if we're attracted to paraphrasing away talk of tables, we'll think that our regimented theory doesn't involve talk of tables precisely because the regimentation process itself involves replacing talk of tables with talk of simples arranged tablewise.⁶

So if the option isn't that of paraphrasis, what does it involve? Perhaps the classic example is Hartry Field's 'fictionalist' account of mathematical talk.⁷ Field

⁶ Of course, the mere possibility of paraphrase doesn't establish that the paraphraser wins. For instance, even if we can get rid of the ontology by paraphrastic means, doing so might force us to take on a vast number of extra ideological commitments, and this may mean that the overall theory the paraphraser offers us is worse than the theory offered by her realist rival. We'll come back to this in the next chapter.

⁷ I have in mind the view Field (1980) developed in *Science without Numbers*. Note that the kind of fictionalism Field advocates is different in important ways from the kind of pretense-theoretic

famously accepts that there is no way to paraphrase talk of mathematical entities: it's not as though he thinks that claims like 'There are prime numbers' can be interpreted in an ontologically innocent manner.⁸ The truth of such sentences, Field contends, really does demand that reality contain mathematical objects that exist in Platonic heaven. But Field also thinks that when we pay attention to the roles that mathematics plays in our best scientific theories, we'll find that those roles can be discharged even if there aren't really any numbers, sets or functions and huge swathes of the mathematical parts of our best theories are thereby false.

In particular, Field argues that the benefits that mathematics brings to science are *inferential* in character: basically, the idea is that using mathematics helps us to draw conclusions about the physical world from premises about the physical world, and its helpfulness is that it allows us to draw those inferences in a far speedier fashion than we could do using logic alone. But Field claims that we can legitimately use mathematics for this purposes even if the mathematics is itself false: what's required is just that the mathematical part of our best theory be *conservative* over the non-mathematical part of the theory. What this means is that the full mathematically loaded theory entails some non-mathematical claim only if the non-mathematical part of the theory entails that claim too. So whilst the maths may help us to get from A to B more quickly, we could in principle get there without it. Again, that's not to say that creatures like us could ever do without mathematics — getting from A to B without maths may take forever — but Field's claim is not that mathematics is *practically* dispensable to our best theories, but that it is *theoretically* dispensable all the same. So even if our (regimented) best theories quantify over numbers, we can legitimately conclude that they do not do so indispensably. And if we can do that, the thought goes, we can legitimately avoid believing in the existence of numbers and their ilk.

3.1.3 Indispensability Arguments

Finally, then, we can formulate Quine's answer to the question of how we should regulate our beliefs about ontology. The answer is that we should believe in the

fictionalisms we'll encounter in chapter 6.

⁸ Field (1989) does consider the idea that mathematical sentences could be paraphrased in modal terms, so that (e.g.) '2+2=4' is paraphrased as 'Necessarily, if the axioms are true, then 2+2=4' but it's clear that Field doesn't think that these paraphrases are adequate.

existence of whatever entities are indispensably quantified over by our privileged theories of the world. So it's no surprise that those who have wanted to defend the existence of *Fs* on Quinean grounds have tried to do so by arguing that quantification over *Fs* is indispensable in the required way. Such indispensability arguments are perhaps most famous in the debate over the existence of mathematical objects. Thus, in *Philosophy of Logic*, Hilary Putnam explains:

Quantification over mathematical entities is indispensable for science, both formal and physical; therefore we should accept such quantification; but this commits us to accepting the existence of the mathematical entities in question. (1971, p.425)

The argument that is implicit in this passage, which has become known as the Quine-Putnam indispensability argument, can be formulated as follows⁹:

- P₁ We ought to believe in the existence of those objects that are indispensably quantified over by our (regimented) best scientific theories.
- P₂ Quantification over mathematical objects is indispensable to our (regimented) best scientific theories.
- C So we ought to believe in the existence of mathematical objects.

The initial premise is just our Quinean answer to the question of what ought to guide our beliefs about ontology, and will thus be accepted by anyone who accepts the Quinean metaontological framework I've characterized. So the focus of the debate has naturally fallen upon the status of the second premise, with mathematical realists such as Quine and Putnam endorsing its truth, and mathematical anti-realists such as Field maintaining its falsity.¹⁰ Again, that's not to say that

⁹ Compare the formulation of the argument given by Colyvan (2001, p.111). Whilst the argument is called the 'Quine-Putnam' argument, its alleged architects thought about the issues in importantly different ways. On this point, see Liggins (2008).

¹⁰ You might think that Field is really denying (P₁) instead. After all, isn't his view that we shouldn't believe our best theories, couched as they are in terms of numbers, sets, and other mathematical objects? Well, it depends on exactly what you mean by 'our best theory'. If we take into account the kinds of creatures we are, then Field will think that *our* best option is to accept a theory — call it *T* — that is literally false. But if we take 'our best theory' to be something like 'the theory that we should accept in ideal circumstances', then *T* is not our best theory. For there is a better theory, *T**, which is free of mathematics, and Field would have no complaints about (P₁) were this interpretation enforced.

the Fieldian response is the only countermove Quine is willing to tolerate: for all that's been said so far, the paraphraser might come up with some clever way to replace talk of numbers with some nominalistic alternative. But that's just to say that there's more than one way we might try to reject the second premise of the Quine-Putnam argument, each of which is acceptable by the lights of a proponent of Quine's metaontology.

It's time to wrap up. Our original question was this: How should we conduct ontological inquiry? This question is a normative one and answering it involves specifying what should norm our ontological beliefs, i.e. our beliefs about what there is. The Quinean thinks that looking at our best theories of the world is also our best guide to finding out what exists, and, hence, we should look to them when we want to know what there is. More precisely, we ought to find out what entities these privileged theories quantify over. If it turns out that they do so indispensably then we ought to believe in the existence of these entities. In the next section, I will consider how the Quinean approach to ontology manifests itself in van Inwagen's defence of fictional realism.

3.2 Indispensability in Fiction

Of all the theorists who defend fictional realism, van Inwagen is without doubt the most vocal adherent of the Quinean approach to ontology. He couldn't be clearer on the point, telling us that if Quine's approach is not followed, then ontological inquiry will be "obscured by imprecision and wishful thinking" (2009, p.506). As we'll soon see however, the way van Inwagen himself thinks of the Quinean strategy differs slightly from mine, though I believe that these difference are ultimately only of presentation and emphasis. What is abundantly clear is that van Inwagen thinks of himself as someone who takes Quine's approach to ontology with the utmost seriousness. That's why it's not unfair on him to look closely how well he applies the strategy.

3.2.1 van Inwagen on Textbook Quineanism

van Inwagen (2004, p.122) sums up his conception of the Quinean approach as follows:

If one doesn't believe that things of a certain sort exist, then one shouldn't say anything that demonstrably implies that things of that sort do exist. (Or, at any rate, one may say such things only if one is in a position to contend, and plausibly, that saying these things is a mere manner of speaking — that, however convenient it may be, it could, in principle, be dispensed with.)

The main issue concerns exactly what it means to contend that talking about things of a certain sort is 'a mere manner of speaking'. The most immediate thought is that one can show that talking about *Fs* is a mere manner of speaking if one can show that what one is really getting at can be expressed without mention of *Fs*. And as we saw, Quine indeed allows for that option, encapsulated as it is in the way of paraphrase. But what's a little odd is that van Inwagen immediately conflates this option with that of showing that the problematic talk can be, at least in principle, dispensed with. And the most immediate thought here is that this option amounts to the kind of fictionalist option Field pursues in the mathematical case. But it's not that Field thinks that mathematics is 'just a way of speaking' in the sense that it can be paraphrased away; the view is rather that its utility doesn't require its truth.

As I intimated a moment ago, however, I don't think much turns on this, and it's certainly not intended as a criticism of van Inwagen. What's central is just that we can locate two distinctive anti-realist strategies within the Quinean setting — the paraphrastic option that van Inwagen himself advocates with respect to talk of composite objects, and the fictionalist option Field pursues with respect to talk of mathematical objects. (There is also the third option of simply shutting up, but that's a marginal position in nearly every debate so can be bracketed here.) Perhaps van Inwagen is right to view both of these as involving the claim that a certain way of talking is in principle dispensable, but then it needs to be remembered that the distinctive claims and commitments of each strategy are very different.

The next thing to note is that whilst van Inwagen is clearly a devoted Quinean, he doesn't agree with Quine's claim that our ontological beliefs should be guided by what's indispensably quantified over solely by our best *scientific* theories, let alone by our best physics. He couldn't be clearer on this point, and tells us that

whilst he finds Quine's ontological *strategy* extremely attractive, he isn't attracted to the naturalistically-constrained *ontology* that Quine himself accepted. But that doesn't matter because Quine's naturalism, and the central role he assigns to science in his discussions of ontology are "a consequence of certain of his epistemological commitments and not of his metaontology" (2009, p. 506).

I think that this is a little too quick: saying that Quine's naturalism isn't part of his metaontology is like saying that Quine's naturalism isn't part of his metaepistemology, despite the fact that Quine thought that "epistemology is concerned with the foundations of science" (1969a, p.69). But that's just to say that even if *Quine's* metaontology is essentially naturalistic, the Textbook Quinean's metaontology is not. And in any case, the crucial point is that van Inwagen thinks the problems raised by the things we say "in the ordinary business of life" are just as problematic as the things "said by physicists speaking in their professional capacity" (2009, p.505).

This obviously has a clear bearing in the context of van Inwagen's defence of fictional realism. After all, if we followed Quine's advice and looked solely to what our best physics says there is, it's immensely unlikely that we'd find quantification over characters like Holmes and Hermione, and it's thereby difficult to see how we would get an indispensability argument for fictional entities up and running. But as I've just emphasized, the naturalist-*cum*-physicalist aspects of Quine's approach to ontology aren't an essential part of the Textbook Quinean approach: the essential element is the idea that we ought to look to what our best theories quantify over in order to determine our ontological commitments. And once our best theories are not being identified with our best physical theories, there is room for van Inwagen to develop an indispensability argument. Indeed, van Inwagen thinks precisely that when we write down our best *total* theory of the world, we will find ourselves quantifying over fictional characters. And this is because our best total theory will include our best *literary* theory, a discipline including "all 'informed' discourse about the nature, content and value of literary works" (1977, p.302).

Having pointed to their role in our literary theories, van Inwagen (1977, pp.302-3) goes on to characterize fictional entities as being among the theoretical entities of literary theory, much as one might think of particles as being among the theoretical entities of physical theory:

Characters in novels are members of a category of things I shall call *creatures of fiction...* And creatures of fiction belong to a broader category of things I shall call *theoretical entities of literary criticism*, a category that also includes plots, sub-plots, novels (as opposed to tangible *copies* of novels), poems, meters, rhyme schemes, borrowings, influences, digressions, episodes, recurrent patterns of imagery, and literary forms ('the novel,' 'the sonnet').

This helps us see what kinds of *things* our best literary theories will talk about. So the only remaining question is what kinds of *claims* our best literary theories will make about those things. Well, van Inwagen (1977, p.301-2) finds it clear that whatever other kinds of claims they make, our best literary theories will have to make claims like the following:

- Mrs. Gamp is the most fully developed of the masculine anti-women visible in all of Dickens' novels
- There are characters in some 19th-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18-century novel
- Some characters in novels are closely modelled on actual people, while others are wholly products of the literary imagination, and it is usually impossible to tell which characters fall into which of these categories by textual analysis alone.
- Since most 19th-century English novelists were conventional Englishmen, we might expect most novels of the period to contain stereotyped comic Frenchmen or Italians; but only few such characters exist

And notice that these claims involve apparent reference to fictional characters (Mrs. Gamp) as well as apparent quantification over both fictional characters and novels. To the extent that our best overall theories of the world will include our best literary theories, we thus have a strong case for thinking that our best overall theories of our world will quantify over fictional characters and other theoretical entities of literary criticism.

Now, even if we grant that our best overall theories quantify over fictional characters, van Inwagen still has work to do since he must show that those theories not only quantify over fictional characters but do so indispensably. van Inwagen isn't particularly explicit on what this argument would look like, and doesn't clearly formulate his defence of fictional realism in terms of an argument from indispensability. But I think it's relatively clear that the pieces are all there, and so I'll assume that van Inwagen's argument can be constructed by analogy with the more familiar argument in the mathematical case.

3.2.2 Indispensability and Fiction

Suppose, then, that the indispensability argument for fictional characters runs in analogy to the one from maths. The following argument emerges:

P₁* We ought to believe in the existence of those objects that are indispensable to our best literary theory (as part of our best overall theory).

P₂* Fictional objects are indispensable to our best literary theory.

C* We ought to believe in the existence of fictional objects.

As before, (P₁*) is just the Quinean story about what should norm our ontological beliefs, loosened as to allow our best literary theories to be part of our best overall theories of the world. Naturally, then, the debate focuses on the status of (P₂*). And as in the mathematical case, the Quinean allows that one can try to resist (P₂*). Firstly, one could show that quantification over fictional objects is dispensable on the grounds that it can be paraphrased away, i.e. by showing that our best literary theories can be formulated without quantification over fictional characters at all. Secondly, one could show that quantification over fictional objects is dispensable in the same way that Field held that mathematics is dispensable, i.e. by arguing that the roles that talk of fictional characters plays in our (regimented) best literary theories can be discharged even if there aren't really any fictional objects and huge swathes of our best literary theories are thereby false.

Now, proponents of the indispensability argument for mathematical realism typically proceed by *first* claiming that maths is indispensable. That is, they begin by asserting premise (P₂) of the argument sketched in the previous section,

and *then* proceed by defending that premise against its attackers (paraphrasers, Fieldian fictionalists). And though van Inwagen is essentially defending the corresponding indispensability claim with respect to fictional characters, (P2*) above, he doesn't come out and simply assert it. Rather, his defence of (P2*) is largely indirect, and his focus is more on showing that the normal strategies for resistance are futile.

On the one hand, van Inwagen is largely skeptical about the prospects for showing that our best literary theories can be regimented without quantification over fictional characters, and thereby skeptical about the viability of paraphrasing away talk of fictional characters. He tells us that talk of fictional characters "is not *easily* eliminable from literary criticism" and that he sees no way to do it. But van Inwagen doesn't only think that paraphrasing is going to be hard, he also thinks that the project is undermotivated:

Why should anyone bother to try to construct such paraphrases? It would probably be very difficult to do this, and the paraphrases would probably be long and messy if they could be got at all... So why embark on such an enterprise? (1977, p.304)

Well, maybe your initial reaction is to shrug and reply: so what? Metaphysics is hard, and sometimes we need to be ready to get our hands dirty and if things get a little bit messy, that's par for the course. But the important message is that the complexity and complication of the paraphrases with which the so inclined anti-realist wants to replace talk about fictional characters may easily be a cost greater than that of acquiring the belief that fictional characters exist.¹¹ Accepting this belief is, of course, the third option the Quinean is left with when confronted with the indispensability argument, and it is the one van Inwagen chooses, after he rejected abstaining and paraphrasing.

To be sure, there remains a final option, the one corresponding to Field's strategy in the philosophy of mathematics. The idea here would be that even if our best literary theories cannot be freed of talk of fictional characters by means of paraphrasis, we can still regard sentences like 'Hermione is a fictional character' as being false. But this is not a viable option, according to van Inwagen:

¹¹ Compare fn.6 above.

I think it would be absurd to think that nothing that can be said only in the language of literary criticism is true. (1977, p.302)

Now, as it stands, this might just smack of table thumping. Whatever the merits of Field's strategy of nominalizing our physical theories, it hardly seems fair to respond *simply* by insisting that it is absurd to think that nothing that can only be said in the language of mathematics is true. But I think van Inwagen's skepticism is merited in the present case. For what's absolutely critical to Field's strategy is that the falsity of mathematics can be reconciled with its utility: Field's starting point is to identify the inferential benefits that mathematics brings to science, and then to argue that those benefits do not require the truth of the mathematical theories that we use in practice. And it's striking that we presently have no grip on what the analogous benefits are in the case of fiction. So the question is: what's the distinctive benefit of talk of fictional characters that can be enjoyed even if there aren't really any such things? Without an answer to this question, we don't really have any grip on how some Fieldian response to van Inwagen's indispensability argument might even be developed. And in light of this fact, regarding talk of fictional characters as being false looks to be a clear cut case of intellectual dishonesty, i.e a case of simply refusing to believe in the existence of things upon which we can't help but rely, without any story about why this isn't anything other than double-thought.

Let's sum up. As a good Quinean, van Inwagen offers — though he doesn't explicitly set things up this way — an indispensability argument for believing in the existence of fictional characters. He does so by identifying a discipline, literary criticism, the outputs of which form part of our best theory of the world. He then argues that our best literary theories feature quantification over fictional characters, which provides a *pro tanto* reason for believing in the existence of such things. Like Quine, van Inwagen accepts that this reason is defeasible, and allows that the fictional anti-realist can show that quantification over fictional characters is dispensable by either showing that such talk can be paraphrased away, or by showing that such talk can be regarded as false despite its usefulness. As we've seen, however, van Inwagen thinks the prospects for both of these strategies are pretty poor, and thereby contends, like Quine in the mathematical case, that we ought to believe in the existence of fictional characters and other theoretical enti-

ties of literary criticism.

3.3 Problems of Overpopulation

Maybe you found it easier than expected to get your head around the idea that fictional characters exist. But would you also be prepared to come to terms with the existence of Vulcan, Sedna, and hallucinated elephants? Well, if you're willing to accept van Inwagen's reasoning for the existence of fictional characters, you better make room in your ontology: it's going to get bloated! This is the **problem of overpopulation**.

Even philosophers who are convinced by the conclusion of van Inwagen's argument for the existence of fictional characters occasionally point out that this kind of reasoning could equally be employed to argue for the existence of failed posits of science, such as Vulcan and Phlogiston, or hallucinated objects, such as John Nash's roommate or the pink elephant in your wardrobe. Thus Ben Caplan (2004, p.332-3) argues that van Inwagen's argument carries over to provide a defence of not only creatures of fiction but also creatures of myth and imagination.¹² And it's also worth noting that not all fictional realists feel the urge to resist Vulcan and its ilk: Nathan Salmon (1998), for instance, explicitly embraces commitment to failed scientific posits such as Phlogiston and Vulcan. The trouble is that it's hard to see how things can stop there. (It's going to get *really* bloated.)

Now, van Inwagen assumed that our best literary theories are part of our overall best theories. But since the only reason he gave us for accepting this is that we take many literary claims to be true, he should also be happy to allow that the theories produced by the history of science — *qua* theoretical discipline — are part of our overall best theory too. But our best theories of the history of science will likely contain sentences like 'There were more failed posits in the 20th Century than in the rest of the history of science put together' which directly involve quantification over failed posits: things like Vulcan and Phlogiston. Moreover, theoretical disciplines branch and various sub-disciplines are created, nearly unlimited in subject. And each discipline will likely employ its own special theoretical vocabulary and talk about its own theoretical entities, much as literary critics introduce terms like 'character constellation' and talk about creatures of fiction.

¹² cf. Hanley (2003).

Cultural anthropology, for instance, talks about various systems of religious beliefs, freely referring to Sedna and Mana, and quantifying over them in sentences like ‘Some mythical creatures were worshipped more than others’.¹³ Of course, the cultural anthropologist doesn’t think that Sedna is a *real Goddess* anymore than the literary critic thinks that Holmes is a *real detective* or the historian of science thinks that Vulcan is a *real Planet*. But since van Inwagen thinks of creatures of fiction as among the theoretical entities of literary criticism, it’s difficult to see why failed posits aren’t among the theoretical entities of the history of science, or creatures of myth are among the theoretical entities of cultural anthropology.

Or think about clinical psychologists. No matter what Paul himself thinks, they don’t believe that there are pink elephants or little green men under Paul’s bed. But they may well agree that *some imaginary objects* can support the process of emotional healing. And the history of superstition will not embrace the claim that there are UFOs or witches, but theorists acknowledge that there’s nothing wrong with saying that *some of the objects of superstitious belief* are more plausible than others. So there is at least a case to be made for thinking that figments of the imagination are among the theoretical entities of clinical psychology, and that creatures of superstition are among the theoretical entities of the history of superstition.

To be clear, the problem is not so much that van Inwagen’s reasoning seems to commit us to the existence of not only Holmes but also extra planets, pink elephants or little green men. Anyone can agree that there are no such things. But his style of reasoning gives us that there is something (Vulcan) which belongs to the kind *failed posit of science*. Similarly, it gives us that there’s something (the figment of Paul’s imagination) that belongs to the kind *hallucinated object*. And it also gives us that there’s something (Sedna) which belongs to the category *creature of myth*. The question is whether the fictional realist who employs van Inwagen’s reasoning is happy to admit not only creatures of fiction into her ontology but is also happy to embrace creatures of myth, failed posits, figments of our imagination, objects of superstition, and so on. That these objects might be, as theoretical entities of their respective disciplines, abstract and therefore different from what we might first expect them to be (human-like, perceivable, concrete)

¹³ I mean Sedna the Intuit Goddess of the sea and marine mammals rather than Sedna the minor planet discovered in 2003.

would, I imagine, be a very small consolation. But the considerations in favour of ‘mythical realism’ or ‘realism about failed posits’ seem directly analogous to those that van Inwagen cites in favour of fictional realism.

(Incidentally, I can’t resist pointing out that there is a certain irony in all of this. van Inwagen (1990) famously argues *against* the existence of ordinary objects like tables and chairs. But now his metaontological assumptions are threatening him to accept a bizarre ontology that is free of tables and chairs but full of fictional characters and hallucinated objects. I’m sure I’m not alone in thinking that this is symptomatic of there being something problematic about van Inwagen’s approach to ontology.)

I emphasize that the overpopulation worry isn’t meant to be conclusive. Perhaps, e.g., the fictional realist who flirts with van Inwagen’s Quinean methodology will insist that creatures of myth and imagination are creatures of fiction even if they aren’t (always) creatures of literary fiction. Or she might question whether all of these theories quantify over the unkosher entities in an indispensable way, and maybe sometimes a case can be made in favour of their dispensability. She might even insist that we should accept a complex but ontologically innocent semantics for all the talk about unkosher objects. Again, all of these options are allowed for by Textbook Quineanism. But the point is just that the style of argument van Inwagen offers in defence of fictional characters looks as though it has application in a host of other cases, and the kind of considerations van Inwagen offers against fictional anti-realism seem to generalize too. After all, isn’t it just absurd to think that nothing that can be said only by talking about Sedna is true? Moreover, one of the main reasons van Inwagen cites against paraphrasing away talk of fictional characters is that the resulting paraphrases will be “long and messy” and it’s difficult to see how paraphrasing talk of Vulcan or hallucinated things would be shorter and tidier. And then it is hard to see what makes talk about fictional characters so special, since hallucinated entities or objects of superstition may also be considered theoretical entities of their respective discipline.

Even if you were happy to let quantification in our best theories be your guide to ontology, you might worry if that led you to accept an ontology of not only fictional characters, but water gods and failed scientific posits too. And a natural reaction would be to point out that when you accepted the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment, you didn’t want to allow that the products of any old

discipline counted as part of our best theory. After all, not all disciplines were born equal. But then we need a story about which disciplines count and which do not. And the problem for van Inwagen is that without a story about why literary theories are special in a way that other theories aren't, the considerations he gives in favour of realism about creatures of fiction directly transpose into reasons in favour of realism about creatures of myth, imagination, the failed posits of bad old science, and far more besides.

Fictional realists who flirt with the indispensability argument thus need to present a reason why literary theories ought to count as part of our best theories of the world, and it'd better be one that does not equally apply to all the theories we cherish. And to license an overpopulated ontological realm would result in ontological commitments to an overwhelming army of theoretical abstracta, a consequence only the very bravest theorists would be ready to face. So the dilemma van Inwagen faces is this: either we need some reason to think that literary criticism is special in a way that (say) the history of hallucinated objects isn't, *or* we embrace commitment to not only Holmes and his ilk but also to pink elephants and their ilk.¹⁴ I take it that the latter option is unpalatable, and if that's what van Inwagen is forced to accept then I think we'd have a clear sign that something has gone badly wrong.

Quine himself would not have to face the overpopulation worry. This lucky turn is due to the fact that for Quine literary theories clearly don't belong to the best theories of our world, after all he thought that our privileged theory is purely physical. Whether or not we are convinced by Quine's reasoning here, at least Quine has a story to tell about *why* he considers physics to limn the structure of reality, and this is exactly the kind of story that van Inwagen is in want of. Whether or not Quine's story is compelling is another question that is worthy of investigation, but it does at least show that the problem of overpopulation does not threaten Quine's view. For van Inwagen, by contrast, things look very different. Given the large amount of disciplines we consider producing true theories, we would have to accept a very large ontology, if truth were the only criteria for belonging to our overall best theory of the world.

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, that's not quite right. There is still the option of showing how talk of pink elephants and their ilk can be paraphrased away. But as I noted earlier, it's difficult to see how that task would be easier to complete than the corresponding one of paraphrasing away talk of fictional entities.

Did we maybe state the indispensability argument in the wrong way? Does it rather argue that fictional characters are indispensable for our best scientific theories? As we saw earlier, however, van Inwagen explicitly rejects Quine's naturalism, and with it the idea that our privileged theory is purely scientific. But even putting this aside, it doesn't seem as though science ever postulates fictional characters, and why would it? The fictional characters literary theory is concerned with are 'offsprings' of books, films, theatre pieces, etc. Science is just not concerned with artistic artifacts.¹⁵

van Inwagen may be able to save his indispensability argument from an overpopulated ontology, but it is not clear how he might approach this. Recall that the Quinean needs a story for why the theory she considers to be our best overall theory of the world is privileged in this way. But in the hierarchy of theoretical disciplines literary theory certainly comes further down the way, and certainly *after* physics.¹⁶ Literary theory doesn't aim at discovery, as other sciences do. Literary theorists don't observe our environment and build theories from their observations, as even the social sciences do. What is it about literary theory that means that we ought to include it in the pool of theoretical disciplines that help us to get closer to the structure of reality? And if literary theory should be included, how do we stop various other enterprises — the history of bad science, cultural anthropology, the history of hallucinations — from getting in on the act too?

