

# How Fictional Works Are Related to Fictional Entities

(Alberto Voltolini)

## Topic and goal

The goal of the paper is to give an ontological, language-independent argument for the existence of ficta (fictional entities). (p.225)

The ontological argument: (p.236)

- (i) “If we admit a certain kind of entity, we cannot but admit all the other kinds of entities that figure in the identity conditions of an entity of that kind.”
  - (ii) “we admit fictional works”
  - (iii) Fictional objects figure in the identity conditions of fictional works.
- (concl) “we cannot but admit fictional objects”

The main part of the paper is dedicated to arguing in favour of the third premise.

- 1) Definitions of fictional texts, fictional works and fictional worlds
- 2) In order to show that (iii) holds, Voltolini argues that in B-cases (cases of syntactically identical fictional works that share the same background assumptions) differences in ficta are the only way to account for the fact that the fictional works are different.
- 3) Voltolini examines diverse possible objections to (2) and answers them.
- 4) He states his ontological argument and compares it to a similar argument given by Thomasson.

## Summary

### *1) Definitions* (p.225-227)

Fictional texts: they are “syntactical items”, “collections of syntactically individuated sentences, i.e. the sentences that are further used *connivingly*, i.e. to make-believe that something is the case.”

Fictional works: They are syntactico-semantic entities, made of: (p.226)

- non-connivingly used sentences (composing the fictional text)
- real truth-conditional interpretation of these sentences (the explicit propositions said by these sentences).

Fictional worlds: They are made of: (p.227)

- fictional work minus sentences/syntax.
- set of explicit propositions constituting the fictional work and set of implicit propositions entailed by them.

### *2) Differences in ficta are the only way to account for the fact that syntactically identical fictional works are different* (p.227-230)

Borges: Ménard tries to reproduce *Don Quichotte de la Mancha*. The fictional texts are the same, but Ménard’s produces a different fictional work from Cervantes.

Case A: Again, Ménard produces exactly the same text that Cervantes wrote, except that in this case, the coincidence is entirely accidental. (p.228)

Case B: Same as the case A, except that in this version of the case Cervantes and Ménard are close neighbours. This further clause is designated to block the idea that different assumptions could explain the difference between Ménard's and Cervantes works.

What can explain the difference between the two fictional works?

- Since the fictional texts are the same, the difference must be semantical (set of explicit propositions)
- It must concern the set of singular propositions (general propositions are not part of fictional texts but of literary texts. Even if this was not the case, general terms are used in fiction with the same meaning as they have outside it, then their meaning is constant, whichever fiction they are found in. So they can not be the difference between the two fictional works.) (p.229)
- The difference in the singular propositions must concern their objectual component. (p.230)
- More precisely, their fictional objectual component.

In B-cases, the difference between the fictional works must be accounted for in terms of different fictional characters.

### 3) *Possible objections* (p.230-236)

- We could define "fictional works" differently, denying that they are syntactico-semantical entities. There cannot be semantical differences between two fictional works

V: But then fictional works become identical to fictional texts, there is a one-one correspondence between them. As a consequence, Ménard's fictional work coincides with Cervantes fictional work

- We could try to say that the difference between the fictional works is due to something else, for instance the background assumptions associated with them. (p.231)

V: This strategy works with A-cases, but not with B-cases. (p.232)

- We could think that fictional works are also constituted by their author's intentions. (p.233)

V: Either the authorial intentions are fulfilled, and the terms have the same meaning. In this case, we still have to explain the difference between the fictional works.

Or the intentions could be fulfilled, but the terms have different meanings. But then the difference in the intentions is superfluous.

Or we can imagine that the authorial intentions are not fulfilled. Then there are no different entities-cum-meaning to account for the difference between the fictional works and this reaction is again useless.

- Instead, we could argue that fictional works are also constituted by their author/composer.

V: Authors should not figure in the existence conditions of fictional works. Even if they did, we would then lack a means to distinguish fictional from other works. (p.234)

- Finally, we could deny that there could be semantic differences without there being syntactical differences. (p.235)

V: There seem to be nothing wrong with the intuitions that the fictional works are different. This kind of objection is arbitrary.

#### 4) *The ontological argument* (p.236-237)

- (i) “if we admit a certain kind of entity, we cannot but admit all the other kinds of entities that figure in the identity conditions of an entity of that kind.”
- (ii) “we admit fictional works”
- (iii) Fictional objects figure in the identity conditions of fictional works.

(concl) “we cannot but admit fictional objects”

Thomasson offers a similar argument: if fictional objects and fictional works are the same kind of entities, we should not reject one while we accept the other.

BUT fictional works and fictional objects are not the same kind of entities! The former are syntactico-semantical entities, while the latter are not.

Even if this was not the case, Voltolini’s argument would still be stronger than Thomasson argument. (p.237)

We could try to reject the second premise of Voltolini’s argument (ii), to reject the existence of fictional works. But then we should have no more reason to accept the existence of non-fictional works.

#### Questions and Remarks

- Should we admit fictional works in the way Voltolini defines them? (premise (ii))
- Are there really no fictional properties? (p.228, note 10)
- Are fictional works only about fictional individuals? (p.229, note 12)
- Is it really necessary that a fictional work contains fictional characters? (p.230, note 15)
- Are composers really not part of the identity of non-fictional works? Isn’t our intuition that there may be differences between syntactically identical works (fictional or not) based on the idea that they have different authors? (p.233)
- Even if authors/composers should not figure in the existence conditions of a fictional work (“necessarily, if a fictional work exists, then it is authored by someone” (p.233)), could they not figure in the identity conditions themselves, something like: necessarily, if  $x=y$ , and  $x$  is authored by  $a$ , then  $y$  must be authored by  $a$ , where  $a$  could be an author or a group of authors?
- Is there really a difference in ficta between the two fictional works in B-cases? What is it supposed to be?