To sum up, a theorist who commits herself to the Quinean approach of ontology ought to believe in the entities our best overall theory of the world indispensably quantifies over. If she's not happy to take this consequence, she should either abstain or paraphrase the unkosher talk. As I argued in this section, a lot hinges on what is deserving of the title of the privileged theory and the Quinean has to successfully defend her choice. Quine himself left it all to physical theories as the (we might say) fundamental theoretical discipline.

But when we started asking for van Inwagen's story of why a literary theory

¹⁵ Notice that the term 'fictional character' is sometimes used in a wider sense in which it encompasses unobservables of science. This is not the way I use the term in this work. Nor is it how van Inwagen uses the term: his fictional characters are the theoretic entities of literary criticism. So it won't do for him to question my claim that science never postulate fictional characters by pointing to frictionless planes and ideal gases. Whatever these things should be called, they are not fictional entities in van Inwagen's sense of the term.

¹⁶ Compare Yagisawa's (2001, §4) complaint that van Inwagen assumes that "literary criticism is a discipline, or activity, that is aimed at discovering truths about the actual world, on a par with physics."

should be part of the privileged theory we had to admit that all he offers as an explanation is that the discipline produces truths. By offering the argument from overpopulation I urged you to see that truth alone will not suffice, unless one is happy to seriously bloat one's ontology. Since a search for a plausible story of why literary theories should be amongst the privileged ones without getting overpopulation doesn't look too promising, van Inwagen's indispensability argument for fictional characters cannot stand as it does. Trying to fix the reasoning, however, will soon lead us to a new direction in approaching ontology.

3.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to offer a picture of the metaontology that is normally taken to represent the standard conception of how ontological inquiry should be conducted: *Textbook Quineanism*. Having sketched the core elements of this Quinean metaontology in abstraction from any particular ontological investigation, I then examined how van Inwagen applies the Textbook Quinean strategy in the specific case of the debate surrounding the ontological status of fictional characters and entities.

As we saw, though van Inwagen does not explicitly set his defence of fictional realism up in these terms, he can naturally be seen as offering us an *indispensability argument* for the existence of fictional characters that is broadly analogous to the famous argument Quine himself offered in defence of believing in the existence of mathematical objects like numbers, sets and functions. But whereas Quine argued for the existence of numbers on the basis of the alleged indispensability of talk of such things in the context of scientific theorizing, van Inwagen argues for the existence of fictional entities on the basis of the alleged indispensability of quantification over such things in the context of our best literary theories.

In liberalising Quine's approach, however, van Inwagen walks a tight rope. For though the naturalistic and physicalist elements of Quine's approach are arguably inessential to the core Textbook Quinean conception of metaontology, allowing that quantification over fictional entities in the context of literary criticism is on a par with quantification over mathematical objects in the context of scientific investigation leaves van Inwagen in desperate need of an answer to the question of what makes literary theory special in a way that (e.g.) the history of

failed posits or the history of mythology is not. And without an answer to this question, the very same reasoning van Inwagen employs to argue for the existence of fictional characters looks as though it will straightforwardly carry over to give us an analogous argument in favour of the existence of failed posits like Vulcan and mythical creatures like Zeus. This, in a nutshell, is the overpopulation worry I raised against van Inwagen's defence of fictional realism.

Perhaps, of course, van Inwagen will be prepared to bite bullets here, and he wouldn't be the first fictional realist to do so: Nathan Salmon, as I mentioned earlier, is prepared to endorse an ontology that includes failed posits and mythical creatures in addition to fictional characters. And so one option that is available to van Inwagen is simply to follow Textbook Quineanism where it leads, despite that being an overpopulated destination. But I take it that most of those who share van Inwagen's love of Textbook Quineanism will try to get off the hook by showing that overpopulation can be avoided by means of those methods that Textbook Quineanism offers the fan of desert landscapes, i.e. by showing, somehow or other, that talk of the problematic entities can be dispensed with. You'll remember, of course, that van Inwagen conjectures that talk about fictional entities cannot be adequately paraphrased away, and that was one of the main reasons why he thought that he had to swallow an ontology including fictional entities. But the matter obviously deserves more scrutiny than it has received in this chapter, and a detailed examination of the question of whether paraphrase can help us avoid an ontology of fictional entities is the business of the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 4

Paraphrasing

RECALL that the central strategy the Quinean offers those who seek to avoid ontological commitment to numbers or fictional characters was that of showing that quantification over such things could be *paraphrased away*. Quine found paraphrases congenial:

Paraphrases can enable us to talk very considerably and conveniently about putative objects without footing the ontological bill. It is a strictly legitimate way of making theories in which there is less than meets the eye. (1969b, p.101)

But the problem is that Quine (1948, 1960, 1969b) talks about paraphrases in a variety of terms including ‘translation’, ‘expansion’, ‘analysis’, ‘rephrasing’, ‘identification’ and ‘explanation’. It is, in this setting, unclear exactly what he has in mind.

Be that as it may, however, the *point* of paraphrasis is clear. For Quine is keenly aware that we find ourselves apparently quantifying over or referring to things — the *glint* in Paul’s eye, the *hole* in the cheese, the *hairstyles* that are in fashion, the *characters* who appear in more than one story — which we find ontologically troublesome. Sometimes, Quine thinks, we have to *put up*, and decide that the best course of action is to accept the existence of the offending entities. Other times, he thinks, we should rather *shut up*, and decide that the best course of action is to hold our tongues and abstain from the talk that got us into trouble in the first place. But sometimes we can neither put up nor shut up,

and we need a mediating resolution, one which shows how our linguistic practices can be reconciled with our ontological scruples. The road to reconciliation, for Quine, is the road of paraphrasis.

Furthermore, even though it's often unclear exactly what Quine and his descendants are up to when they offer paraphrases, the general idea is surely familiar enough. Consider, for instance, the case of talk of holes. True, we might *say* that there is a hole in the cheese, but what's really being got at is that the cheese is perforated in a certain way. So we attempt reconciliation by trying to find a sentence that talks only about the cheese, a sentence that expresses, without mention of holes, what we were really trying to get at. And when we find such a sentence, we say that talk of holes is legitimate but non-committing because the problematic sentences can be paraphrased by unproblematic ones.¹

The worry that one might associate with the notion of a paraphrase isn't, then, that it is obscure what job paraphrases are supposed to do. Rather, the point is that philosophers are often unclear exactly what they have in mind when it comes to saying something a little bit more precise about what the relation is between a problematic sentence and its non-committal paraphrase. And in light of this fact, any more specific characterization of the notion will inevitably raise questions about whether the notion so-characterized is the one that the Textbook Quinean has in mind. Nonetheless, I think it's important to have a model in mind, and I'll offer one in the next section. The model, I shall suggest, constitutes one natural way of fleshing out Quine's remarks on paraphrases, especially given some of his more specific commitments in the philosophy of language. But despite the fact that this will force me to be committal on certain issues, I ultimately hope that the model is a useful one and that the subsequent discussion won't depend too much on the specific elements it involves.

Having offered one way to understand what's going on when the Quinean gives paraphrases, I'll subsequently turn to consider issues regarding what normatively constrains paraphrasing project, i.e. the question of what constraints are built into the project of paraphrasing away talk of dubious entities. With a number of constraints in place, the rest of the chapter will examine whether or not

¹ To be clear, I don't mean to suggest that talk of holes can be paraphrased away. Jackson (1977, p.132) argues that it can be; Casati and Varzi (1994) argue at length that it cannot. See also Lewis and Lewis (1970).

van Inwagen is right to claim that talk of fictional entities cannot be paraphrased away.

4.1 Truth, Translation, and Paraphrase

Paraphrase is a relation that holds between *sentences*. That is not to say that ‘is a paraphrase of’ is a sentential connective like ‘because’ or ‘and’. So if, being sloppy with use and mention, we were to say that *S* is a paraphrase of *S** then it’s important to remember that *S* and *S** are names for (abbreviations of) sentences rather than sentences themselves, and that what we should really say is that ‘*S*’ is a paraphrase of ‘*S**’. In light of this, a natural option to pursue when it comes to offering an account of the relation of paraphrase is to reduce it to some other, more familiar, relation that holds between sentences.

4.1.1 Paraphrase and Synonymy

One sentence can *mean the same thing as* another. And when two sentences are related in this way, we can say that they *share their meaning* and are *synonymous*. Thus ‘All bachelors are unmarried men’ might be taken to be synonymous with ‘No bachelor is neither married nor male’ to pick but one example. And in light of the fact that our original starting point was the thought that paraphrasing sentences *say the same thing as* the sentences of which they are paraphrases, a natural idea is to understand this notion via the notion of synonymy. That is, one might think that ‘*S*’ is a paraphrase of ‘*S**’ iff ‘*S*’ and ‘*S**’ mean the same thing.²

Quine himself was deeply suspicious of the notion of synonymy, thinking that it formed a dark ‘intensional circle’ with related notions such as meaning, analyticity, necessity, and a priority (see, e.g., Quine (1951)). So whatever its merits, the synonymy-based account of paraphrase wouldn’t have been to Quine’s own tastes. But even putting aside Quine’s skepticism of all things intensional, it is worth noting that the synonymy-based account entails that the relation of paraphrase is an equivalence relation, being reflexive, symmetric, and transitive. This of course, is an immediate consequence of the fact that the relation of synonymy is an equivalence relation. And that the synonymy-based account imposes these

² See, e.g., Melia (1995, fn.1).

formal constraints on the relation of paraphrase gives rise to a number of problems.³

For instance, suppose that the relation of paraphrase is, as the synonymy-based account predicts, a symmetrical relation. And now suppose that we tried to show that talk of tables (e.g.) can be paraphrased away since any sentence that talked about tables is paraphrasable by a sentence that talked only about simple objects arranged in a tablewise fashion.⁴ Then, one might wonder, why does *that* show that commitment to tables has been avoided? After all, the relation of paraphrase is being assumed to be symmetrical, so we know that the reverse result shows that talk of simple objects arranged in a tablewise fashion can be paraphrased away in terms of sentences concerning tables. So why doesn't that reverse result show that talk of simple objects was ontologically committed to tables all along? What we're lacking, it seems, is the basis for the idea that paraphrase has a direction, that the inverted paraphrases are somehow worse than the original ones.⁵

This kind of worry was famously raised by William Alston (1963), and is often taken to constitute a very serious *objection* to the viability of paraphrase strategies whether or not they are cashed out in terms of synonymy.⁶ I don't think that's quite right, however. At best the worry raises a *challenge* to the paraphraser: she has to show why one of the sentences (in this case the one about simples) is special in a way that the other (the one about tables) is not. And that means that even if one were to accept the synonymy-based account of paraphrase, that wouldn't itself be the end of the story: various other challenges would remain to be met. Properly understood, I think the challenges can be met. But in developing this thought, it will prove helpful to put the synonymy-based account to one side and consider an account of paraphrases that would have been more to Quine's own liking. Rather than cashing out the relation in terms of synonymy, this alternative account cashes the relation out in terms of *translation*.

³ Though I'll focus on the more famous worry that symmetry gives rise to, see Jackson (1980) for a worry about the idea that paraphrase can be reflexive in character.

⁴ See van Inwagen (1990) and Merricks (2001) for versions of this proposal.

⁵ Compare Schaffer (2009, p.370). As Schaffer notes, the worry doesn't *demand* that paraphrase be symmetrical: even if we don't have a semantic guarantee of it, the reversed paraphrasing scheme might still be viable. We'll come back to this point in the next section.

⁶ Alston (1963, p.47) himself tells us that the worry shows that the point of offering a paraphrase "cannot be put in terms of some assertion or commitment from which it saves us."

4.1.2 Paraphrase and Translation

The relation of translation, like that of synonymy, is a relation that one sentence can hold to another, and it is therefore natural to consider the prospects for an account of paraphrases that is framed directly in terms of translation. It's worth noting that such an account might end up relying on the notion of synonymy — after all, one might think that good translations preserve meaning — but that can be regarded as a separate issue. Indeed, it will prove useful to develop the account without relying on the notion of synonymy, and by considering an account of paraphrase that one might associate with Quine himself.⁷

We can think of a *translation manual* as a function which takes sentences of one language and maps them to sentences of another language. The picture of paraphrase-as-translation can then be thought of as telling us that the paraphraser's goal is to specify a translation manual which takes us from the sentences of a language which talks about problematic entities to sentences of a language which does not. With such a manual at hand, we can enter an sentence of the unkosher language as an input and — if the manual does what it is supposed to do — obtain a sentence of the kosher language as an output. Applied to (e.g.) the debate about composite objects, the thought would be that commitment to tables and chairs can be avoided because the sentences of a language which apparently talks about tables can be translated into sentences of a language which does not. Thus perhaps the sentences of a language which employs quantification over composite objects — a language which allows us to say things like 'there is a table' — can be translated into a language that instead employs plural quantification over simple objects — a language which allows us to say things like 'there are simple arranged tablewise'. And because the sentences of the former language can be translated by sentences of the latter, we may conclude, the paraphraser thinks, that talk of composite objects can be paraphrased way.

An immediate worry one might have about this conception of paraphrase is that it seems to rely on the idea that we have two *different* languages so that the relevant notion of translation is *inter*-linguistic in character. Thus in its application to the debate about tables, I distinguished two languages, one which permitted

⁷ The account of paraphrase given here is broadly in keeping with those offered by Williams (forthcoming) and von Solodkoff and Woodward (MS.).

singular quantification over composite objects and one which did not. The paraphraser thus begins to look like a Indonesian linguist trying to make sense, in her own terms, of what we as English speakers say. But is it really credible to think of those who are trying to paraphrase away talk of tables as speaking a different language to the rest of us? Don't we all speak English?

Happily, the focus on inter-linguistic translation is really just a heuristic device, for the translation-based approach to paraphrasing can be developed in an *intra*-linguistic setting. That is, rather than thinking of things in terms of there being two languages, we can instead think of things in terms of there being a single language. The idea here would be that what we previously thought of as 'the language of composite objects' and 'the language of simples' are really just *fragments* of a single language, English. The paraphraser's project can then be seen as that of showing that sentences which apparently talk about controversial entities like tables and chairs can be translated by those sentences which constitute a special fragment of English in which we are only allowed to talk about simple objects. So there is no real need to think of the paraphraser as speaking a different language than the rest of us: paraphrasing, to twist Quine's words, "begins at home" (1969c, p.46).

How does the translation-based approach to paraphrasing fare with the symmetry worry I mentioned in relation with the synonymy-based account? On the face of things, translation is a symmetric relation: if S is a translation of S^* , then S^* is a translation of S too. But this is a little quick. For remember that what's important is a translation manual which maps sentences of one language, L , to sentence of another, L^* . If we call the function of the translation manual 'Tr', the upshot is that the paraphraser is committed to saying things like:

$$\text{Tr}('S') = 'S^*'$$

And though it might be tempting to gloss this idea by saying that ' S ' has ' S^* ' as its translation, this misses the fact that ' S^* ' is the translation *in* L^* of ' S '. So what we should say is the following:

$$'S' \text{ is translated in } L^* \text{ by } 'S^*'$$

And this relation, the relation of translation-into- L^* , is not symmetric: S isn't even a sentence of L^* so there is no way that S^* could be translated in L^* by S .

Now, we shouldn't take this to show that the translation-based account of paraphrase avoids the symmetry worry. Rather, it shows that the worry doesn't essentially have anything to do with symmetry. For one might think that given that 'S' is translated in L^* by 'S*' the following should also hold:

'S*' is translated in L by 'S'

Or to phrase that in terms of translation manuals: if there is one manual, Tr , which takes us from the sentences of L to the sentences of L^* then there should be another manual, Tr^* , which takes us from L^* to L . So we're left with an analogue to the worry Alston raised against the synonymy-based approach, but one which is separate from any specific worries about the symmetry of the paraphrase relation. The worry is: why should we think that translation-into- L^* deflates the ontological commitments of the sentences of L rather than thinking that translation-into- L inflates the commitments of the sentences of L^* ?

Once paraphrase is understood via translation, however, and once we see that it is translation into L^* that is important, it begins to become a little clearer how the Alston worry should be addressed. The point would be that the specialness of translation-into- L^* is rooted in the specialness of L^* itself. Recall in this regard a point I made in the previous chapter. Quine, as we saw, thought that our ontological commitments should be normed by the quantificational commitments of our best theories of the world. Transposed into the present context, the thought would then be that whatever reasons Quine has for thinking that some theory T^* is our best theory of the world will extend over to give us a reason for thinking that the language in which T^* is written is special in way that other languages are not. That is, if T^* is our best theory then the vocabulary of T^* will be privileged: it will be better suited to describe the structure of reality than its competitors. And so the Quinean can say that the specialness of L^* is rooted in the fact that L^* is the language of T^* . The reason why translation-into- L^* is special, and in turn the ground for the idea that translation and paraphrasing has a direction, is thus that L^* is the language of our best theory of the world.

Now, recall that the point of paraphrasing, for the Quinean, was that it gave her a way of reconciling her taste for desert landscapes with the edicts of common-sense. Thus though the Quinean might want to avoid ontological commitment to (e.g.) tables or numbers, she doesn't want to hold that our ordinary judgements

about such things should be abandoned. Indeed, given its conception of the relationship between an ordinary sentence and its paraphrase, the translation-based approach allows the Quinean to accept that many of our ordinary judgements are true.⁸ To see why, it's worth noting that Quine has a quite specific conception of semantic properties like truth, reference and satisfaction. If we're considering the language that one speaks, Quine holds that various disquotational schemata — ' p ' is true iff p ; ' n ' refers to o iff $n=o$; a satisfies ' Fx ' iff Fa , etc. — collectively provide an extensionally correct definition of one's semantical notions.⁹ But this doesn't say anything about what we should say about the semantic properties of sentences of *foreign* languages, sentences of languages in which we are not 'at home'. Quine's move at this point is to appeal to translation. Thus, if one wants to say that some foreign sentence is true, or that some foreign name refers, or that some foreign predicate is satisfied, then one must appeal to translation. We can, for example, only say that a foreign sentence is true if (i) it has a translation in our home language and (ii) that translation is a disquotationally true sentence of our home language.¹⁰ Call this Quine's *translate-and-deflate* strategy.

This integrated account of semantical and translational properties that constitutes Quine's translate-and-deflate strategy has a clear application in relation to the account of paraphrase that we have been exploring. Thus suppose a theorist, Nowi, spoke only the privileged language, the language of our best theory. And suppose further than this is a language which allows for plural quantification over simples but disallows singular quantification over composites. When it comes to defining her semantic properties, Nowi, as a good Quinean, holds that truth, reference, and satisfaction are to be understood disquotationally and accepts that the Xs satisfy 'are arranged F -wise' iff the Xs are arranged F -wise, and so on. But now suppose that Nowi comes across a normal English speaker, Paul, saying things like 'There is a table'. Since Paul's language is foreign to Nowi, what should she say about his claims? Quine's advice is clear: she must try to find a way of translating Paul's language into her own. And if such a translation can be given,

⁸ The following reading of Quine's conception of truth and its relation to translation is drawn from Field (1994). (For an overview of Field's changing opinions about its adequacy, see the essays collected in Field (2001).) Compare Williams (MS.) and von Solodkoff and Woodward (MS.) who also stress that the "translate-and-deflate" methodology described below plays a crucial role in Quine's conception of ontological inquiry. For an alternative reading of Quine, see Soames (2009).

⁹ See Quine (1970) for his take on disquotationalism.

¹⁰ For discussion, see Field (1994, p.272-4).

i.e. if ‘There is a table’ has a disquotationally true translation in Nowi’s home language, Nowi can happily accept that many of the sentences of Paul’s language are true. Thus Nowi, even though her home language disallows quantification over composites, can perfectly well ‘save the appearances’ and allow that Paul speaks truly. And Paul (observing all of this from his own perspective) has an obvious move when it comes to avoiding ontological commitment to tables. For he may accept that ‘There is a table’ is true only in a derivative sense, only because it has a true translation into the language of our best theory, i.e. the language which Nowi regards as her own.

All of this, of course, is neutral with respect to the question of what should norm translation. Do translations have to preserve meaning? What about logical consequences? Need translation manuals be compositional and recursively specifiable? And as should be clear, the more constraints we place on the enterprise, the harder it will be to save the appearances by means of giving a paraphrase. These issues will concern us in the next section, when we shall examine the constraints which van Inwagen imposes on paraphrases and in turn on those who attempt to paraphrase away talk of fictional entities. But before we move on, a final comment is in order regarding the account of paraphrase I have sketched.

On the translation-based conception of paraphrase that we have been exploring, paraphrasing is understood via the notion of translation, and the language of paraphrase — the language into which we translate — is privileged because it is the language of our best theory of the world. But even within this setting, I think we should resist the thought that the process of paraphrasing *begins* by distinguishing some particular language (the language of our best theory) and *then* continues by seeking to give translations of other sentences into that language. Rather, figuring out what the best language is will in part be a matter of seeing whether it can serve as the language of paraphrase.

To develop this thought, suppose that we decided that the privileged language did not mention composite objects. And suppose that we then found that (for whatever reason) talk about composite objects could not be paraphrased into that language.¹¹ Then it seems that we would have to concede that we couldn’t save

¹¹ Uzquiano (2004) raises some worries about the adequacy of this kind of paraphrase strategy. The basic point is that even though it works well in cases where we have singular quantification over composites, troubles emerge when we have plural quantification over composites as in ‘Some

the appearances and regard our ordinary talk about composite objects as being true, since we cannot apply the translate-and-deflate strategy we need to be able to apply if such talk is to be true. At this point, it would be understandable if one decided that we were wrong when holding that the privileged language was free of talk of composites. After all, there's something about talk about composite things that's worth being preserved and if our chosen privileged language prevents us from doing so, maybe we should reconsider.

What this shows, I think, is that one factor that will be important when it comes to deciding whether or not a language is the privileged language is the question of whether or not that language can serve as a basis from which our ordinary thoughts and claims can be saved. Or to put that point otherwise, even if what makes a language the privileged one is that it's the language of our best theory, part of what makes a theory the best one is that it saves the appearances. And for the Quinean, that amounts to the thought that the theory is couched in a language into which what needs to be saved can be translated. In this sense, then, it's wrong to think that we can get a grip on the answer to the question of which language is the privileged one independently of the question of whether or not the edicts of common sense can be translated into that language. The conclusion to draw from this is that to be the privileged language is, in part, to be language of paraphrase.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that my goal wasn't to offer an account of paraphrase that everyone will accept. And indeed, there are various aspects of the account — the appeal to disquotationalism, for instance — which many will find difficult to swallow. But the account is offered as one way of fleshing out Quine's remarks about paraphrase, an account which, I think, Quine himself would have looked favourably upon. And in any case, I think it's clear that anyone who offers paraphrases needs to say something detailed about exactly what they are up to, and doing so will likely force them to commit on various issues in the philosophy of language. The situation is summed up in a helpful way by Robbie Williams:

Often, it's not very clear to what end metaphysicians offer paraphrases. The idea that providing appropriate paraphrases shows that the paraphrased theory is not 'ontologically committed' to problem-

tables were carried into some homes'.

atic entities makes perfect sense within a certain highly contentious philosophy of language. When advocated by those who do not endorse that particular position, absent further explanation, it is baffling. (MS., p.111)

And the crucial point here is that paraphrase, understood via translation in the manner I've described, isn't baffling and is relatively clear in its design. Our discussion of how it should be executed, particularly in relation to the debate about fictional entities, will thus take place against this backdrop.

4.2 van Inwagen on Paraphrases

On the present proposal, the paraphraser aims to specify a function mapping sentences from one language (or language fragment) to another language (or language fragment). Thus the paraphraser who wants to avoid ontological commitment to fictional characters attempts to map sentences that constitute talk about fictional entities to sentences that are free of quantification over such things. If she can show that *all* sentences that quantify over fictional entities can be paraphrased by sentences that do not, she may take this as an indication that quantification over fictional entities is dispensable to our best theories. That is, the availability of a way of paraphrasing talk of fictional entities into a language which is free of talk of such things would provide reason for thinking that our best theories could themselves be written in a language which is free of talk of fictional entities. When we write our 'book of the world', the language that we used, our privileged language, could be free of quantification over fictional entities.

But you might wonder, with van Inwagen, whether there is an innocent language into which talk about fictional entities can be translated. And as I intimated in the previous section, the answer to this question will depend on the constraints that one imposes on what counts as an adequate paraphrase. At this stage, however, we don't even have an initial suggestion as to how such a paraphrase strategy might be developed.

To develop an initial suggestion of how we might paraphrase away talk of fictional characters, it's worth reflecting that many fictional realists think that fictional characters are, in some sense or other, dependent upon the authorial ac-

tivities of their creators. Amie Thomasson, in particular, takes this dependency to underwrite a central element of her account, the thought that characters are created by authors and their activities. She writes:

Just as marriages, contracts, and promises may be created through the performance of linguistic acts that represent them as existing, a fictional character is created by being represented in a work of literature. (1999, p.13)

Thomasson here seems to suggest that fictional characters are more or less a ‘by-product’ of authorial activity: given that authors act in certain ways, we get fictional characters easily and without further ado. And as we saw in chapter 2, Stephen Schiffer (2003) accepts a view along these lines too, holding that fictional detectives and fictional wizards are created when authors use names to pretend to refer — or as I’ll say, to *quasi-refer* — to detectives and wizards.

But note that what we now have is a way to link up certain claims which talk about fictional characters with claims that do not. So one might think what Thomasson’s picture suggests isn’t so much that the existence of fictional characters is dependent on the activities of authors, but rather that talk of fictional characters can be paraphrased into a language where we talk about authors and their activities instead. Indeed, that’s precisely the picture that van Inwagen (2003, p.154-5) thinks is suggested by Thomasson’s account. Thus in the case of marriages, van Inwagen finds it questionable whether marriages come into existence when people marry. Rather, it’s far more plausible to say that sentences like ‘Some marriages are happier than others’ can be paraphrased as sentences whose variables range only over people, relations, times, “and such other things as we were probably going to have to ‘quantify over’ in any case” (2003, p.154).

In a similar way, someone who sought to avoid commitment to fictional characters might attempt to paraphrase quantification over such things away by translating a sentences like ‘The fictional character Holmes exists’ into a sentence that quantifies over authors and other such ‘less problematic’ entities. And if we apply the model sketched above, the thought would be that a sentence like (1) ‘There are fictional characters’ might be paraphrased as:

(1*) There are authors who, in writing fictions, use names to quasi-refer to objects.

And because quasi-referring isn't referring and doesn't require the existence of a referent, accepting this paraphrase doesn't commit the fictional anti-realist to the existence of fictional entities: it commits her only to the existence of authors (and fictions). Thus the irony is that Thomasson, in telling us what she thinks needs to happen in order for there to be a fictional character, has opened the door for a different moral to be drawn: rather than providing us with a criterion of existence, she's told us how we might eliminate talk of fictional characters altogether.

(1*) then looks like a promising candidate for a translation of (1) that is free of talk about fictional characters. But showing how we can translate an individual sentence into another is one thing, showing how an entire discourse can be paraphrased is quite another. And when it comes to a strategy of translating a larger fragment of talk about fictional entities into innocent talk we are still in baby shoes. But any plausible paraphrasing strategy will respect certain constraints imposed upon it, that is, it will ensure that certain features of the original talk, the talk about fictional entities, are preserved. Rather than actually attempting to develop such a strategy, let's ask what ought to be preserved when one paraphrases away fictional characters.

4.2.1 Preservation of Truth-value

When thinking about candidate constraints on an adequate paraphrase, the first thing that may come to mind is that a paraphrase has to preserve the truth-value of the original sentence. That is, we might think that part of what makes (1*) a good paraphrase of (1) is precisely that (1*) is a true paraphrase of (1).

Occasionally, those who offer paraphrases say things that suggest that they reject the idea that paraphrases have to preserve truth-value. We're often told that whilst the paraphrasing sentence S^* is true, the sentence it paraphrases, S , is itself false (or at least untrue). The point of paraphrasis, on this picture, would be to show how the falsity of S doesn't mean that it isn't worthy of assent. After all, the thought goes, S is just a loose way of talking and if we wanted to be more precise and careful, we could retreat to S^* instead.¹²

¹² Since those who offer paraphrases are often less than clear exactly what they have in mind, it's

Consider in this regard van Inwagen's discussion of paraphrasis in chapters 10 and 11 of *Material Beings*. He illustrates the relationship between a paraphrased sentence and its paraphrase by analogy with that which holds between 'The sun moved behind the elms' and a more scientifically precise claim regarding the relative positions of the sun, the tree and the observer (p.112-3). And though van Inwagen insists that the availability of the latter shows that the former sentence is *literally true*, this comment is difficult to square with some of the other things he says. Thus he tells us that the original sentence is a *right* thing to say in whatever sense of 'right' one can be right to say such a thing (p.102). We're also told that the original sentence is *correct* even though it may be a misleading thing to say (p.101). And he thinks it's okay to say all of these things because someone who said that the sun moved behind the elms would be saying something that's capable of being (literally) true/right/correct in virtue of the fact that "*taken literally*, they [would] report an alteration in the spatial disposition of external objects" (p.101).

I hope I'm not alone in finding it pretty unclear *exactly* what account of paraphrase van Inwagen is outlining. Indeed, it's even difficult to extract a settled answer to the seemingly simple question of whether paraphrases preserve truth-value: we're told they do, but we're also told things which suggest that they don't. It's hardly comforting that van Inwagen tells us that he can say all of these things because he "accepts certain theses in the philosophy of language", theses which he "does not propose to defend in the present work" (p.101). And it doesn't help matters to discover that he hasn't defended these theses elsewhere in the time since the publication of *Material Beings*.¹³

Nevertheless, I think the moral we should draw from all of this is that the question of whether paraphrases will preserve truth-value will depend on our antecedent views in the philosophy of language and how we bring them to bear on our conception of paraphrase itself. And though I have some sympathy with van Inwagen's resistance to get into the nitty gritty work in the philosophy of language, I hope that the account of paraphrase I offered in the previous section can at least be brought to bear here. For the translation-based account straightforwardly predicts that paraphrases will preserve truth-value. To return to the case at hand, the

difficult to attribute this approach to anyone with certainty. But it's certainly the kind of thing which one often hears in conversation. I suspect it's what Merricks (2001) has in mind when he says that claims about tables are "*nearly as good as true*" even though they are false.

¹³ Compare Nolan (2010, p.239-40).

account tells us that if (\mathcal{I}^*) is indeed a true paraphrase of (\mathcal{I}) , then (\mathcal{I}) is itself true. Or to be more precise, the account tells us that if (\mathcal{I}^*) is a disquotationally true sentence of the privileged language then (\mathcal{I}) is true if it can be paraphrased by (\mathcal{I}^*) . This should hardly come as a surprise: it's just a straightforward consequence of the translate-and-deflate strategy we're working with.¹⁴

My answer to the question of whether the paraphrastic project is constrained to preserve truth-value is, then, somewhat hedged. The only conclusion that can safely be drawn, I think, is that whether paraphrases *will* preserve truth-value will depend upon our account of paraphrase. Moreover, those who think that paraphrases *should* preserve truth-value, those who see the paraphrastic project as being constrained to do so, are best seen as demanding a picture of paraphrase which has preservation of truth-value as a consequence. And as we've seen, the translation-based account is one account which predicts that paraphrases will indeed preserve truth-value. The messy issue, which isn't our concern, is whether or not we should have an account of paraphrase like this.

4.2.2 Preservation of Truth-condition

Even if we assume that we should have an account of paraphrase on which paraphrases do preserve truth-value, we don't want an account on which preservation of truth-value is *all* that matters. And that's because we want to rule out the possibility of 'cheap and dirty' paraphrases. For instance, it's clearly not acceptable to map all the sentences we want to be true to ' $\mathcal{I}+\mathcal{I}=2$ ' and the sentences we want to be false to ' $\mathcal{I}+\mathcal{I}=0$ ' even though translating in this way would give the right results from an extensional point of view. A paraphraser who adopted this approach might preserve the right truth-values. But the result cannot be considered satisfying: something about the original sentences has gone missing.

But what? One might point out even if 'There are fictional characters' and ' $\mathcal{I}+\mathcal{I}=2$ ' have the same truth-*value*, they don't have the same truth-*condition*. That is, whilst the two sentences might be extensionally equivalent, they are not intensionally equivalent: they are not true at exactly the same possible worlds. It's no surprise, then, that van Inwagen (1977, p.303) takes *necessary* equivalence to be

¹⁴ The account does allow that there is one sense in which 'There are fictional characters' is not true. For even if (\mathcal{I}) is paraphrased by (\mathcal{I}^*) , (\mathcal{I}) isn't even a sentence of the privileged language and so it clearly isn't a true (or false) sentence of the privileged language either.

one of the requirements for what counts as a good paraphrase.

The thought that preservation of truth-condition matters when giving paraphrases makes sense on our proposed approach to paraphrasing. Consider again a paraphraser who denies the existence of chairs, but is happy to accept particles arranged in certain ways into her ontology. As we've seen, such a theorist can accept that 'There is a chair' is true by showing that the translation of that sentence into the privileged language, L^* , is itself true. Perhaps, e.g., she'll accept that there are simples arranged chairwise and also accept the following translation:

Tr('There's a chair') into L^* = 'There are simples arranged chairwise'

Translation, of course, is a relation between sentences: a translation function takes one linguistic entity, a sentence of one language, and maps it to another linguistic entity, a sentence of another language. But it's very natural to think that accepting these *word-word* principles goes hand-in-hand with accepting certain *word-world* principles. That is, accepting the translation offered above seems to let us state which worldly fact is responsible for the truth of 'there is a table', i.e. a specification of conditions under which that sentence is true:

'There is a chair' is true iff there are simples arranged chairwise.

In this way, we can move from a claim about translation to a semantic claim about truth-conditions. In much the same way, someone who accepted that (\mathcal{I}^*) is a paraphrase of (\mathcal{I}) may go ahead and claim that sentences concerning fictional characters do not require of the world to contain anything else but authors (and fictions), for their truth-conditions are stateable without mentioning of such things.

Once we're giving truth-conditions, however, we first need to identify the object-and meta-languages we are working with. And since our model of paraphrase forces us to be careful about which language(s) we're talking about, this issue is likely to ramify once we're engaged in a semantical project rather than a translational one. Two options naturally suggest themselves.

The first option involves taking English to be our object-language and L^* , the special, privileged language, as our meta-language. And we think of L^* as itself a part of English, so L^* is really a fragment of English. So whilst both 'There's a

chair' and 'There are particles arranged chairwise' are sentences of English, only the latter is a sentence of L^* . As a result, the paraphraser may assert the following T-equivalences:

'There is chair' is true iff there are particles arranged chairwise

'There are particles arranged chairwise' is true iff there are particles arranged chairwise

In this way, when we identify the meta-language as a fragment of the object-language, the result is that the paraphrasing sentence and the sentence it paraphrases share their truth-condition.¹⁵

A second option involves taking both the object-language and the meta-language to be English. (And again, we assume that L^* is part of English.) One important upshot is that 'There is a chair' is now not only a sentence of the object-language, but also a sentence of the meta-language. And, hence, in addition to the truth-conditions given above we also obtain the following results:

'There is a chair' is true iff there is a chair

There is a chair iff there are particles arranged chairwise

'There are particles arranged chairwise' is true iff there is a chair.

These results tell us that there is a chair whenever there are particles arranged chairwise. As before then, this supports the idea that the paraphrased sentence and the sentence it paraphrases share their truth-condition. But in addition, we now have two ways to specify that truth-condition: we can either specify the truth-condition for 'There is a chair' in terms of chairs or we can do so in terms of simples arranged chairwise.

You might think, though, that this is a bad result. For suppose that we think of the ontological commitments of a sentence as an aspect of its truth-conditions.¹⁶ That is, suppose we think that a sentence S is ontologically committed to F s if the existence of F s is required in order to S 's truth-condition to be satisfied. Then it seems like we'll have to say that the existence of chairs *is* required in order for

¹⁵ This in effect is the picture of 'semantic' paraphrases offered in Woodward (2008).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Rayo (2007, 2008).

'There is a chair' to be true. After all, that's what one of the truth-conditions states.

What we've shown is that there are two different ways in which we can formulate a statement of what's required of the world for 'There is a chair' to be true. We can either use full English and say that the truth of 'There is a chair' demands that there be a chair, or we can restrict ourselves to L^* and say that it demands only that there be simples arranged chairwise. This doesn't mean that the sentence has two different truth-conditions, just that there is *one* requirement which can be wrapped up in two different linguistic robes. Moreover, we've also got independent reason to think that one of these linguistic robes is more ontologically revealing than the other. After all, it's part of the Quinean approach that L^* is special. So when we specify the truth-condition for 'There is a table' in terms of the vocabulary of L^* , we'll think that the truth-condition so-specified will reveal the ontological commitments of that sentence. That we can specify the truth-condition using other vocabulary, vocabulary that isn't part of L^* , shouldn't lead us to worry that 'There is a table' was committed to tables after all. At best it means that we cannot directly read off the ontological commitments of a sentence from any old specification of that sentence's truth-conditions. We don't only need to specify the truth-condition, we also need to specify it in the right way, using the right linguistic resources.

(Following Agustín Rayo (MS., p.6), let's say that one is a *Tractarian* if one believes that in order for a sentence to be true, there needs to be a certain kind of correspondence between the semantic structure of the sentence and the 'meta-physical structure' of reality. One might think that the view defended here is anti-Tractarian, since it allows that a sentence like 'There are Fs' can be true even if reality doesn't contain any Fs. But the situation is more nuanced. With respect to the ordinary language, L , the view is anti-Tractarian. With respect to the the privileged language, L^* , however, the view is Tractarian. Rayo (MS., p.12) calls this a *moderate* form of Tractarianism.)

The account of paraphrase we're working with thus seems to support the thesis that adequate paraphrases will preserve not only truth-value but truth-condition. Accordingly, if the fictional anti-realist maintains that (τ^*) is an adequate paraphrase of (τ) , she'll also be committed to holding that those sentences have the same truth-value.

4.2.3 Preservation of Meaning

Sameness of truth-condition, understood in the way I've suggested, is a coarse grained notion. That is, the picture of truth-conditions we're working with in effect assigns to each sentence a set of possible worlds and a sentence S is then said to be true at a world v iff v is a member of $\{w: S \text{ is true at } w\}$. But two sentences which share the same truth-condition and are true at exactly the same worlds often, it seems, differ in their respective meanings. Thus perhaps 'The Pacific Ocean contains H₂O' and 'The Pacific Ocean contains water' differ in their meaning even though any world which makes the one true is a world which makes the other true. Similarly, even if (I) and (I*) share a truth-condition, it's less than clear that they mean the same thing. So a question emerges: how finely grained is the notion of a paraphrase? Do good paraphrases have to share not only a truth-condition but also a meaning?

Opponents of paraphrase often think that paraphrases should be fine grained and preserve meaning. And van Inwagen (1985, p.421) complains about what he perceives as a paraphrasing attempt by Walton that even if the sentences "necessarily had the same truth value, I don't think it could be correct to say that the paired sentences had the same meaning." But this is in tension with what paraphrase strategists routinely say about their conceptions of the relationship between a paraphrasing sentence and the sentence it paraphrases.¹⁷ It is even in tension with some of the things van Inwagen himself says later on in *Material Beings*.

The translation-based account of paraphrases can accommodate the idea that paraphrases have to preserve meaning — we could just stipulate that good translations preserve meaning. But it's certainly not built into the account that a sentence and its translation have to share their meaning over and above their truth-conditions. And to see this, note that Quine, who clearly found an important role for translation, was deeply skeptical of the notion of meaning. But in the present context, I think we can put these thorny issues to one side. On top of being unclear whether we need a more fine-grained distinction than truth-conditions can offer us, it's a difficult question which criteria need to be met in order for to sentences to

¹⁷ Quine (1960, p.256), e.g., writes: "We do not claim synonymy. We do not claim to make clear and explicit what the users of the unclear expression had unconsciously in mind all along. We do not expose hidden meanings, as the words 'analysis' and 'explication' would suggest; We fix on the particular functions of the unclear expression that make it worth troubling about, and then devise a substitute, clear and couched in terms to our liking, that fills those functions."

have the same meaning.¹⁸ Moreover, I take it that preservation of truth-condition would be a significant result on its own whether or not we think it's too coarse-grained. Thus, for the sake of discussion, I will spare further thoughts about whether paraphrases have to preserve meaning.

4.2.4 Systematicity

Even if (τ^*) and (τ) share the same truth-condition, however, the paraphrase owes us more. For even if the paraphraser can offer a translation for a particular sentence, we want to be able to paraphrase any arbitrary sentence that constitutes talk about fictional entities. That is, we want a more general story about how we eliminate talk of fictional characters, and showing how it might be done in a single case, or even a dozen, is at best a step towards something bigger and better.

One strategy that the paraphraser might pursue in order to meet this generality constraint is to show that her translation manual can be defined *recursively*. Such a recursive definition will guarantee generality, but it has another significant advantage: this way the paraphraser can actually prove that her strategy delivers the result we expect it to deliver, namely that we'll get an adequate innocent translation no matter which unkosher sentence we plug in. After all, a recursive specification of how we generate the paraphrases would give us a method of taking an unkosher sentence and generating an innocent paraphrase by grinding through the recursive clauses.

Demanding such a recursive specification, however, might be thought to demand too much. For instance, perhaps the paraphraser will argue that all that really matters is that there is a function which maps sentences concerning fictional characters to sentences which don't. Whether or not such a function can be characterized by a recursive definition, the thought goes, is a separate issue. But whether or not we demand a recursive definition — and as I intimated above, there are good reasons to think that the paraphraser would be in a better position if she could give us a definition of this sort — the mere demand that her paraphrases cover all the cases is enough to cast doubt on the viability of the strategy I suggested earlier. All we've got so far is a way to paraphrase the sentence 'There are fictional characters', and even if we can see how this story might be extended

¹⁸ For an overview, see Künne (2003, pp.42-8).

to cover some other cases — perhaps ‘The fictional character Holmes exists’ can be paraphrased in terms of Doyle’s quasi-referential use of the name ‘Holmes’ for instance — it’s difficult to see how to extend the account to cover all of the things we say about fictional characters. Thus we say that Holmes is more famous than any real detective and that some of the characters who appear in *Harry Potter* are better developed than others. *Perhaps* there are things we can say, but the point remains that the paraphrase strategy we’ve been considering will only be viable if it can be extended to cover these cases and others in a pretty natural way.

The generality constraint, then, raises serious doubts over the possibility of paraphrasing away talk of fictional characters in the manner suggested. Even if we could develop a principled extension of the proposal, there’s a further worry which van Inwagen (1977, p.303) develops. In order to appreciate the worry, consider a paraphraser who, in order to eliminate talk of fictional characters, introduces new primitive vocabulary into her idiolect. Thus, she stipulates that the sentence

- (2) There are characters in some 19th-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18th-century novel,

translates into her language as the sentence

- (2*) The class of 19th-century novels *dwelphs* the class of 18th-century novels.

As van Inwagen notes, there is “a certain trivial sense” in which introducing this ‘dwelph’ device works. The paraphraser successfully abjures talk of fictional characters by introducing a new primitive predicate that allows her to stipulate that (2) and (2*) share their truth-conditions. But van Inwagen worries that this procedure doesn’t respect the logical features of the original sentence. Thus, (2) entails:

- (3) Every female character in any 18th-century novel is such that there is some character in some 19th-century novel who is presented with a greater wealth of physical detail that she is,

And the problem is that it’s unclear how to translate (3) with the help of ‘dwelph’. It looks more like the paraphraser will have to introduce a new primitive, e.g. ‘praph’. She then stipulates that (3) gets translated as

(3*) The class of 18th-century novels *paraphs* the class of 19th-century novels.

But (3*) is not a logical consequence of (2*) and since the newly introduced predicates are primitive, there's little hope that the paraphraser can introduce a bridging condition that tells us why (3*) follows from (2*) despite first glance appearances. Thus this paraphrasing strategy does not respect the logical relations that hold between the sentences that quantify over fictional entities. And in order to rule out such paraphrase strategies, van Inwagen tells us that "an adequate paraphrase must not be such as to leave us without an account of the logical consequences of... the paraphrased sentences" (1977, p.304).

van Inwagen's point, I take it, is that the paraphrase strategist must not only ensure that the generality constraint is met, but must also ensure that logical consequences in the paraphrased language line up with logical consequences in the paraphrasing language. But I think there is a further point we can make against the proposal van Inwagen considers, a point which van Inwagen doesn't clearly identify. For in essence, the introduction of expressions like 'dwelph' and 'praph' achieves a reduction of ontological commitment only by increasing the primitive expressions of the paraphrasing language. And in this sense, we basically have an exchange of ontology in favour of ideology. Moreover, it seems like the paraphrastic proposal van Inwagen considers is going to need lots of primitive ideology in order to meet the generality constraint.

Now, if the paraphraser is to defend her proposal, it's not enough to show that her paraphrase strategy can be applied across the board even if it could be done so as to ensure that van Inwagen's logical constraint is met. For she'd also need to show that it's better to increase ideology in the manner she proposes rather than increase ontology in the manner proposed by fictional realists. And it's worth remembering that ideological commitments are theoretical costs.

Moreover, the procedure of introducing new vocabulary into one's language trades ideology for ontology, i.e. by reduction of ontological commitments is achieved by increasing the primitive vocabulary. But increasing your ideology is a theoretical cost too, and the theoretical costs associated with an increase in one's ideology need to be balanced against an increase in one's ontology. And the point that the paraphraser is going to witness a careless ideological explosion is, I think, what's in van Inwagen's mind when he asks:

[W]hy should anyone bother to try to construct such paraphrases? It would probably be very difficult to do this, and the paraphrases would probably be long and messy. (1977, p.304)

In one sense, the rhetoric here is misleading. The paraphraser's motivation for constructing her paraphrases is clear: she wants to avoid being committed to an ontology of fictional characters. And that, it seems, is a pretty good explanation of why someone would bother to try to construct the paraphrases. Neither is the complaint that the paraphrases would be long and messy particularly persuasive. But one set against the ideological commitments that the paraphraser incurs, van Inwagen's worry begins to make more sense. We don't only want a proposal to avoid commitment to fictional characters, but we also want the resulting theory to be *better* than fictional realism. The decrease in ontology of the paraphraser's theory might weigh in her view. But that may well be outweighed if her theory has a crazy amount of ideology. In this sense, the mere fact that the paraphrases can be given would not automatically show that the paraphraser wins against her realist rival. She also needs to show that her theory is less costly than rival realist theories. And the point is that this cost-benefit comparison has both ontological and ideological dimensions.

To sum up, there are broadly three aspects to the demand that paraphrase strategy must be systematic. Firstly, the paraphrases must be general: the paraphraser must show that her proposal can be extended to cover all the cases that we want it to cover. Secondly, the paraphrases must respect logical structure: the paraphraser must show that consequences in the paraphrased language line up neatly with consequences in the paraphrasing language. Finally, the overall theory offered by the paraphrase strategist must be shown to be better than rival realist theories: the paraphraser must show that any decrease in ontology is not outweighed by an increase in ideology. And van Inwagen's point, I take it, is that when we're considering proposals which try to paraphrase away talk of fictional characters, the proponents of such approaches have their work cut out once we demand systematicity in these three ways.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the notion of paraphrase and seen the role it plays within the Quinean picture of ontology. Again, I stress that the account of paraphrase I have offered — based as it is on a number of contentious views in the philosophy of language — is intended to be a model. But at the same time, I hope to have made it clear that it isn't enough to just appeal to 'paraphrases' without any detailed conception of what paraphrases are, and I think it's also clear that giving a detailed account of paraphrase will inevitably force one to be just as committal in the philosophy of language as the proponent of the translation-based account.

The translation-based approach to paraphrase that I have offered makes a number of predictions: it predicts that paraphrases will preserve both truth-values and truth-conditions, for instance. But we have also seen that there are a number of other constraints that are typically placed on the project of paraphrasing away talk of dubious entities. For instance, the paraphrases must be *systematic* and the ideological costs of paraphrasing away talk of Fs must not outweigh the ontological costs of embracing an ontology which includes Fs.

These two constraints, as we have seen, raise serious doubts about the viability of paraphrasing away talk of fictional entities. For one thing, even if it's reasonably easy to see how we might paraphrase simple claims like 'Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character' in terms of quasi-referential uses of the name 'Holmes', it's far from clear that this kind of strategy can be made systematic and extended to cover the whole range (or at least a significant range) of sentences concerning fictional entities. Moreover, and for another thing, it's far from clear that the proposal can be extended without incurring massive ideological commitments. And it's these worries, I think, that lie at the heart of van Inwagen's worry that the paraphrases offered by the anti-realist will inevitably be 'long and messy'.

Where does this leave us? Well, what certainly hasn't been established is that there is *no* systematic and attractive method for paraphrasing away talk of fictional entities. But the outlook doesn't look particularly good, and the next chapter will examine the prospects for an approach to ontology that is based upon the thought that the paraphrastic strategy is misguided, and that we shouldn't be trying to offer a semantical reduction of talk of fictional entities, but rather should

be trying to offer a reduction that is distinctively metaphysical in character.

Chapter 5

Grounding Fiction

NOW is a good time to take stock of what has been argued for so far in this thesis. In chapter 2, I demonstrated the resilience of fictional realism, by means of showing how a number of prominent objections to realist proposals can be overcome. In particular, I argued that the fictional realist can make sense of the intuition that fictions are about their characters, and that the notorious question of how to interpret negative existentials within a realist framework can be answered. But even if arguments *against* fictional realism are not easy to come by, there's a question of what can be said in favour of such views. And as we saw in chapter 3, a Quinean case can be made in defence of fictional realism, based on the idea that quantification over fictional entities is indispensable to our best literary theories. Moreover, even if we waive the worry that this Quinean argument for realism over-generates, it's doubtful whether the anti-realist can successfully pursue the project of paraphrasing away talk about fictional entities in a systematic and attractive way. But since paraphrasing away unwanted talk is the main strategy offered to the anti-realist in the Quinean metaontological setting, the anti-realist begins to look as though she is running out of options.

The interim conclusion we seem to have reached is thus that if we're forced to choose from the palate of options that Quine offers us, then fictional realism appears to be a disappointing end result. (Disappointing, at least, for those of us who aren't comfortable embracing an ontology of fictional entities.) And so one radical move available to the anti-realist at this point is to abandon the Quinean framework that's been assumed so far. It's worth emphasizing that taken this rad-

ical step won't be to everyone's tastes: after all, some have thought that if Quine's rules are not followed, obscurity, unclarity, and wishful thinking will inevitably result. And in any case, if we reject the Quinean framework, the question is: what would we replace it with? Even the anti-Quinean needs to give us a systematic and principled way of doing ontology. As we shall see, however, a growing number of philosophers have sought to find room for an approach to ontology that stands opposed to Textbook Quineanism. My goal in this chapter is thus to assess the merits of the shared approach that these philosophers defend, and to consider how it might be applied within the context of the debate about fictional characters. In addition, I will also assess the question of how radical a departure from Quinean orthodoxy is required in order to make room for a viable anti-realist account of fictional entities. As we shall see, my suspicion is that the Quinean framework does not have to be rejected as completely and thoroughly as some philosophers seem to think.

5.1 From Quine to Fine

In this section, I shall introduce an approach to ontological inquiry which has been gaining popularity in the recent literature.¹ The central idea behind this approach is that there is a way of explaining that is distinctively metaphysical in character, and this subsequently opens up the possibility that even if talk of tables, sets, or fictional characters cannot be paraphrased away, we might be able to show that truths about such things can be grounded in truths about other things. That is, though we might have to forgo a semantic reduction, the availability of a metaphysical reduction remains. In a sense, this idea isn't too controversial: many of those who have thought that supervenience should play a central role in ontology and metaphysics can be seen as trying to provide metaphysical reductions. As we shall see, however, supervenience might have been a step in the right direction, but it was a wrong step in the right direction.

¹ The prominence of this approach is usually traced to the influence of Kit Fine (2001, 2005, 2009). Cameron (2009), Dorr (2005), Melia (2005), Schaffer (2009), Sider (2009, forthcoming), and Williams (2010) defend related views.

5.1.1 Supervenience: Quine *vs.* Armstrong

To see how we might make room for an approach to ontology that departs from that of the Textbook Quinean, recall the passage I quoted earlier in which Quine explains why he thinks that the language of physics has a special status. Here it is again:

The answer is not that everything worth saying can be translated into the technical vocabulary of physics; not even that all good science can be translated into that vocabulary. The answer is rather this: nothing happens in the world, not the flutter of an eyelid, not the flicker of a thought, without some redistribution of microphysical states. (1981, p98.)

As I noted in earlier, what Quine gives us here is close to a supervenience claim: that there is no change without physical change. And it's this idea — that the physical facts provide a base upon which everything else supervenes — that leads Quine to the conclusion that the language of physics is privileged. But notice that though Quine explicitly denies that the specialness of physics is rooted in the idea that everything that's worth saying can be said in the language of physics, he does endorse a startling semantical claim: that everything that's worth saying has a translation in physically acceptable language. That is, what Quine is denying is just that the language of physics is special *because* such a translational claim holds. But that's clearly not to say that Quine denies the relevant translational claim: he doesn't. And such a claim, as we've seen, lies at the heart of his translate-and-deflate account of paraphrase, an account which in turn plays a central role in his approach to ontology.

The claim that everything that's worth saying can be said in the language of physics, though reflected in Quine's wider philosophy of language, doesn't follow from his supervenience claim, however. It's one thing to say that all facts supervene on the physical facts, and quite another to say that everything can be expressed in a physically acceptable language. Indeed, the supervenience claim could be maintained even if it were to turn out that biological, psychological or, for that matter, literary claims lacked translations into the language of physical states and properties. That's to say that Quine's translatability claim goes far beyond the

supervenience claim he begins with. Indeed, and as David Lewis (1983, p.358) points out, supervenience offers a “stripped-down” form of reductionism and is “unencumbered by... claims of translatability.”

There is a more general point here: it’s one thing to think that a language is special because it accurately describes a set of subvenient facts, and quite another to think that the facts which supervene on those subvenient facts can be expressed in that special language. And now suppose that we were to grant the conclusion that began to emerge in the previous chapter: that talk of fictional characters resisted translation into the privileged language, whether that’s the language of physics or something else. Given that the supervenience claim is independent of the translational claim, this wouldn’t force us to deny that facts about fictional characters supervened on facts which can be stated without mention of such things. For example, for all that’s been said so far, fixing the facts about authors and audiences might itself fix the facts about fictional characters, even though claims about fictional characters cannot be paraphrased in terms of claims concerning authors and audiences. Indeed, such a supervenience claim seems attractive: it is, after all, quite odd to think that truths about fictional characters float free of truths about authors and their authorial actions. But the present point is that this shouldn’t be confused with the claim that claims about the former can be translated by claims about the latter.

If the B-facts supervene on the A-facts, then there is an intuitive sense in which the B-facts depend on the A-facts: as Kripke’s (1972, p.153) metaphor has it, fixing the A-facts is *all God has to do* to fix the B-facts. And so in the present context, the thought is that all God has to do to ensure that Holmes exists is to fix the facts about authors, audiences and the rest. Thus if we accept an ontology that includes the entities that are involved in the subvenient facts, the thought goes, we’ve already got the ingredients out of which we can ensure the existence of Holmes. Indeed, as we might want to put it, we already had Holmes to begin with.

It’s this thought — the thought that supervenient entities are “nothing over and above” subvenient entities — that is behind David Armstrong’s infamous idea of an *ontological free lunch*, something that is ontologically harmless because it is nothing over and above things that are already in our ontology. As he puts it in *A World of States of Affairs*:

It will be used as a premiss in this work that whatever supervenes or, as we can also say, is entailed or necessitated, in this way, is not something ontologically additional to the subvenient, or necessitating, entity or entities. What supervenes is no addition of being. (1997, p.12)

Thus one might think that if the existence of tables supervenes on the existence of simples arranged tablewise then tables are ontological free lunches, and if the existence of fictional characters supervenes on the existence of authors and audiences, then fictional characters are ontological free lunches too.²

These Armstrongian notions are not very well understood, however. As van Inwagen (1994, p.210) points out, a slippery expression like “nothing over and above” might be employed regularly by philosophers, “but what it means is never explained by its employers”. For instance, even if one thought that a table was nothing over and above the simples out of which it is composed, the view is not that the table is identical to the simples: this is not the idea that composition is identity. But if the table is not identical to the simples, then it’s something *in addition* at least in the numerical quantitative sense. What remains to be seen is what non-metaphorical content Armstrong can give to the thought that the table is no addition in being.

Still, there was something attractive to the thought that if the facts about tables or fictional characters supervened on facts about simples or authors and audiences, then there is some sense in which embracing an ontology which includes the former shouldn’t be thought to be problematic, at least given that it’s acceptable to embrace an ontology which includes the latter. But whilst I think there is something close to this thought which can be given sufficient content as to make it serviceable — more of which in a moment — I think it’s also clear that mere supervenience isn’t what’s really motivating Armstrong’s metaphors.

To see why, note that supervenience is usually cashed out in modal terms. In philosophy of mind, for instance, the usual gloss on the idea that the mental supervenes on the physical is that there *can’t* be a difference in the mental facts

² Lewis (1991, p.87), e.g., tells us that “mereology is innocent” because of the supervenience of fusions on their proper parts.

without a difference in the physical facts.³ And since the ‘can’t’ here is meant in a metaphysical way, the thought is that no two possible worlds in which the same physical facts hold can differ in their mental facts.⁴ But now consider the following example, drawn from Kit Fine (1994). Intuitively, the existence of impure sets supervenes on the existence of their members: fix the facts about which objects exist in w and you thereby fix the facts about which impure sets exist in w . But now remember that the existence of an impure set intuitively entails the existence of its members and note that this means (given the original supervenience claim) that there are no two worlds which agree about which impure sets exist but disagree about which objects exist. In this setting, the existence of an impure set not only supervenes on the existence of its members, but the existence of its members supervenes on the existence of the target impure set. While this result might not harm the usefulness of the notion of supervenience, it does threaten the connection between supervenience and ontological free lunches. For — given Armstrong’s picture — we should say that *both* impure sets and their members are ontological free lunches. It’s not just that Paul’s singleton is nothing over and above Paul: Paul is nothing over and above his singleton either.

Now, remember the point that if the B-facts supervene on the A-facts, then there is a sense in which the B-facts are dependent on the A-facts. And it’s really the dependency that seduces us into making the kind of ‘free lunch’ metaphors that Armstrong finds so congenial. The Finean example can then be seen as highlighting two points about why the kind of dependence associated with supervenience isn’t up to the task. Firstly, the example forces us to remember that the kind of dependence supervenience supports is purely modal: supervenient facts depend on subvenient facts in so far as the former are necessitated by the latter. But second, the kind of dependency claim that we’re after is more fine-grained: even if Paul is modally dependent on his singleton, there is still an intuitive sense in which Paul’s singleton depends on Paul and not the other way round. So even if Armstrong was right to think that the dependence of one object on another had ontological con-

³ Davidson, for instance tells us that “mental characteristics are in some sense dependent, or supervenient, on physical characteristics. Such supervenience might be taken to mean that there cannot be two events alike in all physical respects but differing in some mental respect, or that an object cannot alter in some mental respect without altering in some physical respect” (1980, p.214).

⁴ I’m glossing over complications raised by distinctions between different kinds of supervenience claim — global vs. local, e.g. — but I hope that’s acceptable in context. See Kim (1984, 1987) for discussion of the differences.

sequences, he misdiagnosed which kind of dependency relation was the important one.

5.1.2 From Supervenience to Grounding

The moral of the previous section was that even if the fictional anti-realist jettisons Quine's paraphrastic project, she shouldn't rest content, even initially, with the thought that facts about fictional characters supervene on facts about authors, audiences, and the rest. Supervenience is a step in the right direction, to be sure, but what's really important seems to be a more fine-grained notion of dependence.

Returning to the case of the relationship between the fact that there are tables and the fact that there are simples arranged tablewise, it's natural to try to signal the dependence of the former on the latter by saying things like:

The table exists *in virtue of* the particles being arranged tablewise

The table exists *because* the particles are arranged tablewise

There are two points to bear in mind about claims such as these. In a sense, the first point highlights why supervenience was a step in the right direction and the second highlights why it was a wrong step in the right direction.

The first point is that the notion of explanatory dependence that is relevant to these claims is neither causal nor conceptual, but rather metaphysical. But what does this amount to? Following Kit Fine (forthcoming), the distinctively metaphysical nature of the dependence can be characterized by noting that if one fact, q , holds in virtue of another fact, p , then intuitively it should be impossible for p to obtain without q obtaining too. That is, when q holds in virtue of p , p should necessitate q . And we can then say that an 'in virtue of' claim signals a metaphysical kind of dependence whenever the necessitation is metaphysical, i.e. whenever it is metaphysically impossible for the explaining fact to hold without the fact explained holding too.

The kind of dependency associated with supervenience is metaphysical: if one fact supervenes on another, then there is a corresponding sense in which the subvenient fact metaphysically necessitates the supervenient one. But it cannot be *only* supervenience that's at issue here. For we cannot conclude that one fact holds in virtue of another just because the former is metaphysically necessitated by the

latter. As Karen Bennett and Brian McLaughlin (2005, §3.5) emphasize, supervenience is not a relation of metaphysical priority: the supervenience of one thing on another doesn't guarantee the corresponding claim of metaphysical dependence.⁵ Whilst the fact that the Earth has one moon metaphysically necessitates that 3 times 3 equals 9, it's hardly plausible to suppose that the latter fact is true in virtue of the former. And whilst the fact that the Earth has one moon metaphysically necessitates that the Earth has one moon, we can't conclude that the Earth has one moon in virtue of the fact that the Earth has one moon.

The second point is thus that even if the claim that the table exists in virtue of the particles being arranged tablewise *entails* that the existence of particles arranged tablewise necessitates the existence of tables, it's important to realize that any ontological significance that we may come to associate with such a dependence claim isn't to be traced to this entailment. That is, the kind of explanatory dependency we're looking for is *hyper-intensional* in the sense that it allows us to draw distinctions that are more fine-grained than those that can be drawn in purely modal terms. So even if the fact that Paul's singleton exists necessitates the existence of Paul, it may still be false that Paul exists because of the existence of Paul's singleton, at least when 'because' is understood in the relevant metaphysical sense. What we need, as Fine puts it, is not only a necessitation of one fact by another, but also a *determination* of one fact by another.

I now want to introduce some more Finean terminology.⁶ When q holds in virtue of p in the relevant metaphysical sense, we say both that q is *grounded* in p , and that p *grounds* q . This new terminology is useful because 'in virtue of' doesn't always express a metaphysical form of dependence. Fine concedes, for example, that some 'in virtue of' claims can express dependency relations that are best understood in terms of physical or normative dependence. Thus we might say that an object is moving in virtue of the fact that some external force is acting on it, but the strongest modal connection that holds between these two facts is physical necessitation rather than metaphysical necessitation. The term 'ground',

⁵ As Fine (2001, p.11) points out, problems emerge even if we limit the application of supervenience to the contingent domain: "Velocity at an instant, for example, supervenes on velocity over an interval and vice versa, and yet we cannot say, without circularity, that each reduces to the other." For more discussion of these sorts of examples, see Kim (1993, pp.144-6) and McLaughlin (1995).

⁶ See Fine (2001, §5) for discussion.

by contrast, is intended to be univocal: it always picks out the target form of metaphysical dependence.

Though claims about what grounds what are always to be understood as signalling a metaphysical dependence of one thing on another, we need to distinguish between *full* grounding and *partial* grounding.⁷ To see why, note that we want to make room for the idea that one fact may be grounded by a plurality of other facts. A classic example is that of a conjunction. The fact that there are tables and there are birds is, intuitively, grounded in the fact that there are tables and grounded in the fact that there are birds. But the relevant notion of grounding here is that of partial grounding: the fact that $p \wedge q$ obtains might be partially grounded in the fact that p obtains, but p doesn't fully ground $p \wedge q$: for that job we need q too. This of course has a direct analogue if we change the terminology and talk of metaphysical explanation rather than grounding: thus we might partially explain why a conjunction is true by citing the truth of one of its conjuncts, but this is clearly inadequate if it is taken as a full or complete explanation. But though partial grounding should be distinguished from full grounding, it's the latter notion which seems to be the primary one. And to see this, just remember that there is supposed to be a modal connection between one fact and its ground: the grounding fact is meant to metaphysically necessitate the grounded fact. This entailment will clearly only go through if grounding is understood to be full grounding.

It's all too easy for me to imagine that you find the notion of grounding unclear. *What exactly*, you may be thinking, *does "grounding" mean?* Well, like Fine, I doubt that the concept of grounding can be analyzed or defined in other terms: the concept of ground is an *ideological primitive*. But though this means that I won't be able to respond to worries about the concept of ground by giving an explicit definition of the term, we should resist the idea that this means that the concept of ground is somehow inexplicable.

The point here is that philosophical concepts like that of grounding are oftentimes best explicated in terms of the role they play within the theories which deploy them. Thus, Theodore Sider (forthcoming, p.12) remarks:

Philosophers sometimes slip into a magical-grasp picture of understanding. An opponent wields a crucial term. She will not be bullied

⁷ Fine (2001, p.15).

into equating it with some combination of preferred terms. An inward search for a mystical mental state of UNDERSTANDING comes up empty. The opponent is pronounced confused or obscure... Philosophical terms *can* be unclear: when they have been given no clear theoretical role to play. Philosophy is not just the building of theories on previously existing concepts. We also build new concepts, by building theories that use them.

So rather than trying in vain to explicate the notion of ground via explicit definition, perhaps we're better off trying to explicate the concept by characterizing the role that grounding is meant to play within our theorizing.⁸

The first point here is that though grounding can't be given a purely modal analysis, grounding is at least connected to modality. Remember that if one fact (fully) grounds another, it follows that the former fact metaphysically necessitates the latter, and if one set of facts (fully) ground another set of facts, it follows that the latter supervene on the former. In this way, grounding concepts aren't independent from modal ones, and part of our grip on the notion of ground comes from the way in which ground questions are connected to modal ones.

Grounding is also connected to the concept of reduction, and again this connection can be seen via the relationship between grounding and modality. For remember that the view we're developing is based on the thought that facts about fictional characters can be reduced to facts that don't involve Holmes and his ilk. And the moral that we're drawing from the failings of the paraphrastic project is precisely that the target reduction shouldn't be thought of as being some sort of semantic reduction but rather as being a distinctively metaphysical reduction. Reduction by way of supervenience sets us off in the right direction, but as we've seen it cannot deliver us all that we want because supervenience is an intensional relation and won't let us draw the kind of hyperintensional distinctions we want to draw. But that's not to say that Armstrong (e.g.) went wrong when he thought that supervenience was important. Rather, it's to say that supervenience is impor-

⁸ This is exactly the strategy which Lewis (1983, 1984, 1986) pursues in order to explicate the concept of naturalness. He never gives us an explicit definition of the concept — he's happy to accept it as a working primitive — but he does his best to explicate the concept by giving us paradigm examples of how it applies (being blue is more natural than being grue, e.g.), telling us how it relates to other concepts (natural properties are intrinsic, e.g.), and specifying its role in wider theorizing (natural properties are reference magnets, e.g.).

tant only to the extent that it *tracks* relations of ground. So here is another aspect of the notion of ground: relations of ground are what are tracked by reductive relations of supervenience and supervenience relations are reductive to the extent that they track relations of ground.⁹

In addition to relating grounding to supervenience and reduction, we can also flesh out the concept by specifying its formal features.¹⁰ In line with the literature (see, e.g., Fine (2001), Schaffer (2009) and Rosen (2010)), we shall take grounding (both partial and full) to be *irreflexive*, *asymmetric*, and *transitive*.¹¹ That is:

- $\neg\exists p(p \text{ grounds } p)$
- $\forall p\forall q(\text{if } p \text{ grounds } q, \text{ then } q \text{ doesn't ground } p)$
- $\forall p\forall q\forall r(\text{if } p \text{ grounds } q \text{ and } q \text{ grounds } r, \text{ then } p \text{ grounds } r)$

That grounding has these formal features constrains any story we might give about what grounds what. For instance, since grounding is irreflexive and transitive, we know that p cannot ground any fact q which is itself grounded by something which grounds p : there can be no ‘grounding circles’. We also know that we cannot conclude that p grounds q just because we know that p grounds something which is equivalent to q . This applies even for very strict notions of equivalence. For instance, the proposition that Paul exists is metaphysically equivalent to the proposition that Paul’s singleton exists, but the fact that Paul exists cannot ground itself even though it grounds the fact that Paul’s singleton exists. Similarly, the proposition that snow is white is conceptually equivalent to the proposition that it is true that snow is white, but the fact that snow is white cannot ground itself even though it grounds the fact that it is true that snow is white. Finally, p is logically equivalent to $\neg\neg p$, but the fact that p cannot ground itself even though it grounds $\neg\neg p$.

Notice that we already have a relatively rich conception of the notion of ground: we have intuitive examples of how it applies, a story about how it relates to other notions like supervenience, and an account of its formal features.

⁹ Compare Kim (1994, p.60).

¹⁰ For more on this, see Fine (forthcoming) and Schnieder (MS.).

¹¹ That is, grounding is *typically* thought of as being transitive, but note that Jenkins (2011) raises some doubts about the idea that grounding is irreflexive and Trogdon (MS.) raises some doubts about the idea that grounding is transitive.

We've specified part of the job description, but we also need to say something about the job itself. This leads us to the question of how the concept of ground is deployed within our wider theorizing, and within the ontological project more generally. In particular, we want to know how the anti-realist can deploy the notion of ground within the context of her own account.

5.2 Explanations for Fictional Anti-realists

With the idea of grounding in place, the goal of this section is two-fold. It's to show, firstly, how truths about fictional characters can be explained by appeal to facts which don't involve such things and, secondly, to explain why this strategy brings the fictional anti-realist closer to her goal of avoiding an ontology of fictional entities. Before we start with offering explanations for particular facts about fictional characters, let me introduce four principles that will guide us.¹²

The anti-realist rejects an ontology of fictional entities, and — given that her rejection is stronger than mere suspension of judgement — will thus accept:

(SPARSITY) Our ontology contains no fictional characters

But since one of her key motivations is to give an account that is non-revisionary, she will also subscribe to another principle:

(MODESTY) Many ordinary claims about fictional characters are true

If the anti-realist is attracted to the idea of incorporating grounding in her theorizing, then she believes that we don't need to accept fictional entities into our ontology if facts about fictional characters can be explained in terms of other things. Thus she's optimistic that the following holds:

(EXPLANATION) True claims about fictional characters can be fully explained solely by the existence and properties of other entities (i.e. not fictional characters)

It then follows from (EXPLANATION):

¹² These principles are drawn from deRosset (2010), though my formulations are slightly different. Compare von Solodkoff (2011).

(PRIORITY) The explaining facts do not involve fictional characters

We may aptly call a fictional anti-realist who embraces this principles a (fictional) *priority theorist*.¹³

5.2.1 The Explanations

It is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis to give explanations for each and every truth about fictional characters. Indeed, it makes sense to focus on examples from external talk about fictional characters. The rationale for focusing on these cases is that they are the ones that have been thought to motivate fictional realism. If the priority theorist can show how the sample cases can be explained without the help of fictional entities then it looks as though fictional realism is undermotivated.

To begin, note that two priority theorists could well disagree about what grounds facts about fictional entities and, hence, two priority theorists could disagree about which entities (and which features of those entities) figure in the facts that do the explaining. Thus one priority theorist might argue that what grounds facts about fictional entities are facts about the interpretations of fictions.¹⁴ But in the context of the previous chapters, a more natural proposal emerges, one which identifies the grounds in terms of what authors do when they produce fictions (and, maybe, how the audience responds too). Why do I call this a natural proposal? Recall from earlier chapters that amongst the different species of fictional realism it's the creationist views — those which maintain that fictional characters are actually created by their authors — that come closest to what seems to be the ordinary conception of fictions. They are the least revisionary of the realist views.

So what could the explanations of facts concerning fictional characters in terms of authors and their acts look like? Let's look at some examples and start with a simple common sense truth: that there are fictional characters.

My strategy, as I intimated above, is to look to what creationists have typically said about such cases and piggy-back my priority-theoretic explanations on these creationist ideas. Thus, e.g., Thomasson suggests that (merely) fictional characters exist because authors use names (or descriptions) in certain ways when

¹³ I'll omit of the prefix 'fictional' in the following, as it should be clear from the context when I'm having this particular priority theoretical view in mind.

¹⁴ This view has been indicated to me by Ross Cameron in personal conversation.

producing fictions. Of course, when Doyle introduced the name ‘Holmes’ he was *pretending* to refer to a real person even though there was no such person. Let’s say that in using the name ‘Holmes’ in this pretend way Doyle was acting in a *quasi-referential* manner.¹⁵ In the next chapter, I’ll examine exactly what account of fictional characters Thomasson builds on this foundation. But it should be clear how it might be appealed to in the present context. Thus, when faced with the question of what grounds the fact that there are fictional characters, our Thomasson-inspired proposal predicts the following:

- (1) There are fictional characters because authors use names/descriptions in a quasi-referential manner when producing fictions, pretending to refer to or describe real things.

One thing that might strike you immediately about this explanation is that it’s given in terms of authors and their activities, when it seems that an explanation in terms of fictions is so much easier available:

- (2) There are fictional characters because there are fictions according to which there are characters.¹⁶

And so one might naturally ask: which explanation is the right one?

This question is a bad one. There is no reason to suppose that there is only one way of explaining the fact that there are fictional characters. And to see that just note that it’s perfectly acceptable for the priority theorist to try to explain why there are fictions according to which there are characters by appeal to the fact that authors use names/descriptions in a quasi-referential way when writing fictions. Given the transitivity of the grounding relation, this straightforwardly predicts that the first explanation entails the second: there is no competition between the two, and my aim here isn’t to defend my explanations as the being the *only* explanations that are available, just to establish the availability of *some* explanation that delivers what the priority theorist was after.

From the explanation of the basic fact that there are fictional characters we can now build up to more complex cases. To begin, note that some fictions do

¹⁵ I borrow the term ‘quasi-reference’ from Moltmann (MS.a).

¹⁶ Sainsbury (2010, p.150) offers this as a way of paraphrasing the claim that there are fictional characters.

feature real life people: Napoleon is a character in Woody Allen's *Love and Death*, for instance. This in turn gives rise to the distinction between fictional characters and *merely* fictional characters: Napoleon and Holmes might both be fictional characters, but only Holmes is merely fictional. Our earlier explanation covers the general case, but it's easy to extend it to cover the more specific one:

- (3) There are merely fictional characters because authors use names/ descriptions in a purely quasi-referential manner when producing fictions

Where, roughly, an act of pretend reference is *purely* quasi-referential if the corresponding act of reference would have resulting in reference failure, and notice that we can say this because we're assuming that characters are created by authors. Before Doyle created Holmes — more of which in a moment — the name 'Holmes' didn't refer to anything, even on standard creationist views.

From the explanation of the quantificational fact that there are fictional characters, we can also obtain explanations for particular instances. What explains why Holmes is a fictional characters? The natural candidate is (3*):

- (3*) Holmes is a fictional character because an author used the name 'Holmes' in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction.

Moreover, the priority theorist will ground the fact that the fictional character Holmes exists in exactly the same way: the fictional character Holmes exists because an author used the name 'Holmes' in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction. And notice that even if other authors — writers of fan-fiction, say — use the name 'Holmes' in a quasi-referential way, it was Doyle who *first* used the name 'Holmes' in this manner when writing a fiction. This naturally suggests the following explanation of the fact that Holmes was created by Doyle:

- (4) Holmes was created by Doyle because Doyle was the first author to use the name 'Holmes' in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction¹⁷

¹⁷ Actually this needs refining because, obviously enough, someone else might have used the name 'Holmes' when writing a fiction. What that would show is that there were two characters who shared a name. This would force us to distinguish two characters, Holmes₁ and Holmes₂, and thereby distinguish two names, 'Holmes₁' and 'Holmes₂'. The point would then be that Doyle was the one who first used the name 'Holmes₂' when writing a fiction. For more discussion of this some problems that arises when it comes to giving a criterion of creation for fictional entities, see Brock (2010). Nothing I've said here is rendered problematic by Brock's objections to creationism.

So far, so good. But notice that we've so far only considered some relatively simple external facts about fictional characters. This is still significant: if these explanations are granted, we've shown how truths about fictional characters can be explained without mention of such things. Nonetheless, our explanatory project is still in baby shoes and trickier cases lie ahead.

Consider, for instance, truths expressed by impure external sentences, in the sense I introduced in chapter 1. In particular, consider the claim that Holmes is not only a fictional character, but a fictional detective. In this case, the fact that 'Holmes' was used by an author in a quasi-referential way isn't sufficient to explain why Holmes is a fictional detective. But the following explanation, which builds on (3), seems acceptable:

- (5) Holmes is a fictional detective because an author used 'Holmes' in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction, *F*, and according to *F*, Holmes a detective.

Similarly, the fact that Holmes is a fictional man or the fact that Hermione is a fictional wizard or the fact that the Cheshire Cat is a fictional cat can be explained by appeal to a mixture of facts concerning the quasi-referential acts of authors and the properties of the objects to which names like 'Holmes' and 'Hermione' fictionally refer. Though we've *used* the name 'Holmes' in the explanation, notice that we've done so within the scope of the fictional operator 'According to *F*' and I shall assume that there is an acceptable way to ground truths about what is fictionally the case. If you find the use of the fictional name really distracting, just plug in the kind of Fregean view mentioned in the opening chapter on which names in indirect contexts refer to their own senses or read 'According to *F*, Holmes is a detective' as 'According to *F*, the name 'Holmes' refers to a detective'. I hope this assumption is dialectically appropriate: as I stressed earlier, fictional realists don't tend to argue that 'metafictional' or 'critical' sentences like 'According to the *Holmes* stories, Holmes is a detective' are problematic for anti-realists. A more satisfying explanation would, I imagine, say something about what makes it fictional (in the relevant story) that the name 'Holmes' refers to a detective or what makes it fictional that the name 'Hermione' refers to a wizard. But how internal fictional truths should themselves be explained is an issue on which I

hope I can remain neutral on here.¹⁸

A popular passtime when engaging in talk about fiction is to draw comparisons between characters from different fictions. To give a sense of how such interfictional comparisons might be explained, consider the fact that Holmes is taller than Frodo. What explains why Holmes and Frodo stand in this relation? We already know how to explain the existence of the relata, so what remains to be explained is just the fact that Holmes stands in the taller-than relation to Frodo. And it is clear that this has something to do with the contents of their home fictions. Suppose, e.g., it's fictional (in the *Holmes* stories) that Holmes is 6ft tall and fictional (in *The Lord of the Rings*) that Frodo is 4ft tall. Then a natural way of explaining why Holmes is taller than Frodo suggests itself:

- (6) Holmes is taller than Frodo because an author used 'Holmes' in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction, F_1 , and an author used the name 'Frodo' in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction, F_2 , and according to F_1 , Holmes is 6ft tall, and according to F_2 , Frodo is 4ft tall.

And again, it's relatively easy to see how this form of explanation will extend to other cases.¹⁹

We don't only make comparisons between fictional characters: we like to get real characters involved too. That is, we make not only *intrafictional* comparisons (between characters in the same fiction) and *interfictional* comparisons (between characters in different fictions) but also *transfictional*; comparisons (between characters and real world things). It's easily seen how we can transform the last explanation in one that tells us why Holmes is taller than, say, Danny de Vito:

- (7) Holmes is taller than Danny de Vito because Danny de Vito is 5ft tall and an author used 'Holmes' in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction according to which Holmes is 6ft tall.

¹⁸ For classic discussions of fictional truth, see Lewis (1978) and Walton (1990). For an overview of the debate, see Woodward (2011). We'll come back to this issue in our discussion of Kendall Walton's (1990) account of fictional characters in the next chapter.

¹⁹ Cite Künne. Say something about cases where it's not clear numerical values can be given, e.g., Holmes is happier than Frodo because... and it's fictional that Holmes is very very happy and it's fictional that Frodo is less than very very happy.

You might worry about this explanation, for at least two reasons. One: why is the explanation couched in terms of Danny de Vito being 5ft tall rather than being *less than* 6ft tall? Two: what if the fiction doesn't settle Holmes' height?

The first worry is the bad one mentioned a moment ago. That Holmes is taller than Danny de Vito might have many good explanations, each of which is acceptable by the lights of the priority theorist. That is, that Danny de Vito is less than 6ft tall might be itself grounded in the fact that he is 5ft tall, and there is no need for me to choose one of the many explanations of why Holmes is taller than Danny de Vito as *the* explanation. As for the second worry, I concede that I'm *assuming* that Holmes is fictionally 6ft tall. But all that I really need is that Holmes is fictionally greater than n ft tall, where the value of n is given by de Vito's actual height. And it's plausible that even if the fiction doesn't tell us exactly how tall Holmes is, it certainly suggests us his height is greater than n . So once again, it seems that by appealing to the activities of authors, the contents of fictions, and the properties of real world things, we can give explanations of various facts about the relations that fictional characters stand in to each other and to non-fictional things.

Another range of cases are illustrated by claims like 'Holmes is a famous fictional detective' and 'Holmes is more famous than any real detective'. Such claims are typically presented by fictional realists as being resistant to anti-realist explanation. And maybe that's right if the anti-realist is constrained to give a semantic explanation, or a paraphrase. But on the present priority-theoretic view, we don't need to engage in the paraphrastic project; our explanations are meant to be metaphysical in character.

Let's forget Holmes for the moment and consider the claim that Obama is famous (in a certain community). Whatever one thinks about the *semantics* of such sentences, it seems clear that the fact that Obama is famous is grounded in facts concerning the members of the relevant community. But which facts? Mark Sainsbury (2009, p.137-8) hints at one answer to this when he tells us that we must take into account "the fact that for something to be famous is (and nothing more than) for it to be thought about in the right sort of way". This seems wrong to me. Even if lots of people think about God in the right sort of way, it seems odd to say that "God is famous" purely because of that. (More generally, the inference from 'Lots of people think about x ' to ' x is famous' sounds bad to my ear.) It

seems more natural to hold that for x to be famous in a community is for lots of people in that community to *know about* x . So a first explanatory idea would be that Obama is famous because lots of people know about Obama. Similarly, the thought would be that Holmes is famous because lots of people know about Holmes.

The question now becomes: what grounds the facts that lots of people know about Obama and Holmes? Sainsbury (2009, p.136) himself advocates a *propositional reduction* of “thinking about” which extends naturally to “knowing about”.²⁰ The thought here is that whilst a sentence like ‘Juan thinks about Obama’ looks relational insofar as it says that Juan stands in the ‘thinking about’ relation to Obama, we can give a propositional reduction of such relations. That is, Paul’s thinking about Obama is, for the propositionalist, reduced to Paul’s thinking *that* Obama is F, for some predicate ‘F’. If we go with this idea in the case of ‘knows about’, the idea would be that the fact that lots of people know about Obama gets reduced to the fact that lots of people know that Obama is F, for some predicate ‘F’. Similarly, the thought would be that the fact that lots of people know about Holmes is reducible to the fact that lots of people know that Holmes is F, for some predicate ‘F’.

I stress that the kind of propositional reductions I have in mind are neither syntactical, semantical nor conceptual reductions. They are *metaphysical* claims, claims about what grounds what. Sainsbury, by contrast, seems to think of propositionalism as giving a semantic reduction and thereby leaves himself open to the charge that such a semantic reduction doesn’t fit the linguistic data.²¹ Those arguments don’t, I think, work against the propositionalist reductions I am appealing to since I am doing metaphysics, not semantics.²²

Let’s consider how the propositionalist account plays out with respect to a concrete case. Suppose we want to explain why Holmes is famous. The present account tells us that Holmes is famous because lots of people know that Holmes is F, for some predicate ‘F’. Now, it’s conceivable that the relevant value of ‘F’ might vary: perhaps River knows that Holmes is a fictional detective, whereas Joaquin

²⁰ See also Sainsbury (2010).

²¹ Szabó (2003) and Forbes (2006) criticize propositionalism. See also Crane (2008) for an discussion of Sainsbury’s conception of ‘thinking about’ and its evolution.

²² For a discussion of the relationship between semantic theorizing and priority-theoretic (or ‘fundamentalist’) metaphysics, see von Solodkoff and Woodward (MS.).

knows that Holmes is a fictional man, for instance. But it seems clear that, as a matter of fact, it's widely known that Holmes is a fictional character. So this suggests the following explanation:

- (8) Holmes is famous because lots of people know that Holmes is a fictional character.

As far as it goes, this seems plausible.²³ But the explanation still talks about Holmes, so disrespects (PRIORITY), which told us that the facts which explain facts about Holmes and his ilk do not themselves involve fictional characters. So though (8) is a step in the right direction, the priority theorist needs to specify what grounds the fact that lots of people know that Holmes is a fictional character. And it's plausible, I think, that lots of people know that Holmes is a fictional character because lots of people know that according to the *Holmes*-stories, Holmes exists. And remember that I'm assuming that facts of *this* form are acceptable by the lights of the priority theorist. This gives us (8*):

- (8*) Holmes is famous because lots of people know that it's fictional that Holmes exists

Extended to a related case, we get the result that Holmes is a famous fictional detective because it's well known that it's fictional that Holmes is a detective. Again, I stress that these explanations are intended to be *metaphysical* reductions, specifications of what grounds what, rather than semantical reductions. So I do not claim that the explanation specifies anything like to 'what speakers mean' when they say that Holmes is famous. I claim only that Holmes' fame is *grounded* in the fact that it's fictional that Holmes exists.

A more complicated example of a similar sort is provided by the fact that Holmes is more famous than any real detective. What grounds this fact? Well the first thing to note is that one explanation of this fact is the following:

²³ Hang on — couldn't Holmes be famous even in a scenario where we had made a massive mistake and mistaken the *Holmes*-stories for non-fictional reports of real events? Maybe, but what's *responsible* for the truth of a claim isn't the same as what's *required* of reality for that claim to be true. (Compare: p grounds the truth of $p \vee q$ but the truth of $p \vee q$ doesn't require the truth of p .) Questions of ground, as I'm understanding them here, are questions of responsibility rather than requirement. I discuss this further in von Solodkoff (forthcoming).

- (9) Holmes is more famous than any real detective because Holmes is more famous than George Samuel Dougherty and Holmes is more famous than James McLevy, and Holmes is more famous than.... (continue in this way, for each real detective).

So what the priority theorist now needs to show is that each individual conjunct is grounded, i.e. that Holmes is more famous than Dougherty, and that Holmes is more famous than McLevy, and so on. And it's easy to see how this will go: we'll say that Holmes is more famous than McLevy because more people know about Holmes than know about McLevy, that is, because more people know that Holmes is F, for some predicate 'F', than know that McLevy is G, for some predicate 'G'. And it is true, after all, that there is no fact about McLevy that is more widely known than the fact that Holmes is a fictional detective. That is, there is no fact about Levy that is more widely known than the fact that it's fictional that Holmes is a detective.

The refined explanation of why Holmes is more famous than any real detective, then, looks like this:

- (9*) Holmes is more famous than any real detective because more people know that it's fictional that Holmes is a detective than know that George Samuel Dougherty is F (for any predicate 'F') and more people know that it's fictional that Holmes is a detective than know that James McLevy is F (for any predicate 'F'), and more people know that... (continue in this way, for each real detective).

Perhaps I was too quick in calling this an explanation. Of course, it's rather the sketch of what an explanation would look like, were I be able to list every real detective. Surely this could be done, but I understand if nobody is very interested in doing that. But this only means that no one is very interested in knowing the metaphysical grounds of the fact that Holmes is more famous than any real detective. If that leaves a faint feeling of non-satisfaction still, I urge you to bear in mind that what we're up to when giving the specific explanations that give us the metaphysical grounds of facts is very different from offering paraphrases or stating what has been said by the speaker even broadly construed.

I shall only consider one more example of how to give grounding explanations for facts about fictional entities, and the kind of example I have in mind is one that concerns interfictional identity. Consider the fact that Holmes appears in more than one novel. Drawing on (3) and the explanation why Holmes is a fictional character, you might initially think the following is a good candidate for the explanation of the interfictional fact:

- (10) Holmes appears in more than one story because an author used the name ‘Holmes’ in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction, F_1 and an author used the name ‘Holmes’ in a quasi-referential way when writing a fiction, F_2 , and $F_1 \neq F_2$.

But this won’t do, as it doesn’t establish that the two fictional characters are identical, only that two characters from two different fictions share a name. To solve this problem, I’d like to make use of the idea, emphasized in recent work by Friederike Moltmann (MS), that two distinct referential acts can be *coordinated*. The idea here is, I hope, intuitive: when Doyle used the name ‘Holmes’ when writing a later story, his use of the name was quasi-referential but also *linked to* and in some sense *dependent upon*, his earlier quasi-referential use of that same name. This contrasts with a case where another author, Sam, uses the name ‘Holmes’ without coordination when writing a fiction, F_3 . We wouldn’t, e.g., conclude that Sam’s character had certain properties in F_3 just because Doyle’s character had certain properties in F_1 . But were Sam’s use of the name ‘Holmes’ co-ordinated with Doyle’s use of that same name, the properties of the thing to which ‘Holmes’ refers in F_1 would be defeasible grounds for ascribing properties to the thing to which ‘Holmes’ refers in F_3 . This generates the following explanation of the fact that Holmes appears in more than one story:

- (11) Holmes appears in more than one story because an author used the name ‘Holmes’ when writing a fiction F_1 and an author used the name ‘Holmes’ when writing a fiction F_2 and the quasi-referential acts are coordinated, and $F_1 \neq F_2$.

Again, a fuller explanation would probably be phrased in terms of the facts in virtue of which the two quasi-referential acts are co-ordinated. But at least as it stands, the explanation seems to be adequate for the needs of the priority theorist.

The explanatory project facing the priority theorist is far from complete. But I hope that the idea has become sufficiently clear. As an anti-realist who rejects fictional characters from my ontology, I seek to explain facts concerning fictional entities in terms of facts concerning other things. But the explanations that I think need to be given are not semantical ones — the goal is not to paraphrase away talk of fictional characters, at least in the way that Textbook Quineans conceived of that project — but rather to offer specifications of which facts *ground* facts about fictional characters. And though this project might result in long and messy explanations and lack the systematicity desired for paraphrases, I claim that this is acceptable, since we have no guarantee that our ‘grounding story’ will be systematic and neat. Neatness, simplicity, systematicity are features we might reasonably expect of the semantics of talk about fictional characters, but we’re not giving semantic explanations but metaphysical ones.

I also concede that though I have given explanations for a range of facts concerning fictional characters, I certainly haven’t shown that *all* facts concerning fictional characters can be explained even metaphysically in an adequate fashion. You might, for instance, point to claims concerning the intentional attitudes we apparently bear to fictional characters: Paul *admires* Hermione, Sam is *jealous of* Holmes, Juan *fears* Cthulhu. But I emphasize that though the range of cases I’ve covered is far from complete, it’s still quite extensive. Moreover, the cases I’ve covered are significant in that many of them — the fact that Holmes is more famous than any real detective, for instance — are exactly the cases that fictional realists have used to motivate their own accounts. Finally, I also think that caution is merited. Exactly how we should understand intentional attitude ascriptions like ‘Paul admires Hermione’ is a notoriously vexed question, and generates a number of difficult puzzles for everyone, be they realists or not.²⁴ Rather than commit myself to some specific approach to such cases, I hope it’s legitimate in the context of this thesis for me to remain neutral here and rest content with showing that a significant range of problematic cases can be explained within the context of a priority theoretic approach to the debate about fictional entities.

²⁴ In personal communication, van Inwagen indicated that he’s sympathetic to Walton’s approach of treating such sentences as involving some kind of pretense. That may mean that Paul is pretending that Hermione is a real person and within this game of pretense, he admires her. So accommodating intentional attitudes isn’t straightforward even for the realist.

5.2.2 Whence Fictional *Anti-Realism*?

While the idea that truths about fictional characters like Hermione can be explained without reference to or quantification over fictional characters looks promising, one might wonder how the priority theorist can be an anti-realist about fictional entities. The fact that we can explain the discourse without postulating fictional entities doesn't by itself show that fictional characters don't belong to the furniture of reality. How does the priority theorist earn the right to be an anti-realist while talking the way she does, freely referring to and quantifying over fictional entities? And so you might well wonder what's really so anti-realist about the advocated picture. Sure, we can explain facts about fictional characters without referring to them in our explanans, but don't we just have to accept that there are fictional characters, if there are facts about them?

To begin to answer these questions, it's important to note that an analogous question can be raised in the context of a Textbook Quinean approach to ontology. Where the question facing the priority theorist is 'How can you think you're an anti-realist if you think that it's a fact that there are fictional characters?' the question facing the Quinean is 'How can you think you're an anti-realist if you think it's true that there are fictional characters?'. Indeed, given various intuitive principles connecting truths to facts — ' p ' is true iff it's true that p iff it's a fact that p — one might think that the questions amount to pretty much the same thing.

Next, note that the Quinean has an answer to this question: even an anti-realist can accept that it's true that there are fictional characters if she can show that claims about fictional characters can be paraphrased away. And the analogous move available to the priority theorist is to say that even an anti-realist can accept that it's a fact that there are fictional characters if she can show that the fact can be *grounded* in an appropriate way. What both theorists have in common is that they attempt to reconcile their sparse ontology with what appears to be the folk's commitments by way of reduction. The Quinean claims that she can semantically reduce talk about fictional entities to non-offensive talk, and the priority theorist maintains that his reduction is of a rather metaphysical nature.

At this point, you might wonder what the real difference is between the priority theorist who wants to explain away fictional characters and the Textbook

Quinean who wants to paraphrase fictional entities away.²⁵ After all, there's a sense in which we can say that they both engage in a project of mapping sentences concerning fictional characters to sentences that are free of such things. The Quinean anti-realist view incorporates a function that maps a sentence *S* to some sentence that may be adequately thought of as paraphrase of *S*. In the priority theorist's setting, think of this mapping function as taking a sentence *S* and mapping it to some sentence which expresses a fact that grounds the fact that *S* obtains. So rather than developing something new, the question goes, haven't we just ended up agreeing with the Quinean paraphraser after all?

This question neglects a conclusion I drew earlier: we shouldn't forget that the Quinean needs something metaphysical in order to explain why the language of paraphrase is privileged. If the Quinean is not able to cite some metaphysical reason why her paraphrases are preferable to the original talk when it comes to determining our ontological commitments, then she'll have trouble when it comes to giving an adequate reply to Alston's worries. Here I agree with Jonathan Schaffer's (2009, p.370) claim that some basis for the *direction* of paraphrase is needed, and his subsequent suggestion that the Quinean should hold that paraphrases are significant because they track independently fixed relations of grounding. But in this setting, the priority theorist's move is to work directly with the notion of grounding and metaphysical explanation, rather than making a detour via translation of some other kind of semantic reduction.

Next, note that this isn't a mere shift of emphasis: the concessions the Quinean needs to make to agree with the priority theorist are pretty extreme. Recall in this regard that the paraphrastic project is normally constrained in certain ways. The paraphrases must be given a systematic way and the function which maps offensive sentences to their innocent surrogates is typically held to be finitary in character. Indeed, the worries I raised about the project of paraphrasing away fictional characters in the previous chapter weren't so much based on the thought that there is *no* function mapping sentences concerning fictional characters to sentences concerning other things; rather, the worries arose because this function only specifies a way of paraphrasing away talk of fictional characters if it meets the constraints mentioned above. And it's precisely at this point where the priority theorist gets

²⁵ Predelli (2009) objects to Cameron's (2009) truthmaker-theoretic version of priority theory on something like these grounds.

off the Quinean boat.

Suppose, e.g., that the number of fictional characters is prime. What grounds this fact? Well, a natural first thought is:

- (12) The number of fictional character is prime because there are either exactly two fictional characters, or there are exactly three fictional characters, or there are exactly five fictional characters....

Forget the fact that our explanation talks of fictional characters: that would only be a problem if the fact that the infinite disjunction holds lacked an explanation that respected (PRIORITY). The point here is just that the explanation is perfectly acceptable by the priority theorist's lights, precisely because she doesn't insist that the explanations have to be finitely stateable. Ross Cameron (2009, p.261) points out that:

The fact that one can only state the exact way reality must be in order for [some sentence] to be true if one can state an infinite disjunction is, again, neither here nor there: it would be worrying were I attempting to analyse, in the sense of providing a synonymous sentence... [But] that is not my project. I am merely trying to indicate the grounds of the English sentence.

And though Cameron here associates paraphrase with synonymy — which I suggested in the previous chapter was a mistake — the crucial point is that it's not normally thought that one can alleviate commitment to *Fs* by pointing to the truth of some infinite sentence and offering that as a 'paraphrase' of the claim that *Fs* exist.²⁶ Part of what makes paraphrasing difficult, as Stephen Yablo (2005, p.95) points out, is the "requirements of a finitely based notation." In any case, if the constraints on paraphrasing are relaxed to the point where these kinds of mappings count as 'paraphrases', it's clear that we're thinking of paraphrasis in a very different way to the Textbook Quinean. By all means, you can *call* the priority theorist a paraphraser if you want to, but the priority theorist's paraphrases aren't paraphrases in the normal sense. And because of the connotations that

²⁶ Compare Melia (1995).

‘paraphrase’ has, I think we’re better off not calling the priority theorist a paraphraser.

Another worry one might have about calling priority theory a form of anti-realism relates to the thought that the priority theorist, in accepting that it’s a fact that there are fictional characters, seems committed to accepting that there is some sense in which fictional characters are *real*. After all, they exist, and they exist objectively. In what sense, then, does the priority theorist deny the reality of fictional entities?

There are clearly various senses in which she does accept the reality of fictional characters. She’s happy to admit that fictional characters exist and she agrees that it’s a fact that fictional characters exist. And the sense in which the priority theorist accepts the existence is not such that they mind-dependent ideas or mental images: they are objective entities. So when she denies the reality of Holmes and Hermione she can’t be denying that they are real in *that* sense. But that shouldn’t throw us. For note that something structurally similar arises with respect to the Quinean paraphraser. At least when he’s speaking English, will he accept that there are fictional characters and that it’s true/a fact that there are fictional entities. So in *this* sense — which is analogous to the one just mentioned for the priority theorist — the Quinean paraphraser accepts that fictional characters are real. But this just means that the Quinean paraphraser has some explaining to do when it comes to telling us why he is a fictional anti-realist. And we already know how the explanation goes: the Quinean paraphraser denies the reality of fictional entities by claiming that his *ontology* is free of them. And, to return to the case of the priority theorist, the same point applies: the priority theorist denies the reality of fictional entities in the sense that she excludes such things from her ontology. And she does that by showing how facts about fictional entities can be grounded by facts about other things.

So far, I have emphasized the differences between the projects of paraphrasing away talk of fictional entities and the project of grounding facts about fictional entities. But I hope that it’s clear that these two projects have the same *goal*: both theorists want to reconcile the truth of what we ordinarily think and say with a sparse ontology. And both try to explain the ordinary appearances without appealing to fictional entities. But while for the Quinean paraphraser reconciliation takes the form of a semantical explanation, the priority theorist’s takes the form

of a metaphysical explanation. So though they agree on what needs to be done, they disagree on how the reconciliatory project is best executed and how exactly it is constrained.

These differences and similarities between the two approaches have consequences when it comes to the question how each theorist will determine what *is* in their ontology. In an important sense, both give a prominent position to the following question: are *Fs* explanatorily basic? But since the Textbook Quinean paraphraser and the priority theorist think about the explanatory project in two very different ways, they will offer different accounts of what it means to say that *Fs* are explanatorily basic. For the paraphraser, to think that *Fs* are explanatorily basic is to think that *Fs* are quantified over in the privileged language, the language of our best theories (or the indispensable fragment of the language, or what have you). For the priority theorist, by contrast, to think that *Fs* are explanatorily basic is to think that the existence of *Fs* is metaphysically inexplicable, that is, to think that the fact that there are *Fs* is a *fundamental* fact. So whereas the paraphraser will accept an ontology that includes whichever entities she can't paraphrase away, the priority theorist will accept an ontology that includes whichever entities can't be grounded in other things. And again, both think that one can accept an ontology which does not include *Fs* without thereby denying that there is some sense in which there are *Fs*, their ways of making sense of this position differs. Whereas the paraphraser's move is to deny that all truths were born equal and then take ontology to be determined by which entities are quantified over in the privileged language, the priority theorist denies that all facts were born equal and then takes ontology to be determined by which entities are involved in the fundamental facts.²⁷

In sum, I conclude that the priority theoretic account of fictional entities that I've developed does deserved to be called a version of fictional anti-realism. For though she accepts that there are fictional characters and that it's a fact that such things exist, the priority theorist does not accept that these facts are explanatorily basic: they can be grounded by facts which do not involve fictional characters.

²⁷ You might wonder whether the priority theorist is in for a foul deal of trading an ontology of fictional characters for an ontology of facts. But as I noted earlier, Fine (2001, forthcoming) is keen to stress that the entire debate could be set up in terms of a sentential operator "because" read in a suitably metaphysical way and that his account isn't dependent upon any substantial notion of a fact.

In a sense, her view is structurally similar to the Quinean's, except that where the Quinean anti-realist attempts to give a semantic reduction of sentences like 'Holmes is a fictional character', the priority theorist attempts to metaphysically reduce the fact that Holmes is a fictional character. And if I'm right that such reductions can be given, we can earn the right to deny the reality of fictional characters whilst accepting the truth of what we ordinarily think and say.

5.3 Conclusion

In the previous chapter, we saw that those who attempt to alleviate commitment to fictional characters by providing ontologically innocent paraphrases of sentences like 'There are fictional characters' have their work cut out for them. My goal in this chapter has been to develop an alternative and in some ways anti-Quinean approach to the debate about fictional characters, one which gives a central role to a distinctively metaphysical form of explanation. This isn't as anti-Quinean as it seems: after all, the Quinean too needs to incorporate a metaphysical notion to give the paraphrase a direction. But what is distinctive about the approach developed here is that the important form of metaphysical dependence is not that of supervenience, but grounding. And with the notion of grounding in place, a theorist who denies the reality of fictional characters is better off concentrating on giving grounding explanations for facts about such things, where the grounding facts don't mention fictional characters anymore. I then proceeded by sketching what such explanations might look like for various truths about fictional objects and we saw that it looks promising that such truths can be explained in terms of the acts of authors and their audiences. I then argued that despite the fact that the priority theorist accepts the existence of fictional characters, there is a clear sense in which she denies their reality. For although she accepts common sensical and theoretical claims about such things, she does not think that they feature in her ontology, since she doesn't take them to be explanatorily basic.

There is, of course, much more to be said about the conception of ontological inquiry that I've deployed in order to develop a novel version of fictional anti-realism. But I hope that it's clear that the view is deserving of attention, and that the resulting version of anti-realism it offers is an attractive one. In the next chapter, we'll encounter some rival views, each of which departs from Quinean

orthodoxy too. Comparing these views to the priority-theoretic approach developed here will, I hope, allow me to clarify the approach further.

Chapter 6

Rivals

IN the previous chapter, I developed an alternative to the textbook Quinean approach to handling talk about fictional characters. On this view, the central question we face is whether truths about fictional characters can be *explained* by facts which do not talk about such things, where the relevant notion of explanation is distinctively metaphysical in character. But this approach to ontological inquiry is not the only non-Quinean view knocking around in the literature. And in order to better appreciate the advantages of my advocated approach my aim in this final chapter is to compare and contrast the priority theorist's view with a number of non-Quinean approaches to the ontology of fictional characters.

6.1 Ontological Minimalism

I pointed out in the opening chapter of this thesis that whilst realists are united in embracing an ontology of fictional entities, the positive arguments offered in favour of fictional realism vary from realist to realist. Thus van Inwagen thinks that we should embrace an ontology of fictional entities because quantification over such things is indispensable to our best theories of the world. And it's no surprise that van Inwagen argues in this way, given his commitment to a broadly Quinean conception of ontological inquiry.

Not all realists, however, embrace a Quinean metaontology. Both Amie Thomasson and Stephen Schiffer, for instance, embrace an ontology of fictional entities but also think that questions like 'Do fictional characters exist?' and 'Are

there fictional characters?’ are, in a significant sense, *easily answered*. In particular, neither think that we should look to the entities postulated by our best theories of the world in order to answer ontological questions, and both think that fictional characters are ‘cheap’ or ‘thin’ or ‘minimal’ entities. Though there is disagreement on what makes them so, I’ll call the shared view that Thomasson and Schiffer accept *ontological minimalism*. My goal in this section is to introduce the core elements of the versions of minimalism that Thomasson and Schiffer defend, and then proceed to contrast the minimalist metaontology with the priority-theoretic conception developed in the last chapter.

6.1.1 Fictional Characters as Pleonastic Entities

Like many others, Schiffer (1996, 2003) is sympathetic to the idea that when authors use fictional names in writing their fictions, they are only pretending to refer to real people, animals, locations etc. Moreover, he thinks that the fact (e.g.) that Rowling wrote a novel in which she used the name ‘Hermione’ to pretend to refer to a real wizard *entails* that the fictional character Hermione exists. Thus Schiffer (2003, p.51) tells us that we may infer (2) from (1):

- (1) Rowling wrote a novel in which she used the name ‘Hermione Granger’ in the pretending way characteristic of fiction
- (2) Rowling created the fictional character Hermione Granger

But to create something is to bring it into existence, so (2) entails that Hermione Granger exists. Thus from the pretending use of the fictional name ‘Hermione’ we may begin to use that name in a *hypostatizing* way. This kind of inference, in Schiffer’s terminology, is a *something from nothing* transformation, since “they take one from a statement in which no reference is made to a thing of a certain kind (in this case, to a fictional character) to a statement in which there is a reference to a thing of that kind” (p.51).

To be clear: Schiffer does not think that the conditional connecting (1) and (2) is *logically* necessary, and so the something-from-nothing inference is not logically valid. But he does think that the conditional connecting (1) and (2) is *metaphysically* necessary. But this is only a necessary condition on a something-from-nothing transformation. Rather, an inference from some sentence *S* to some ex-

istence sentence stating that *Fs* exist is a something-from-nothing transformation if *S* metaphysically entails the existence of *Fs* and the following three conditions hold:

- (i) *S* is metaphysically possible
- (ii) *S* doesn't logically entail the existence of *Fs*
- (iii) the concept of an *F* is such that if there are *Fs*, then *S* metaphysically entails the existence of *Fs*

In the case at hand, then, the fact that (1) metaphysically entails (2) doesn't itself establish that the inference gets us something from nothing. But so long as the extra conditions are in place — i.e. so long as it's metaphysically possible for Rowling to use the name 'Hermione' in a pretend way, and so long as (1) doesn't logically entail the existence of fictional character, and so long as it's somehow built into our concept of a fictional character that if there are such things then their existence supervenes on what authors do — then we can conclude that the inference from (1) to (2) constitutes a something-from-nothing transformation. And since Rowling did write a novel in which she used the name 'Hermione Granger' in the pretending way characteristic of fiction, it follows that (2) is true and thereby that the something-from-nothing transformation establishes the existence of fictional characters. This, in Schiffer's (p.57) terminology, means that the concept of a fictional character is a *pleonastic concept*, and that fictional characters are themselves *pleonastic entities*.¹

The most striking element in Schiffer's 'proof' of the existence of fictional characters is the claim that the concept of a fictional character is such that if there are fictional characters, then their existence is metaphysically entailed by the fact that authors use names in the pretend way that is characteristic of fiction. Or to rephrase that slightly, Schiffer thinks that the concept of a fictional character is such that the existence of fictional characters supervenes on the activities of au-

¹ This isn't quite right: Schiffer also adds a constraint to the effect that the result of adding a pleonastic concept *F* to a theory *T* gives us a conservative extension of that theory *T** which we obtain by restricting the quantifiers of *T* to the things which aren't *F* — i.e. all the non-*F* sentences you can prove in *T* can be proven in *T**. I won't dwell on this here: see Schiffer (2003, p.57) for discussion.

thors. Schiffer insists that this supervenience claim is a *conceptual* truth, a truth knowable a priori via mastery of the concept of a fictional character.

Notice, then, that the thought that the existence of fictional characters supervenes on the actions of authors plays a crucial role for Schiffer. But unlike Armstrong, Schiffer doesn't seem to think that this supervenience in itself establishes that fictional characters are free lunches. By the same token, however, Schiffer tells us that fictional characters are 'thin' entities, "mere shadows of the pretending use of their names" (p.59). And it's here, I take it, that the idea that it's a conceptual truth that the existence of fictional characters supervenes upon the activities of authors plays a role. What makes the difference between fictional characters and cats, islands and electrons is that fictional characters do not "enjoy the highest degree of ontological and conceptual independence from our linguistic and conceptual practices" (p.60). True, the existence of cats may supervene on the existence of simple particles arranged in certain ways, but that doesn't show that cats are thin entities precisely because the fact that they so supervene is not knowable a priori via command of the concept of a cat.

It's not too surprising, then, that Schiffer thinks that investigation into the 'true nature' of fictional characters isn't worthwhile for, being mere shadows cast by our linguistic practices, they have no true nature. Thus he writes:

There can be nothing more to the nature of fictional entities than is determined by our hypostatizing use of fictional names. The 'science' of them may be done in an armchair by reflective participants in the hypostatizing practice; fictional entities can have "no hidden and substantial nature for a theory to uncover. All we know and all we need to know about them in general" is determined by our hypostatizing use of fictional names.² (p.60)

If Schiffer is right then fictional characters are far less puzzling than anti-realistically inclined theorists have feared and realist theorists have let on. Thus whilst the *metaphysical* question of what fictional characters are like is, for Schiffer, a non-question, the *ontological* question of whether fictional characters exist is, for Schiffer, easily established via a something-from-nothing transformation.

² The inner quote is from Johnston (1998, p.38).

So the distinction between thin and thick entities isn't a distinction between what is in our ontology and what is not. Rather, it is a distinction between those entities where serious metaphysical questions may be legitimately asked and those where such questions are redundant. Entities don't need a VIP pass to enter into our ontology; all kinds of entities, whether thin or thick, will be admitted.

Schiffer is our first example of an ontological minimalist, someone who thinks that questions like 'Do fictional characters exist?' are easily answered and that fictional characters are somehow 'thin' or 'minimal' entities. But as I mentioned at the outset, Schiffer is not the only philosopher who has defended minimalism. I'll now turn to Amie Thomasson's version of the approach, beginning with her rejection of Schiffer's own proposal.

6.1.2 Fictional Characters as Relatively Minimal Entities

Schiffer, you'll recall, thought that all it takes for there to be fictional characters is that authors use fictional names in the pretending way that is characteristic of fiction. And the thought here appears to be that merely adopting a language game in which one can infer something from nothing guarantees that the terms introduced by that language game will successfully refer. So, e.g., Schiffer characterizes his pleonastic conception of properties as follows:

The sentence "Fido is a dog", whether or not it is true, also yields the singular term "the property of being a dog", which we are assured of referring to the property of being a dog. (1994, p.304)

Notice that merely adopting the language game which allows us to introduce terms for properties *guarantees* that property terms refer. Properties, and pleonastic entities more generally, are thereby created by the language games that introduce them to our ontology, and all we know and need to know about them is determined by those language games.

But as Thomasson (2001) points out, merely adopting a language game by which we generate the singular term 'the fictional character *n*' from the sentence 'x used the name '*n*' when writing a novel' emphatically doesn't give us any assurances that the fictional character *n* exists since we have no assurances that an author did use the name '*n*' in the pretenseful way that is characteristic of fic-

tion. And the point here is that merely establishing the criteria of application of a term doesn't show that the criteria so-established are fulfilled. And indeed, whilst fictional characters might be 'language-created' in the sense that they are 'introduced' into our ontology in part by the adoption of a certain language game, they are 'language-independent' in the sense that it's an empirical matter whether the criteria which the language game establishes for terms like 'the fictional character Hermione' to have reference are fulfilled.

Though Thomasson agrees with Schiffer insofar as she holds that fictional characters are minimal entities, she doesn't believe that fictional characters are *absolutely* minimal: adopting a language-game which introduces terms like 'the fictional character Hermione Granger' doesn't itself establish that the terms introduced by this language game do indeed refer. So rather than following Schiffer in holding that fictional characters are mere shadows cast by our linguistic practices, Thomasson maintains that the existence of fictional characters is a consequence of the fact that "no additional ontological ingredients or conditions are required" for the existence of fictional characters, beyond those ingredients or conditions that are required to make it true that authors use names in the right sorts of ways. Thus whatever it is that's demanded of the world in order for it to be true that an author uses the name 'Hermione' in the relevant pretend way, it's also what's required to ensure that 'the fictional character Hermione' refers; *nothing more* is required and *nothing less* is required either. Fictional characters, on this picture, thus emerge as *relatively* minimal entities: they are "minimal with respect to those entities referred to in the more basic sentence" (2001, p.325).

One might worry, however, that even embracing relatively minimal entities threatens to open the flood-gates. Suppose, e.g., that I introduce the term 'hoverball' into the language as follows:

- x is a hoverball $=_{\text{def}}$ x is a pink sphere 3 feet in diameter, hovering over a person's head, that exists if and only if there is a person³

This definition introduces into the language a new term, 'hoverball', and it simultaneously specifies the conditions under which 'hoverball' refers. The worry is obviously that the criterion in question seems to be that 'hoverball' refers iff

³ Thomasson (2007, p.171) cites John Hawthorne as offering this example. Compare Schiffer's (2003, p.53) discussion of wishdates.

there is a person. But surely no-one believes that there are pink spheres 3 feet in diameter, hovering above people's heads!

Thomasson (2006, p.172), however, thinks that there is a crucial difference between the linguistic rules which introduce the term 'hoverball' into the language and those which introduce the term 'fictional character' into the language. For the term 'fictional character' is guaranteed to refer *given* that it's true that authors use fictional names in the way that is characteristic of fiction. But the term 'hoverball' isn't guaranteed to refer given that it's true that there are persons: the concept of a hoverball also includes the concept of being a pink sphere and this is part of the definition of a hoverball. So the concept of a hoverball requires more than the existence of a person since it also requires the existence of a pink sphere. Yet the concept also says that nothing more is required for there to be hoverballs than for there to be persons. The supposed definition is therefore "ill-formed", and there is no threat that accepting that fictional characters are relatively minimal entities will also force us to accept that there are hoverballs (2007, p.172).

But while we can avoid commitment to such extraordinary objects as hoverballs, Thomasson thinks that we cannot avoid commitment to fictional characters so long as we accept the truth of basic claims like "An author used the name '*n*' when writing a story" because no more is required for it to be true that there are fictional characters than is required for the basic sentence to be true.

6.1.3 Ontology Made Easy?

I now want to turn to examine the more general approach to ontological inquiry that's implicit in Thomasson's minimalist defence of fictional realism. To many metaphysicians, especially those concerned with ontology, Thomasson's metaontology must be anything but uplifting. That's because many of them take themselves to engage in attempts to uncover the world out there, making discoveries that are, in some sense, inspired by science. But Thomasson's outlook on the discipline appears rather grim. She believes that ontologists are taking themselves far too seriously when they wonder whether tables really exist or whether fictional names refer to anything. But let's take it slow.

Thomasson's starting point is that if we want to find out whether there are Ks, the question to ask is: does the term 'K' refer? For given standard assumptions

about what noun phrases refer to, we know that if ‘K’ refers at all, then it refers to all and only the Ks, meaning that if there is an x such that ‘K’ refers to x then there is at least one K.⁴ There is an obvious problem with this: ‘K’ could refer even though there aren’t any Ks because ‘K’ could have meant something different. Thomasson’s (2008, p.65) move at this point is to rephrase the question. Rather than asking whether ‘K’ refers, we now ask: does *K* refer, where the use of the star quotes is there to pick out terms on the basis of what they actually mean rather than on the basis of their phonological or typographical features. This isn’t the only option: instead of introducing some special way of quoting expressions, we could instead just index the relevant semantical predicates. That is, rather than asking whether ‘K’ refers *tout court*, we could instead ask whether ‘K’ refers *in English*. But in order to save time and avoid littering the subsequent discussion with stars, I’ll drop them in what follows and just associate Thomasson as endorsing the following principle — call it principle (E):

(E) Ks exist iff ‘K’ refers

Notice that Thomasson’s principle (E) presupposes that the term ‘K’ exists. And one might worry that this means that (E) is unsatisfactory: if the term ‘K’ didn’t exist, then it wouldn’t refer even though there would still be Ks. Thomasson’s (2008, p.66) move at this point is to rewrite (E) as: Ks exist iff ‘K’ refers, given that the term ‘K’ exists. Again, I’ll take this qualification as read in what follows.

Thomasson here identifies the question upon which ontological inquiry should be focused: if you want to find out whether there are dogs, the question to ask is: does the term ‘dog’ refer? And if you want to find out whether there are fictional characters, the question to ask is: does the term ‘fictional character’ refer? But in addition to identifying the ontological question, Thomasson also gives us a methodology for answering questions of reference and thereby a methodology for ontological inquiry.

If we want to find out whether ‘K’ refers, the question to ask is whether the term ‘K’ is correctly applied to anything. And to determine whether it is correctly applied, we need to find out what the term’s application conditions are and then

⁴ I’m going to follow Thomasson’s talk of the reference of a predicate, but the issue is better set up in terms of satisfaction. (If nothing else, the term ‘reference’ is used and abused wildly.) The question we should ask if we want to find out whether there are Ks is then this: is the open sentence ‘Kx’ satisfied? But I’ll follow Thomasson’s discussion.

see whether the world is such as to ensure that the term is correctly applied. That gives us Thomasson's (2008, p.67) principle (R):

(R) 'K' refers iff the application conditions for 'K' are fulfilled

Now, one might worry that this means that ontological inquiry isn't about the world itself but rather is simply about language. But this worry is misguided: specifying the conditions under which a term is correctly and incorrectly applied is one thing; finding out whether the world is such that a term is correctly applied is quite another. That is, the application conditions of a term are only fulfilled if the world does play along. (Recall at this point the earlier worry about Schiffer's proposal and the resulting distinction between establishing a criterion of application and fulfilling it.)

Okay, but what are the application conditions for a term? At a level of abstraction, Thomasson (2008, p.70) tells us that they should be thought of "as rules for when it is and is not proper to use a term," rules which speakers master "in acquiring competence with applying and refusing a new term in various situations", and that rules which once mastered "enable competent speakers to evaluate whether or not the term would properly be applied in a range of actual and hypothetical situations." Thus speakers learn the application conditions for a term 'K' when they acquire the concept of a K, even if that doesn't normally or even very often mean that speakers can make those rules explicit. Applied to a particular case: even though I cannot give you necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as a dog, there is, the thought goes, some implicit set of rules that govern my use of the term 'dog' and my mastery of these rules is reflected in my ability to evaluate whether or not the term 'dog' applies in a range of situations.

How, then, do we find out whether the world is such as to ensure that a term like 'table' or 'dog' or 'painting' is correctly applied? Thomasson (2008, p.71) wants to deflate such questions:

Even if we can't properly state the application conditions for terms like 'table' and 'chair', it's clear that most dining rooms provide sufficient conditions for these terms to refer according to the speakers' ordinary standards, most art galleries meet conditions that ensure 'painting' and 'sculpture' refer, and so on. And so it seems that (barring radical

sceptical hypotheses that would take speakers to be badly deceived in thinking that the relevant conditions are fulfilled in dining rooms and art galleries when they are not) the conditions ordinarily required for these terms to apply are fulfilled. As a result, the terms refer, and (given schema (E)) we can conclude that tables, chairs, paintings and sculptures exist.

What emerges in this passage is the distinctive minimalist thought that ontological questions like ‘Do tables exist?’ are somehow easily answered, despite the ink that has been spilt over them. All we need to do to reach a positive answer is to (a) reflect on the situations under which we apply and withhold a term like ‘table’, and then (b) ask ourselves whether the world is such that the term ‘table’ is correctly applied. In ordinary cases, the answer will be self-evident, at least barring a radical sceptical hypothesis of the sort Thomasson mentions in the passage.

Even though existence questions about *ordinary* objects like tables and chairs are easily answered, that doesn’t mean that *all* existence questions are easily answered. Whether there are electrons isn’t something that one can find out very easily at all, and the fact that there is no such thing as Phlogiston was a scientific discovery. But in any case, the crucial point is just that in order to find out whether Ks exist, the two-step process is to first determine what the application conditions associated with ‘K’ are, and then to determine whether they are fulfilled. If they are then, by application of schema (R), the term ‘K’ refers and, by application of schema (E), Ks therefore exist.

How does all of this play out with respect to the question of whether fictional characters exist? Well, the first challenge is to specify the conditions under which the term ‘fictional character’ is correctly applied. Thomasson’s move is familiar: she points to the idea that our use of the term ‘fictional character’ is linked to the activities of authors. That is, one is in a position to correctly utter ‘*n* is a fictional character’ in precisely those conditions under which an author has used the name ‘*n*’ in a pretend way when writing a novel. And since we know that authors did use names in a pretend way when writing novels we may conclude — barring radical sceptical hypotheses that would take speakers to be badly deceived into thinking that the application conditions are fulfilled when in fact they are not — that the application condition associated with the term ‘fictional character’ is

fulfilled. By (R), we may infer that the term ‘fictional character’ refers, and by (E), we may conclude that fictional characters exist. Thus whilst fictional characters might not be ordinary objects, their existence can be established rather easily too.

6.1.4 Why Ontology is Hard

Notice that, on Thomasson’s picture, there are two sub-tasks to be undertaken if we want to find out whether there are Ks. The first task is to specify the conditions under which a term is correctly and incorrectly applied based on armchair reflection. The second task is to find out whether the application conditions associated with a term are fulfilled. Thus whereas the first question is one that can be prosecuted “from the armchair” the second requires empirical investigation. And this latter step has fairly little to do with philosophical investigation, according to Thomasson. Conceptual analysis is the domain of philosophy, but empirical investigation is not and so Thomasson concludes that her method makes addressing existence questions so straightforward “that it leaves very little room for doing ontology, if we conceive of this as a distinctively *philosophical* enterprise of figuring out *what really exists*” (2008, p.75). Conceptual analysis, taken alone, “is not a matter of figuring out what ‘really exists’ by distinctively philosophical means” and empirical inquiry “is work for scientists or investigative journalists, not for a distinctively philosophical discipline of ontology” (p.75). Thus if ontologists were thinking that they were trying to answer deep questions about what really exists, they were getting in over their heads, for limning the structure of reality, as Thomasson (2007, p.200) maintains, is not a job for philosophers.

You might expect me to be *completely* opposed to all of this. After all, the priority-theoretic approach to ontological inquiry I endorsed in the previous chapter gave a central role to the question of *What Grounds What?* and the question of what *really* exists was identified as the question of which entities are explanatorily *fundamental*. So it seems that I’m committed to there being a distinctively philosophical project lurking around here: that of finding out what is ‘at the bottom of it all’ — what there really is. Shouldn’t I say, then, that ontology is hard?

Well, I’m less opposed to Thomasson’s approach to ontology than you might imagine. For what’s clear is that Thomasson’s goal is to show that existence questions are easier to answer than many philosophers have thought, and that her

target is existence questions asked in ordinary English. But once the issue is set up in that way, there is a certain sense in which Thomasson's minimalist view is consistent with the approach to 'ontology' offered by not only the priority theorist but also by the Textbook Quinean.⁵

Think, for instance, of the Quinean. The Quinean was never very much interested in the question of whether ordinary English sentences like 'there are tables' or 'tables exist' are true: accepting that it's true that there are tables doesn't, even on the Quinean picture, tell us one way or the other whether we are ontologically committed to tables. To think otherwise would be to forget the central role which the translate-and-deflate methodology plays within the Quinean picture. The route to answering the ontological question is that of finding out whether our best theories of the world quantify over tables, not whether it's true to say in ordinary English that tables exist. And so when push comes to shove, ordinary English gives way to the language of the privileged theory, and questions of the ontological commitments of ordinary language sentences are negotiated by means of the translate-and-deflate methodology sketched in chapter 4. To put that otherwise, the Quinean might start by asking questions like *What Exists?* and *What Is There?* but these questions get replaced with more refined ones concerning the quantificational commitments of our best theories. Similarly, the priority theorist too might acknowledge that it all starts with wondering what exists. But when we dig deeper into what we actually care about when we ask ontological questions, the original existence question gets replaced with questions like *Are Ks fundamental?* These ways of specifying the central question of ontological investigation significantly differ from each other. But it's far from being obvious that Thomasson's question — 'Do Ks exist?' — is the question we should ask when doing ontology. Both the Textbook Quinean and the priority theorist will insist that there is a further question to be asked even once we've settled whether it's true to say in ordinary English that tables exist.

Now, Thomasson (2008, p.77) does seem aware of this when she writes:

[I]f serious ontologists are implicitly changing languages, then their work gives no reason for doubting that the above account gives an

⁵ Note that I'm not intending to claim that Thomasson is arguing against a strawman. I don't think she does, but I do think that the Textbook Quinean and the priority theorist as I conceive of them should remain unimpressed.

appropriate and easy method of answering existence questions, whenever these are asked using our familiar English language.

Now, I'm not sure what exactly she's getting at here, since I don't think it's obvious that the Quinean or the priority theorist are "implicitly changing languages". What's true is that it's sometimes helpful to distinguish between what's truly said in English and what's truly said in the language of our best theory (for the Quinean) or the fundamental language (for the priority theorist). But it's not as if the Quinean or the priority theorist are suddenly speaking different languages to the rest of us when they enter the ontology room.⁶ What's more likely is that they are either distinguishing certain ways of talking or introducing certain special theoretical terms and then trying to regiment their discussions on this basis. But the ways of talking that are distinguished are bits of English and the special theoretical terms are introduced into English by means of English. True, the resulting 'language' might not be familiar to the man on the street, but neither is the technical vocabulary of physics. So the charge that serious ontologists are implicitly changing languages is, I think, far too quick.

Perhaps Thomasson will say: "Look, ontology is just the study of what exists, what other question is there?"⁷ The question, no doubt, is a good one. But serious ontologists do think that there is a further question: what is reality like independently of how we represent it to be? And though this question is daunting, ontologists were trying to get beyond our representations of reality and reach out to reality itself. There isn't really any way to tell a story about reality itself without representing it to be a certain way, admittedly. But a natural move to make at this point is to privilege a certain way of representing things — perhaps the language of our best theory, or perhaps something else — and then use this privileged medium to tell our story about reality. The remaining question would be how our ordinary representations fit together with our privileged representations. And though they disagree on how to fit the pieces together, both the Quinean and the priority theorist are trying to make sense of how this project is best understood and prosecuted. Call this 'changing languages' if you like, but it's characteristic

⁶ Or more likely, it's not obvious that they have to think of themselves as doing just that.

⁷ This paragraph and the next are adapted from von Solodkoff and Woodward (MS.) where the same point is made against the 'noneist' approach to ontology defended by Routley (1980) and Priest (2005).

of the kind of ontological inquiry that we've become familiar with.

It's increasingly popular to distinguish two kinds of ontological commitment: *thick* or *heavy* commitments on the one hand, and *thin* or *light* commitments on the other.⁸ Despite the association this idea has with all things anti-Quinean, even the Quinean can make sense of it: she could happily accept that the ordinary sentence 'Ks exist' is thinly committed to Ks even if its paraphrase into the language of our best theory doesn't talk about Ks. (The priority theorist could parrot this if she wanted.) But the Quinean would also insist that ontology was about thick commitments rather than thin, and we think that this is the conception of ontology and ontological commitment that serious metaphysicians try to work with. To be clear: that's not to say that we cannot ask questions about what our thin commitments should be, and you can think of this project as 'Ontology Lite' if you want. But the project of serious ontology — you can think of this as Ontology Proper — is something else entirely.⁹ And to the extent that Thomasson is focused on the question of what can truly be said to exist in the vernacular, she's interested in Ontology Lite rather than Ontology Proper.

To sum up: Thomasson's concerns are somewhat orthogonal to those of both the Quinean and the priority theory. What we shouldn't lose sight of is that the project of ontology isn't the project of semantics: the question was about what's required of reality in order for our representations to be accurate, not about whether the representations are accurate and how they fit together with each other. The crucial idea here is that the priority theorist too may find some philosophical joy in wondering whether 'K' in English applies to anything and just as Thomasson she'll say that this question is metaphysically not very deep. Ontology Lite, then, analyzes our concepts such as that of a fictional character with the goal to specify the conditions under which the term 'fictional character' is correctly applied. Ontology Proper, on the other hand, is rather interested in whether fictional characters are fundamental or whether they are part of the grounding basis. And if they are then the feature in the priority theorist's Ontology Proper. If they don't, but nevertheless the term applies to something, then though fictional characters are not part of the priority theorist's ontology, it's still perfectly fine to say that fictional characters exist and that the terms 'Holmes' and

⁸ The distinction is familiar from Hodes (1990). See Rayo (2008, p.415-6) for discussion.

⁹ Compare Williams (2010, p.116).

'Hermione' refer. It's just that these entities are part of the priority theorist's thin ontology, while what she's really interested in when doing deep ontology is the thick ontology. It is, of course, open to Thomasson to simply reject the project of ontology proper as being somehow misconceived or defective. But even then she should admit that the project in which she's engaged isn't the one that serious ontologists have been attempting to execute.

6.2 Pretense Fictionalism

On the textbook Quinean approach to ontology I outlined earlier in this thesis, we have three options when faced with an apparent ontological commitment to *Fs*. We can put up and embrace commitment to *Fs*; shut up and abstain from talking about *Fs*; or we can find some way to paraphrase talk of *Fs* in a non-committing way. But as Steven Yablo (1998, 2001) has pointed out, Quine actually seemed to recognize a further option. Thus Quine notes:

One way in which a man may fail to share the ontological commitments of his discourse is ... by taking an attitude of frivolity. The parent who tells the Cinderella story is no more committed to admitting a fairy godmother and a pumpkin coach into his own ontology than to admitting the story as true. (1953, p.103)

The idea here seems to be that though *sentences* concerning pumpkin coaches are ontologically committed to pumpkin coaches, *we* can avoid commitment to such things so long as the attitude that we take towards those sentences is frivolous. And this is one reason why we may not share the commitments of our sentences. So unlike the strategy of alleviating commitment by paraphrasis, which involves showing that the sentences weren't committing after all, the strategy Quine alludes to here seems to involve the idea that commitment can be avoided so long as we don't believe the things that we say. Or as we might put it, commitment can be avoided so long as we can get away with *pretending* that our sentences express truths.

My goal in this section is to assess how this idea might play out in the context of the debate about fictional characters. I'll call proponents of this strategy *pretence fictionalists*. Though a number of versions of pretence fictionalism have been

developed in the literature, I'll focus on the most detailed and fully-developed version of the proposal: that of Kendall Walton (1990, 2000). I'll highlight the differences between Walton's approach and those of Antony Eagle (2007) and Anthony Everett (2005) along the way.¹⁰

6.2.1 Fiction, Fictionality, and Make-believe

Walton's starting point is not so much the desire to do without an ontology of fictional characters as to show that some sort of anti-realism emerges naturally once we approach the debate by giving a central role to the notion of make-believe.¹¹ Thus Walton (2000, p.71) tells us that he cannot imagine trying to make sense of the institution of fiction "without giving a prominent place to some kind of imagining or make-believe, and to the notion of propositions being fictional."

All of the accounts that we have considered, from van Inwagen's realism to the priority-theoretic approach of the previous chapter, incorporate the notion of fictionality in their respective accounts of talk about fiction. Thus we need to appeal to the notion of what's fictionally true of Holmes to make sense of van Inwagen's distinction between the properties a character *has* and those that the character *holds*. And for the priority theorist, facts about fictional characters are, in part, explained in terms of facts about what's fictional. But what is distinctive about Walton's account is that it begins by trying to explain internal talk about fiction on its own terms, and then aims to show that this account naturally extends to cover the external cases too. Accordingly, I'll start by sketching Walton's account of what's going on when we say things like 'Hermione is a wizard' and then examine whether he is right to think that this account can explain what's going on when we say things like 'Hermione is a fictional character' too.

Walton observes that when we engage in internal talk about a fiction (*Harry Potter*, say) we typically pretend that there's a real girl called 'Hermione' who is a

¹⁰ A couple of prominent anti-realist approaches will be conspicuous by their absence in what follows. In particular, I won't be discussing the approach of Gareth Evans (1982) or that of Mark Sainsbury (2005, 2009, 2011). That's not because I don't think that these views are worthy of attention — they clearly are — but because I think there are enough similarities between the pretense fictionalist approaches I'll focus on and the approaches of Evans and Sainsbury that the latter views can, for my purposes here, be treated as subtle variations on the pretense-theoretic theme.

¹¹ Compare Stacie Friend (2007, p.145) who tells us that Walton's analysis is driven "not by the need to accommodate empty names... but by the view that participation in games of make-believe has explanatory priority for our discourse about fictional characters."

wizard. And the subsequent thought is that when we utter the sentence ‘Hermione is a wizard’ we are pretending that we speak truly. But in order to pretend to speak truly by uttering this sentence, Walton points out, there need not be an object referred to by the name ‘Hermione’ and there need not be a proposition that is expressed by ‘Hermione is a wizard’. Rather, we only need to *pretend* that there is an object referred to by the name ‘Hermione’ and *pretend* that there is a proposition expressed by our sentence.

Of course, even if we are only pretending to speak truly when uttering the sentence ‘Hermione is a wizard’, we still need to explain why it is *right* to pretend to do so and why it is *wrong* to pretend to speak truly when uttering the words ‘Hermione is a french rabbit’. Walton’s explanation is based on his wider account of fiction. He thinks that just as we are not free to believe as we please, we are not free to imagine Hermione as we please either (1990, p.39). Imaginings are constrained also: it is *proper* to imagine that Hermione is a wizard but *improper* to imagine that she is a french rabbit. And this in turn connects up with his account of fictional truth: something is fictionally true iff there is a prescription to imagine that thing. This suggests that it’s right to pretend to speak truly when uttering the words ‘Hermione is a wizard’ because there is a prescription to imagine that one speaks truly when uttering those words, i.e. because it is fictional (in the *Potter*-stories) that those words express a truth.

Walton gives an account of how prescriptions to imagine, and thereby fictional truths arise. The key notions here are that of a *game of make-believe* and that of truth *in* such a game. These notions are familiar; we are all familiar with playing games like ‘cops and robbers’ after all. But what determines what is true in a game? Or to speak metaphorically, what determines what is true in the world of the game? Walton thinks that the features of the game-world could be fixed in a number of ways. We could stipulate that it is true in the game-world that there are dragons (e.g. by saying ‘Let’s pretend that there are dragons!’) or we could connect up features of the real world to features of the game world (e.g. by saying ‘whenever there is a hat-wearer, it is true in the game that there is a cop’). Walton calls these ways of determining what is true in the game *principles of generation*; he calls the real world objects which help to generate fictional truths *props*.

Walton then cashes out the notion of truth in works of fiction in terms of truth in games of make-believe. The starting point is that a work of fiction is a

representation, something “whose function is to serve as a prop in games of make-believe” (p.53).¹² But works of fiction do not have the function of serving as props in any old game of make-believe. Rather, they *authorize* certain games of make-believe, those that use the work as a prop in the right sort of way (p.51). I might use the *Potter*-stories as a prop in a game of make-believe in which Hermione is a french rabbit (say one based on a principle of generation which says ‘if the words ‘Hermione is a wizard’ appear in the text, then it is true in the game that Hermione is a french rabbit’). But that is not the function of the *Potter*-stories: their function is to be used as a prop in games of make-believe in which Hermione is a wizard (p.51).

The notion of truth in a work of fiction is then defined as a by-product of truth in a game of make-believe. Walton sums this up as follows (I adapt the passage to fit my example):

What is fictional in the *Potter*-stories is what is (or would be) fictional in any game in which it is the function of the stories to serve as a prop.
(p.60)

What is fictionally true in the *Potter*-stories is therefore what is true in any game of make-believe that is authorized by those stories. And to relate this back to the initial prescription-based account of fictionality: what is true in a work of fiction is what you have to imagine in order to be playing a game of make-believe which is authorized by the work of fiction in question.

With Walton’s account of the relationship between works of fiction and games of make-believe in place, we can now see how his account plays out with respect to internal talk about fiction.

6.2.2 Walton on Internal Talk About Fiction

The central aspect of Walton’s approach to internal talk of fiction is based on the idea that participation in games of make-believe is widespread (p.394):

¹² Notice that the category of fiction is, for Walton, much wider than it might normally be thought. Video games, movies, paintings, and various other things will count as ‘fictions’ in Walton’s sense. Notice also that Walton is a *functionalist* about fictions: works of fiction are representations whose function is to serve as props in games of make-believe. Contrast, e.g., Currie (1990) who gives an *intention* based account of works of fiction on which works of fiction involve utterances which are intended to elicit imaginings in audiences in virtue of the audience recognizing that they are intended to imagine in response to the utterance.

Verbal participation may be much more prevalent than one might have thought. Even when it is perfectly obvious that a speaker is making serious claims about a fictional world, we need not deny that he is participating verbally in a game of make-believe.

Suppose, e.g., that I am reading the *Potter*-stories to a small child, and I utter the sentence ‘Hermione is far cleverer than Harry’. In doing so, I am engaged in a game of make-believe, pretending to describe real people; I am “caught up in the spirit of the work... participating in a game of make-believe in which the work is a prop” (p.393). And now contrast this with a case in which you and I are discussing the *Potter*-stories and I say ‘Hermione is far cleverer than Harry’. On the face of things, we are not engaged in a game of make-believe; it seems that we are taking a more critical stance and describing the fictional world of Harry and Hermione. So whereas in the original case I am only pretending to describe the real world, in this case I seem to be really describing the pretend world.

A natural question to ask at this point is what Walton thinks a speaker is doing when they “stand back and observe coldly, intellectually, objectively” (2000, p.71) and utter the words ‘Hermione is far cleverer than Harry’? Is the speaker *pretending* to make an assertion and thereby indirectly describing the world of the *Potter*-stories? Or is she *genuinely* making an assertion and directly describing the world of the fiction?

The problem is that Walton (1990, p.395) has no account of assertion to offer and he is not concerned too much with the question of where we draw the line between pretend assertions and genuine ones. The difference “is inherently fuzzy and we can happily leave it that way.” But rather than getting into the niceties of Walton scholarship, I will read Walton as agreeing with Anthony Everett (2005) who, in the course of defending his own version of pretense fictionalism, writes (again, I adapt the quote to fit my example):

Utterances of [internal] sentences such as ‘Hermione is far cleverer than Harry’ are to be understood as being made within the scope of a pretense. So in uttering ‘Hermione is far cleverer than Harry’ we are not making an assertion about the real world. Rather, we are pretending that the world is as it is portrayed in *Harry Potter* and

we utter ‘Hermione is far cleverer than Harry’ in order to describe it.
(2005, p.639)

So in uttering internal sentences, we are not asserting anything; at best we are quasi-asserting something. This might not be exactly what Walton has in mind, but it fits the proposals of Everett (2005) and Eagle (2007) and is in line with Friend’s (2007) overview of the core elements of the approach.

Even if we are only quasi-asserting when we utter internal sentences from a cold critical perspective, what is the point of doing so? That is, what do we convey about the real world when we engage in internal talk about the fiction and pretend to assert that Hermione is a wizard?

You might think that the answer is that we are pretending to speak truly in order to communicate to our audience that it is fictional that Hermione is a wizard. Walton is happy with this if it’s understood as an *informal* description of what is conveyed by uses of ‘Hermione is a wizard’. But he thinks that the informal description is misleading because it suggests that there is a proposition (*that Hermione is a wizard*) that is fictionally true. Walton doesn’t want to commit himself to the existence of such a proposition, however, and so he thinks that a more detailed description of the case will tell us that utterances of ‘Hermione is a wizard’ convey something like this:

- (3) The *Potter*-stories are such that pretending to speak truly by uttering ‘Hermione is a wizard’ in an authorized game is to fictionally speak truly

I say that this is ‘something like’ what is conveyed by ‘Hermione is a wizard’ because Walton (1990, p.400) actually says that pretending to assert that Hermione is a wizard conveys the claim that the *Potter*-stories are such that to pretend in *this* way is to fictionally speak the truth in an authorized game — where ‘this’ way is the way that is indicated by a speaker who pretends to speak truly by uttering ‘Hermione is a wizard’. This allows Walton to say that ‘Hermione is a wizard’ and ‘Harry Potter’s closest female friend is a wizard’ both convey the same thing, since the way of pretending that is indicated in each case is the same. But for our purposes, the simpler formulation (3) will suffice. In any case, and however we formulate, the crucial point is that disengaged uses of sentences like ‘Hermione is a wizard’ convey facts about real world objects (works of fiction) and the games

of make-believe they authorize. And notice that this gives us a very good reason for pretending to assert internal sentences: doing so allows us to communicate to our conversational partners something about the props, the works of fiction, and the games of make-believe they authorize.

6.2.3 From Internal to External Talk

Walton starts with internal talk to defend, in its natural habitat, the thought that we are only pretending when we talk about fictional characters. But that's not where he stops, for he wants to understand external talk similarly.

This might seem like an odd idea. For whilst it does indeed seem as though we are pretending when we say things like 'Hermione is a wizard', it's much more difficult to see why we take on "some kind of frivolity" when speaking about fictional characters from an external point of view. I don't take myself to pretending to speak truly when I say that Holmes is Doyle's most famous fictional character: for all intents and purposes, I seem to be deadly serious. But let's take it slowly.

The first kind of external cases Walton considers are those in which some kind of pretense is still plausibly involved: cases I dubbed 'impure' external sentences in chapter 1. Consider, e.g., an interfictional comparison like (4):

(4) Monk is taller than Frodo.

Walton's view is that when we utter (4), we are only pretending to speak truly. The challenge he thereby faces is to explain why it's right or appropriate to pretend to speak truly by uttering (4) whereas it's wrong or inappropriate to say 'Frodo is taller than Monk' even if one is only pretending. And in the internal case, Walton relied on the thought that a work of fiction generates a certain set of authorized games and then used the resulting notion of truth-in-fiction to specify the conditions under which it's correct to pretend one thing rather than another. But this model seems problematic in the present context. It seems that in order to judge the appropriateness of this utterance we need to pretend that Monk and Frodo are real things inhabiting one fictional world and then compare their respective heights in that fictional world. But this kind of game is authorized by neither *Monk* nor *The Lord of the Rings* stories; so neither can serve as our prop here.

Walton points out, however, that even though a “fused” game based on the two fictions taken together is authorized by neither fiction, there is such a game. It’s just that it’s an unofficial game. Here’s what he says (I’ll adapt the quotation to fit my example):

Comparisons between characters in different works can be thought of as contributions to unofficial games which combine in natural ways games authorized for the various works. (4) suggests a game in which *Monk* and *The Lord of the Rings* are both props, and in which each functions much as it does in games authorized for it. To speak informally, Monk and Frodo are both characters in the world of the combination game, and each brings to it the height he exhibits in his home world. (1990, p. 407).

Moreover, Walton suggests that uttering (4) can convey truths about the non-fictional world: as before, uttering (4) conveys a claim about the props. But since we have two props, we have two options.

- (5) *Monk* and *The Lord of the Rings* are such that pretending to speak truly by uttering (4) in an unofficial game based on them is to fictionally speak the truth
- (6) *Monk* is such that to pretend to speak truly by uttering ‘Monk is *n*ft tall’ in an authorized game is to fictionally speak the truth and *The Lord of the Rings* is such that to pretend to speak truly by uttering ‘Frodo is *m*ft tall’ in an authorized game is to fictionally speak the truth, and $n > m$

Walton (1990, p.413) tells us that (5) depends on (6): the unofficial game based on the two fictions is a matter of combining, in a natural way, the authorized games of each. So Walton thinks we should “expect some looseness... saying (4) may serve to get across either or both of the facts expressed by (5) and (6)” and that it will, by and large, depend on the interests of the speaker and her conversational partners. As in the internal case, Walton thinks that pretending to assert (4) can convey a fact about the real world objects (works of fiction) and the games of make-believe they generate. It’s just that the game is an unofficial one that is nonetheless a ‘natural’ fusion of two separate fictions.

Even if one finds this explanation of interfictional comparisons attractive, it's noticeable that these are cases of impure external talk and one might thereby worry how the account will generalize to cover other cases in which our external talk takes on a pure form. Consider, e.g., an old favourite:

(7) Hermione is a fictional character.

The question is: how on earth can this involve pretense? It seems as though (7) does nothing other than express a simple truth.

Walton (1990, p.422) holds that (7) involves pretense, but in a specific way. He suggests that a speaker who utters (7) is not engaged in a pretense but is rather *betraying* their pretense. In using the name 'Hermione' the speaker pretends to refer, and the use of the predicate 'is a fictional character' is then understood in terms of the speaker betraying this pretense, making it clear that it was only fictional that he referred to something. Walton suggests that this explanation can be utilized to cover negative existential claims like 'Hermione doesn't exist' too. Again, the thought is that in using the name 'Hermione' the speaker is pretending to refer, a pretense of reference that is subsequently betrayed by 'doesn't exist' (1990, p.422). So though these cases are not understood exactly along the lines of either internal cases or impure external cases, pretense is still very much part of the picture.¹³

6.2.4 *Fame!*

What about (8), however?

(8) Holmes is more famous than any real detective

Walton (1990, p.414) specifies what is conveyed by (8) as follows:

(9) There is a degree of fame d such that no real detective is famous to that degree, and the *Holmes*-stories are such that to pretend to speak truly by uttering 'Holmes is famous to degree d ' in one of their authorized games is to fictionally speak the truth

¹³ Walton (2000) suggests a different account of negative existentials on which claims like 'Hermione doesn't exist' convey the claim that 'Hermione' does not refer.

Or to speak informally: no real detective is famous to degree d and it is *Holmes-fictional* that Holmes is famous to degree d .

I find this quite puzzling. What matters is not how famous Holmes is ‘in the story’ but how famous Holmes is ‘in reality’. Walton’s (9) seems appropriate to a reading of (8) on which what is at stake is the thought that Holmes’ degree of fame *in the Holmes stories* is greater than the degree of fame of any real detective. But even if Holmes had a very low degree of fame in the fiction, the character Holmes would’ve been more famous than any real detective nonetheless.

Walton (1990, p.424) suggests a different move which might be brought to bear on this case. He tells us that there may be games of make-believe “in which it is fictional that there are two kinds of people: both ‘real’ people and ‘fictional’ people”. And so one might naturally think that (8) can be interpreted as a move within such a game. The game will be unofficial but it will be generated by the *Holmes-stories* nonetheless. This suggests that we might retreat from (9) and specify what is conveyed by (8) as follows:

- (10) The *Holmes-stories* are such that to pretend to speak truly by uttering ‘Holmes is more famous than any real detective’ in one of their unofficial games is to fictionally speak the truth

This only masks the trouble. By analogy, recall that Walton thought that the fact that it is appropriate to pretend in an unofficial game based on the fusion of *Monk* and *The Lord of the Rings* was dependent on the facts about what is appropriate to pretend in the games of make-believe that each authorizes. But the problem is that the games authorized by the Holmes stories seem utterly irrelevant to the assessment of (8): how famous the fictional character Holmes is has nothing at all to do with what’s appropriate to pretend about Holmes’ fame in games of make-believe authorized by the *Holmes-stories*.

How, then, can Walton specify what is conveyed by (8)? However he does it, it can’t just be a matter of importing into some game of make-believe based on the *Holmes-stories* the facts about real detectives. The flip side to this point is that (8) doesn’t seem to communicate anything about the *Holmes-fiction*: if it communicates something about the props which generate truths in the unofficial game, it’s too simplistic to think that the prop in question is the *Holmes-story*. For even if we are playing an unofficial game of make-believe in which Holmes is a fictional

detective with a certain degree of fame, the degree of fame that Holmes has in this game has very little (if anything) to do with how famous he is represented as being in the story.

Remember that, for Walton, fictional truths are generated by principles of generation linking real world items to fictional truths. Thus, e.g., if we are playing a game of cops and robbers, the following principle of generation might be in place: x is wearing a hat iff it is fictional that x is an cop. And in the basic case of internal truths, it's again easy to identify the props and say something about how they might be linked to fictional truths; perhaps if the prop in question is the *Holmes*-stories, the principle says something like: if 'Holmes is F ' appears in the text, then it's fictional that 'Holmes is F ' expresses a truth. It's even easy to see what the props are in cases like 'Holmes is taller than Frodo' — the props in question will be the relevant works of fiction and we know (roughly) what needs to be going on with the props in order to ensure that it's fictional in the extended game that Holmes is taller than Frodo.

The problem, however, is that this model comes under pressure when we turn to cases like (10). What we need is a story, or at least a sketch of a story, about what the world needs to be like in order to ensure that it's fictional in the relevant game that Holmes is more famous than any real detective. Without such a story, we have no real grip on what fact about the real world is communicated by (10).

As I mentioned at the outset, however, Walton is not the only pretense fictionalist. The problem we are facing arises because part of Walton's project is to try to characterize what ordinary speakers mean when they utter sentences like (8), and the play with unofficial games is in part motivated by his desire to be able to saying something systematic about what ordinary speakers mean when they engage in external talk about fiction (1990, p.415). But upon reflection, it's somewhat unclear why the pretense fictionalist needs to engage in this project, and some pretense fictionalists have thought that Walton's quest for systematicity is misguided.¹⁴ Anthony Everett, for instance, writes (2005, p.647):

When we try to describe the information about the real world conveyed by utterances of [external] sentences, we find we cannot describe

¹⁴ Thus, e.g., Eagle (2007) tells us that he sees no reason why the defender of a pretense account should seek to try to offer a systematic account of what sentences like (8) convey.

it except in so far as we enter into an [extended] pretense and talk and think as if there really were fictional characters. We cannot step outside of our [extended] pretenses in order to describe this information from an external standpoint. This does not prevent the information we convey from being about the real world. Our acts of imagining are real things with real properties. It is just that the only way to describe many of the most interesting features of these acts requires our participating in the very sorts of imaginative process we seek to describe.

Everett, then, would precisely resist the idea that we can always find some sentence which expresses what is communicated by an external sentence. Transposed into the present context, the thought would be that it's wrong to demand a specification of the real world fact that is communicated by the claim that Holmes is more famous than any real detective. And the fact that we have trouble specifying what is communicated isn't surprising because we cannot express that information without engaging in the pretense.

This move fits in nicely with the kind of pretense-theoretic approach to mathematics that Yablo (2000, 2001, 2005) develops. According to Yablo, sentences like 'The number of planets is 9' can be seen as moves within a game of make-believe, a game which combines real world facts about physical reality with a fiction based on standard mathematics. And in analogy to Walton, Yablo thinks that the point of pretending to assert that the number of planets is 9 is to convey some fact about the real world: precisely that there are exactly nine planets. But like Everett, Yablo denies that we can always specify the real world fact which is communicated by a mathematical sentence. For instance, if we consider a claim like 'The number of planets is prime' then the relevant fact about the real world that we communicate is an infinite disjunction, which would prevent us from specifying the 'real content' of the claim that the number of planets is prime.

That said, there are differences between the Yablovian conception of mathematics and the Everettian conception of talk about fictional characters. For one thing, Everett claims that we can *never* specify the information conveyed by utterances of external sentences whereas Yablo thinks that we can *sometimes* specify the information conveyed by mathematical claims. And to my mind — in light of

the kind of Waltonian specifications of what is conveyed by sentences like (8) that we've encountered — Everett's claim seems overly pessimistic. Moreover, even if we focus on the cases where Yablo claims that we cannot specify what is communicated, notice that he does at least give us a grip on what is communicated (the infinite disjunction) and provide us with a story about *why* we cannot specify it completely. Everett, by contrast, doesn't even so much as *hint* at what might be communicated by sentences like (8) and he doesn't explain why we cannot specify the information about the real world that they communicate.

Walton's position thus seems incomplete and Everett's approach seems overly pessimistic. But not all is lost for the pretense theorist.

Like Walton and Everett, Anthony Eagle (2007) notes that if a pretense theoretic account of external sentences is to be made plausible then the relevant kinds of games need to be games of a very special sort. He writes (2007, §7):

What we need to do is make-believe *that there are fictional entities* — perhaps even make-believe that those entities are abstract artifacts as Thomasson maintains — and that one of those things is the fictional character Bond, and that thing is famous. This, in turn, is appropriate to make-believe, intuitively, just in case the exploits of the fictional character are widely publicised; and certainly the Bond fictions which contain details of those exploits are themselves famous.

Notice that, on this approach, the relevant game of make-believe might itself end up looking very much like the realist theory of fictional characters that Thomasson endorses. So, e.g., both Eagle and Thomasson will agree that Bond is famous and that Bond is an abstract artefact that was created by Ian Fleming. It's just that Thomasson believes her theory and Eagle just make-believes that Thomasson's theory is true. This marks a sharp contrast with the approaches of Walton and Everett. For whilst they agree that we need to make-believe that there are fictional characters, they don't appeal to the idea that the relevant game of make-believe is parasitic upon a version of fictional realism such as the artifactual view defended by Thomasson.¹⁵

¹⁵ Note that a similar approach to understanding talk about fictional characters has been advanced by Stuart Brock (2002). The crucial difference between his and Eagle's account is that Brock's fictionalism is not a pretense view. Rather, he advocates interpreting every external sentence as

Notice also that Eagle tries to say something about what the world has to be like in order to make it appropriate to pretend that Bond is famous: it has to be appropriate to pretend that the exploits of the fictional character Bond are widely publicised, and that the *Bond*-fictions are themselves famous. This might not be a full specification of what licenses us to pretend that Bond is famous, but it seems far superior to the pessimistic outlook of Everett that we encountered earlier. Moreover, and unlike Walton's account, this one seems to rightly predict that what is communicated by a claim like 'Bond is more famous than any real spy' is a claim about the real world, a claim that has something to do with the fact that the *Bond*-stories are more famous than any real spy rather than a fact about what's true according to the *Bond*-stories.

Finally, note that unlike Walton's approach, Eagle's approach would work even if *every* external claim were understood as a move within the game of make-believe mentioned above, i.e., the game in which there are fictional characters which are abstract artifacts created by authors. On Walton's view, by contrast, different external claims are handled via different games of make-believe, which leads Thomasson (1999, p.99) to worry that Walton's account is unsystematic and lacks unity. But since Eagle can understand all external claims in terms of a single game of make-believe, his account can offer a unified treatment of external sentences about fictional characters.

In light of this, I'm inclined to think that the parasitic pretense-theoretic approach sketched by Eagle is the most promising implementation of the approach. For not only does the theory allow for a uniform treatment of external sentences, but we're also told how the pretenses hook up to the real world and we learn what the real world truths we convey by our pretenses look like. These are clear benefits of Eagle's approach.

6.2.5 Priority or Pretense?

Having introduced the general pretense fictionalist approach and seen how the specific proposals of Walton, Everett, and Eagle differ from one another, I will now examine the differences between the priority theoretic approach I developed

being prefixed with an operator in the style of 'according to fictional realism'. Like Eagle, however, I think the pretense-theoretic version of the proposal is far more attractive than the paraphrastic one Brock defends. Much of what I'll say, however, applies in either setting.

in the previous chapter and the pretense theoretic approach we've just considered.

The most striking difference between the two approaches is their starting points. The priority theorist starts by assuming that sentences like 'Holmes is a fictional character' and 'Some characters appear in more than one novel' are not only assertable but *true*. Not 'kind of true' or 'loosely true' or 'nearly true' — just plain old true. The pretense theorist, by contrast, thinks that they are at best *untrue* and most likely *false*. Sure, these sentences might be 'correct' things to say, uttering them might convey true things via some kind of pragmatic process, they might fictionally express truths, and they might be 'metaphorically true'. But the pretense theorist, at least when she is not playing the game, will plainly reject that external sentences like 'Holmes is a fictional character' are true *simpliciter*.

I'm confident that I'm not the only one who finds this a little bizarre. In fact, I know I'm not, for Jonathan Schaffer (2009) finds it bizarre too. Schaffer thinks that many ordinary existence claims — claims like 'There are prime numbers' and 'There are fictional characters' and 'There are properties' are not only true but *obviously* true, commanding *Moorean certainty*, being more credible than any philosopher's argument to the contrary. Of course, Schaffer is aware that one might appeal to fictionalist resources in response to this claim. Thus in response to the allegation that it's just obviously the case that prime numbers exist,

[o]ne might hold that it is only *according to the fiction of numbers* that there are prime numbers. I reply that this doesn't touch the argument. 'There are prime numbers' does not make any claims about fictions (nor is there any covert fictive operator lurking in the syntax). So presumably this is a way of saying that 'there are prime numbers' is false and only some suitable paraphrase is true. But 'there are prime numbers' is obviously true. Whatever philosophical concerns might motivate this paraphrasing fictionalist have met their *reductio*. (2009. p.357)

Now, this passage is misleading. The pretense fictionalist doesn't think that there is some covert fictive operator lurking in the syntax or semantics of 'There are fictional characters' or 'There are prime numbers'. Eagle (2007, §2), e.g., tells us that the pretense view "keeps to a minimum the semantic constituents that are present neither explicitly or implicitly in the syntax" and cites this as a reason to

prefer a pretense-theoretic approach over an alternative approach. So Schaffer's presumptions about what the fictionalist is claiming are inaccurate.¹⁶ But what's really important to Schaffer is that the fictionalist thinks that it's false that there are prime numbers or fictional characters, despite the fact that it's just obvious that there are such things.

What does the argument from Moorean certainty amount to? It seems clear that the argument cannot be of the form: It's true that Holmes was created by Doyle, so it's true that there are fictional characters, so any view that entails that it isn't true that there are fictional characters is wrong. For that argument clearly begs the question against the fictionalist. So if the argument from Moorean certainty is to have a chance of being compelling, it cannot be formulated in these simple terms.

In recent work, Robbie Williams (forthcoming) suggests a better way of understanding Schaffer's argument, one which is formulated in terms of justification rather than truth. The idea is that the central Moorean claim is that we are more justified in believing (e.g.) that Holmes was created by Doyle than we are in believing any theory which says that there are no such things as fictional characters. But given that Holmes' being created by Doyle entails that Holmes exists, we in turn are more justified in believing that there are fictional characters than we are in believing any theory that entails that there aren't. But given this claim of relative justification, believing the pretense theory — even if we have some reason to do so — won't be an option because we have far more reason to hold onto our ordinary beliefs.

But though this argument isn't question-begging, the pretense theorist will precisely question the initial premise that we are justified in believing in the existence of fictional characters (or in believing something that entails that there are fictional characters). This move is familiar. Thus Hartry Field, in the course of defending his version of mathematical fictionalism, argues precisely that we *lack* good evidence for the existence of numbers and sets, and so he would reject the claim that we are more justified in believing that there are numbers than we are in believing his anti-realist theory. Similar moves, of course, can be anticipated in the present

¹⁶ Schaffer might have something like Brock's (2002) approach in mind above (see fn.15 above), for Brock does think that there is a covert fictive prefix present in the semantics of sentences like 'Holmes is a fictional character.' My point here is just that this semantic proposal isn't mandatory and it certainly isn't the standard way of developing fictionalism.

case, and so formulating the Moorean argument in terms of relative justification doesn't seem to give the fictionalist much to worry about.

As a consequence, Williams suggests a third formulation of the Moorean argument, one that is formulated not in terms of truth or relative justification but in terms of *belief revision*. He suggests that the question one should ask oneself is this: *given my starting point*, is it *rational* for me to come to believe that there are no such things as *Fs*? In the case of fictional characters, our starting point is that we believe that some characters are better developed than others, we think that the fictional character created by Doyle is more famous than any real detective, and we believe that some fictional characters are accurate presentations of obsessive-compulsive patients. The point is that accepting a theory (such as a pretense theory) which entails that there are no fictional characters will force me to revise all of these beliefs. But since we have such a large number of beliefs about fictional characters, giving them all up seems to require a lot of justification.

Notice that this doesn't imply that we should dogmatically hold onto any beliefs: refusing to revise one's beliefs in face of damning evidence against them would be irrational. Rather, the point is that if we are to be convinced that it's rational to revise a large body of our beliefs, then we'll need to show that the theory which forces us to give up those beliefs is very well justified indeed. Perhaps there have been cases of this in science — perhaps our best and highly justified physical theories force us to revise our beliefs about time and space — but is it really credible to think that the philosophical troubles that fictional characters generate give us enough reason to give up a large body of our ordinary beliefs? Of course, I concede that our ordinary talk of fictional characters is confusing (think of negative existentials, e.g.). But all that means is that all theories will force us to give up on some of our ordinary beliefs. The question is whether the huge revisions mandated by anti-realism are worth it, and whether the pretense theorist has ever given us anything like the kind of evidence we'd need to be in a position to rationally revise our beliefs in such an extreme manner.

But hang on, the pretense theorist might chip in, this argument relies on the assumption that ordinary folk *do* believe that Holmes is a fictional character, and it thereby assumes that we're asking the folk to *revise* their beliefs. That is, the argument assumes that the pretense theorist is a *revolutionary* fictionalist, who wants to get the folk to change their ways. So if the proposal is intended in a

more *hermeneutic* spirit, and if the pretense theorist claims that we were *always* just pretending and *never* really believed, then the argument is inapplicable.

The point is well-taken. But the issue then becomes whether it's really plausible to think that we only make-believe rather than genuinely believe; after all, it doesn't seem like speakers are just pretending when saying 'Some fictional characters are better developed than others', they seem to really believe it. Moreover, making-believe that *p* is normally something that we're *aware of* and something we *choose* to do.

In response to these kinds of worries, Stephen Yablo (2001, p.90) claims that making-believe is an 'amalgam' of two things: (i) being *as if* you believe and (ii) being that way through your deliberate effects. But the pretense theorist, Yablo claims, only really needs to accept that it's as if we believe: she doesn't need to think that we got that way through our deliberate efforts. So what the pretense theorist needs to make room for is a state which involves being as if we believe but is also non-deliberate, something we can slip into without noticing. Yablo calls this state *simulation*, and points out that this notion isn't totally unfamiliar: Walton (1997) utilizes it in order to explain our emotional responses to fiction.¹⁷

According to Walton, when I read a story like *Anna Karenina*, what I am doing is allowing the contents of the story to provide simulated beliefs for an "off-line" simulation of what it would be like to be someone who believed such things. When I read that some misfortune befell Anna, my simulated belief triggers my affect system just as it would if my belief system had been "on-line" and I had a real belief that someone had suffered such a misfortune. As a result, I feel pity. Similarly, if I am watching a horror film like *28 Days Later*, I am allowing the fiction to provide simulated beliefs for an "off-line" simulation of what it would be like to be someone who believed such things, and when I see that there are zombies attacking Britain, my affect systems are triggered in the same way as they would be if my belief system had been on-line and I had a real belief that there was a zombie outbreak. As a result, I feel fear and anxiety, or at the very least something close.

Aaron Meskin and Jonathan Weinberg (2005) call these seemingly emotive

¹⁷ Currie (1995) also appeals to simulation to this end. The difference is that whilst Walton thinks that I simulate the beliefs of a character in the story, Currie thinks that I simulate the beliefs of someone who is reading the story as a factual account of a series of events. The presentation of Walton's approach owes much to that of Meskin and Weinberg (2003).

reactions to fiction *fictive affect*. They note that audiences experiencing fictive affect

...will display a small but significant set of relevant behaviours, but will fail to demonstrate other behaviours that would be expected of someone experiencing its non-fictive analogue. (p.20).

So the idea is that when we have affective responses to fiction, what happens is that we use the contents of the fiction and simulate belief in these contexts to put us in the position of someone who actually believes that there is a giant squid in front of us or that someone mourns the death of his wife; i.e. we are simulating what it would be like to be someone who believed such things. But though simulated belief triggers affective responses, it does not produce the same range of behaviour that such a belief would. I might feel anxious when watching *28 Days Later* but I don't exhibit *fight-or-flight* behaviour: I don't flee the cinema, start shooting at the screen, or begin to stockpile weapons and food with the hope of surviving. The behavioural range of fictive affect, as Meskin and Weinberg put it, "typically extends no further than one's movie seat or reading chair" (p.20).

Yablo claims something similar goes on with mathematics. The idea seems to be that we run "off-line" simulations of what it would be like to be someone who really believed that there were numbers and sets. That is, we use mathematical realists as a basis for a simulation. And so we reason like mathematical realists, and behave as mathematical realists would behave. For all intents and purposes, it's *as if* we really believed. But we don't really believe in numbers, even though we might not realize that we don't. As Yablo (2001, p.90) puts it:

Making believe is a conscious activity, or one easily brought to consciousness. Simulating is not. It may even come as a great *surprise* that one is simulating. It came as a great surprise to me to realize that although it was as if I believed that an invalid argument was one with countermodels, I did not *really* believe it.

In this setting, Yablo claims that he can legitimately hold that we do not really believe that there are numbers. But the relevant claim is not that we are making-believe. The claim is that we are simulating instead.

The pretense theorist's hope now is to be able to apply the simulation picture to external talk about fictional characters too.¹⁸ Consider Eagle's account. On his picture, the idea would be that we use fictional realists as a basis for what it would be like to believe that there really are fictional characters. Thus the thought goes that we only simulate having the belief that some fictional characters are more famous than others, and only simulate the belief that Holmes was created by Doyle. But we don't really believe these things, even though it may come as a great surprise to us to realize that we don't.

But while it's clear enough where the similarities and dissimilarities between belief and simulated belief lie in the case of our ordinary engagement with fiction, we haven't yet been told what the similarities and differences are between simulating that there are fictional characters and believing that there are. When it comes to the similarities, the best I can make out — by analogy with Yablo's picture — is partially grounded in the fact that our verbal behaviour will be similar and our inferential systems will run as normal. In both cases we're ready to defend certain sentences and get upset when someone rejects them. As teachers, we'd give points if our students wrote down such claims in a relevant exam, and subtract points if they denied the truth of these sentences. When it comes to these aspects, we can certainly see what the similarities between belief and simulated belief would be.

But what about the dissimilarities? Well, in the case of fiction, it's crucial that simulating the belief that there is a zombie invasion in Britain doesn't trigger our behavioural systems in the same way as genuine belief would. As I pointed out earlier, we don't exhibit fight-or-flight behaviour, and if someone did leave the cinema and start stock piling weapons, we'd probably say that they weren't just running a simulation but genuinely believed. What's far from clear, however, is what the behavioural differences would be if we were only simulating belief in the existence of fictional characters. In what ways do fictional realists act differently from the rest of us?

Now, Yablo (2001, p.90-1) suggests that there will be some predictions from the hypothesis that we are only simulating belief in the existence of numbers. Thus he tells us that if we are simulating rather than believing we will, upon reflection, be *indifferent* to philosophical questions about the existence of mathematical ob-

¹⁸ Eagle (2007, p.146) expresses sympathy with Yablo's account, and it's clear that Walton thinks that his account is a good description of ordinary practice.

jects: we'll either claim that we don't believe or claim to be agnostic, or claim that ordinary practice doesn't depend on whether or not we believe. He also thinks that we'll regard some questions about numbers as being *silly*: we'll have as little time for questions like 'What are the intrinsic properties of the number 2?' as we have for questions like 'How many hairs does Holmes have on his head?'. Similarly, the pretense theorist might claim that the fact that we were only simulating belief in the existence of fictional characters would show up in our 'all-things-considered' judgements about fictional characters, and our reactions to 'silly' questions about Holmes and his ilk.

Notice that the pretense theorist is making a bold claim here — even though an ordinary speaker might take herself to believe that Holmes was created by Doyle, she would really only be simulating that belief, simulating having the beliefs of someone who believed that there are fictional characters who were created by authors. What's more, that's a bold *empirical* conjecture. It'd be surely interesting to conduct empirical research on the issue, but as far as I'm aware it hasn't been done yet and so the plausibility of the pretense theorist's account depends on future discoveries. In this setting, the pretense theorist is a *hostage to empirical fortune*.

The complaint was that if the pretense theorist is going to make good on the idea that we never really believed, they need to make room for something like the notion of simulation. But they also need to characterize that notion, and how it differs from belief.

The former problem is made sharp by the fact that the kinds of examples Yablo gives are pretty heterogenous. Next to the movie-goer who fears the giant squid he also mentions these cases:

Copernicus after realizing the astronomical facts still simulates belief in a setting sun. Einstein having developed relativity theory still simulates belief in absolute rest and motion. ... A dreamer may simulate the belief that she is winning the Nobel Prize. (2001, p.91)

But it's *far* from clear that these examples should be all handled in the same way. What, apart from being alleged cases of simulated beliefs, do they have in common? Simulation of the belief that the sun is setting certainly differs from the simulation to the effect that I won the Nobel Prize. (And as Brendan Jackson (2007) has argued, a far simpler account of motion ascriptions is available, according

to which claims like ‘The sun is moving’ are context sensitive and involve an implicit restriction to a certain frame of reference.) Moreover, it’s even less clear that Einstein simulates the beliefs of a Newtonian. Rather, he just *assumes* Newtonian mechanical principles when doing certain calculations because his theory tells him that those principles approximate truth in many cases. And then there is of course the fact that in the first two cases the agent is *aware* he doesn’t believe, while the example of the dreamer well may be the only case in which the agent doesn’t realize that she’s simulating.

The second issue is made sharp by the fact that it’s relatively easy to tell what’s going on in cases like the movie-goer who simulates the belief that there is a zombie invasion or a giant sea creature attacking. But what’s less clear is what’s going on in the kind of cases that Yablo cares about, such as mathematics or talk about fictional characters. What’s the relevant difference between the simulator and the believer in the proposition that there are fictional characters? Again, in the case of the movie-goer, a pretty good indicator that he’s not really believing that zombies are attacking is that he exhibits no fight-or-flight behaviour. But what behaviour ought to be usually triggered by a sober and emotionless belief such as the belief that there are numbers or the belief that there are fictional characters? One thought might be that the difference lies in the simulator not letting the simulated belief be the driver in her decision making. Thus I might attempt to put myself in your shoes by simulating that I just received a pay raise (let’s go with happy simulations), but if I then go about and book a holiday to the Seychelles I probably did so well at simulating that I started to genuinely believing that I got a pay rise. In the same way, the thought goes, the simulator puts herself in the fictional realist’s shoes by simulating the belief that there are fictional characters. But what kind of behavioural difference would show up between the simulator and the genuine fictional realist?

To be clear, I’m not saying that these challenges cannot be met. But I do think that they constitute a serious challenge to the pretense theorist. So long as we haven’t been given any satisfying answer to these questions, the ball is in the pretense theorist’s court.

6.2.6 Summing Up

Where does this leave us? Well, despite the attractions that a pretense theoretic account of internal talk might have, it's far from clear that the account is viable once we try to use it to explain external talk about fiction too. Part of the problem here, as I argued in §6.2.4, is that the pretense theorist owes us a story about the real world facts that are communicated by sentences like 'Hermione is a fictional character' or 'Holmes was created by Doyle.' Even if we don't demand that the pretense theorist has something systematic to say, we still want a sketch of a story and an explanation about why we don't just assert the real world fact instead of conveying it by engaging in a game of make-believe. So the fictionalist has work to do on this front. But even if she can do that, the worry remains that her account forces us to give up many of our ordinary beliefs and it's not clear that the price is worth paying. In particular, it's not clear that it's worth paying given that there is an alternative, priority-theoretic approach on the market which seems to deflate questions of existence and replace them with questions of grounding. So if the pretense theorist is motivated by ontological worries about fictional characters, the prospect of a priority theoretic approach makes pretense theory look undermotivated. Of course, if the pretense theorist is motivated by the idea that her account is descriptive of actual practice, then that's a different matter. But now she has to make the case that we never really believed in fictional characters at all. It's far from clear that the moves made in this direction so far — such as the Yablovian appeal to simulated belief — are viable, however. And the simpler option, that of holding that we do believe, and our beliefs are true, is available even to the anti-realist by embracing a priority-theoretic approach.

6.3 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to compare the priority-theoretic account of fictional entities defended in the previous chapter to two of its most prominent rivals: the *minimalist* account of Stephen Schiffer and Amie Thomasson, and the *fictionalist* account of Kendall Walton, Anthony Eagle, and Anthony Everett. I stress that though I have raised worries about these accounts, my goal has not been to offer decisive reasons against them but rather to identify the central ways

in which they differ from my own preferred account.

So, for instance, in §6.1, I argued that the minimalist's concerns are somewhat orthogonal to those of the priority theorist. For Thomasson's focus is on existence questions asked in ordinary English, whereas the priority theorist thinks that the mere fact that the English sentence 'There are fictional characters' is true doesn't settle the ontological question either way. The priority theorist isn't alone in this: proponents of the Textbook Quinean approach to ontology will also think that the interesting ontological questions remain unanswered even once we've settled on what can truly be said to exist in the vernacular. In any case, Thomasson might be right that existence questions are easy to answer, but such a deflationary attitude to the derivative would be consistent with a priority theory.

In §6.2, I then turned to look at pretense fictionalism. The kind of pretense-theoretic account of internal talk offered by Walton is, I think, attractive. But I'm doubtful that the account can be extended to cover external talk about fictional entities. Part of the problem here is that the pretense theorist thinks that though sentences like 'Hermione was created by Rowling' are false, they can still be used to convey truths about the real world. As we saw, however, we still need a sketch of what kinds of truths about the real world are conveyed by external sentences, and it's difficult to see in some cases what the pretense theorist has to say. The other part of the problem is that pretense theorists have typically thought of their project as being hermeneutic in character: they think that we don't really believe that Holmes was created by Doyle and are only pretending instead. But as we also saw, however, we still need a story about what we are doing and the normal moves that have been made in the literature — e.g., Yablo's appeal to simulation — has hardly been well developed. To the extent that the priority theorist has no analogous problem — she can happily hold that we do believe, and that our beliefs are very often true — the pretense theorist faces problems that the priority theorist does not.

Concluding Remarks

The literature on fictional entities has, I think, failed to fully appreciate that there is a crucial distinction between *first-order* ontological questions and *second-order* metaontological ones. This is reflected in the all-too-frequent lumping together of (e.g.) van Inwagen and Thomasson as proponents of ‘fictional realism’. For what’s true is that both van Inwagen and Thomasson agree on the answer to the first-order ontological question *Does Holmes Exist?* and it’s hardly a surprise that they are subsequently lumped together as realists. But what’s also true is that van Inwagen and Thomasson have very different metaontologies: they disagree over the subject matter of ontological inquiry, as well as its aims and its methodology. Moreover, it’s easy to forget that a philosopher’s metaontology will tend to shape her answers to ontological answers. So, e.g., it’s hardly a surprise that Thomasson advocates a positive answer to the question of Holmes’ existence given that she accepts a metaontology that implies that ontological questions are easy to answer.

This thesis aimed to bring these methodological issues to the fore. As we have seen, the arguments that realists have offered in favour of their views have tended to rely on crucial metaontological assumptions about what ontological questions are and how they should be answered. For instance, within the Textbook Quinean metaontology that van Inwagen accepts, our beliefs about what there really is should be guided by our best theories of the world: and if those theories indispensably quantify over fictional characters, we should embrace an ontology that includes Holmes and his ilk. In chapter 3, I distilled an ‘indispensability argument’ for fictional realism from van Inwagen’s various discussions, and detailed how it fits into the wider Quinean metaontology he accepts. I also raised some doubts about the viability of van Inwagen’s metaontology; the complaint was that if the outputs of literary criticism count as part of our best theory of the world, it’s

difficult to see why the outputs of cultural anthropology, the history of science, or clinical psychology won't also count. And if they do, there is the danger that van Inwagen's metaontology gets him in for more than he bargained for and he'll be forced to embrace an ontology that includes not only creatures of fiction but also creatures of myth, failed scientific posits and figments of the imagination.

In outlining the Textbook Quinean approach to ontological inquiry, we also saw that the notion of *paraphrase* plays a central role, since one way to alleviate commitments to fictional characters would be to show that quantification over them could be paraphrased away. But despite the fact that various philosophers have appealed to paraphrases, it's far from clear how paraphrasis should be understood. In chapter 4, I offered a model: the *translate-and-deflate* picture of paraphrase, and discussed a number of constraints that we might place on the paraphrastic project. I also suggested that the demand for systematicity cast serious doubt over the idea that commitment to fictional entities could be alleviated by the method of paraphrase.

Having examined the Textbook Quinean approach to ontological inquiry in chapters 3 and 4, I then examined an independently motivated metaontology that stands opposed to the Quinean orthodoxy in certain ways, which I subsequently deployed in order to defend a novel version of fictional anti-realism. On this view, the central task we face is that of *explaining* truths concerning fictional characters, where the relevant notion of explanation — *grounding* — is distinctively metaphysical in character. Fictional anti-realism emerges as the plausible thesis that truths about fictional entities can be completely explained in terms of the existence and features of other things. Having developed this *priority theoretic* proposal and sketched its application to the debate about fictional entities, I then examined the differences between it and some of its rivals, including the minimalism of Schiffer and Thomasson, and the pretense fictionalism of Walton, Eagle and Everett. In contrast to the minimalist, the priority theorist thinks that there is a further question to be asked even once we have settled whether the application conditions for an expression like 'fictional character' are fulfilled: we want to know whether there *really* are fictional characters, not just whether it's true to say in English that there are fictional characters. But I also argued that there is a certain sense in which the priority theorist can agree with the minimalist: for all that's been said, questions of *derivative* ontology (Ontology Lite) might well be

quite easy to answer even if questions of *fundamental* ontology (Ontology Proper) are difficult. And this in turn means that the priority theorist will have no need to hold that our ordinary beliefs about fictional characters (that Holmes was created by Doyle, that some characters appear in more than one story, etc.) are false nor any need to deny that we never really believed such things in the first place. To the extent that these are costs that the pretense fictionalist must pay, the priority theoretic approach to the debate about fictional characters seems less revisionary of our ordinary conception.

The priority theoretic approach generates many questions, admittedly. On the one hand, there are *global* issues relating to the central elements of the account and the very notion of grounding. On the other hand, there are *local* issues relating to the application of priority theoretic resources to the debate about fictional characters. But I hope to have convinced you that the account is no less plausible than its rivals, and that priority theoretic accounts of fictional entities, such as the one that I have developed, are attractive and deserving of attention. More generally, I hope to have convinced you that second-order metaontological issues are centrally important to any full assessment of an answer to a first-order ontological question. And this point is illustrated vividly if the debate about fictional characters is taken as a case study.

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