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Fictional Names Revisited

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1 Introduction

Fictional names (and related thoughts) have long puzzled philosophers. Fictional entities are often used in philosophy as paradigms of something that does *not* exist, and fictional names as stock examples of names that *fail* to refer to anything. Yet we seem to be talking about *something* when we talk about, say, Sherlock Holmes. That is, sentences such as:

> Sherlock Holmes smoked a pipe
>
> Sherlock Holmes never existed

seem perfectly meaningful, and at least the latter seems true. Devitt (1981) has distinguished here two kinds of attitudes among philosophers. He calls those who insist that fictional names fail to name anything "the tough philosophers," and those who rather think that fictional names do refer to something "the tender philosophers." It seems that from Russell to Quine and beyond, "the tough philosophers" have dominated—at least in the so-called "analytic" tradition. Russell famously wrote:

> [T]o maintain that Hamlet, for example, exists in his own world, namely, in the world of Shakespeare's imagination, just as truly as (say) Napoleon existed in the ordinary world, is to say something deliberately confusing, or else confused to a degree which is scarcely credible. There is only one world, the 'real' world: Shakespeare's imagination is part of it, and the thoughts that he had in writing Hamlet are real. So are the thoughts that we have in reading the play. But *it is of the very essence of fiction that only the thoughts, feelings, etc., in Shakespeare and his readers are real, and that there is not, in addition to them, an objective Hamlet.* (Russell 1919, 169; my emphasis)

However, in the 1970s, the tide turned. In 1973, Kripke gave his famous *John Locke Lectures* in Oxford. In those lectures, Kripke defended the "tender" view. The transcript of the lectures was circulated in the philosophical community, and they influenced many philosophers. Several other philosophers, partly independently and partly influenced by Kripke, began to hold similar views. Kripke's lectures were finally published in 2013 as *Reference and Existence* (Kripke 2013). Their publication has given new currency to Kripke's particular views (see also Kripke 2011).

In those lectures, Kripke contends, at least tentatively, that fictional entities do exist as abstract objects, and fictional names do refer to such abstract entities. Several other philosophers have since then favored similar views. There is no established terminology here. I shall call this general view *The Abstract Object Theory (*AOT, in short).[1] However, we need to distinguish two different variants of the view. First, Wolterstroff (1980) has proposed a view that is somewhat Platonist: according to him, fictional entities are collections of properties and as such, *eternally* existing kinds. Second, Kripke and several others, including Searle (1975), van Inwagen (1977, 1983, 2003), Thomasson (1997, 2003), Salmon (1998), and Braun (2005), have rather held that fictional objects are *created*, and have "a time of birth." This specific view is sometimes called "Creationism." The focus in what follows is mainly on this latter view, but as "Creationism" as a label has some unhappy connotations, I prefer to talk simply about "AOT."

Advocates of AOT have utilized different analogies. Van Inwagen compares fictional entities to theoretical entities in various sciences and contends that fictional characters are theoretical entities of "criticism" or "fictional discourse." I cannot help feeling, however, that the analogy is quite weak: theoretical entities in science are typically postulated in order to explain some otherwise unexplainable observable phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is not clear what the latter would be in the case of fictional entities. In science, it is also possible that it turns out the postulated theoretical entities do not in reality exist: this happened, for example, for the postulated planet Vulcan. It not clear that the same could happen for fictional entities in the AOT framework. In practice, van Inwagen's grounds appear to reduce to the observation that we sometimes seem to quantify over fictional entities. I will set van Inwagen's analogy with theoretical entities aside, but I will return to the question of quantification later.

Kripke and Thomasson, in contrast, view fictional entities as social entities—or, at least, they defend AOT by comparing fictional entities to social entities, such as nations or laws. Kripke says:

> The fictional character can be regarded as an abstract entity which exists in virtue of the activities of human beings, in the same way that nations are abstract entities which exist in virtue of the activities of human beings and their interrelations. (Kripke 2011, 63)

> They exist in virtue of certain activities of people just as nations do. (Kripke 2013, 73–74)

Thomasson, in turn, writes:

> …the best view of what fictional characters are … is that fictional characters are abstract cultural artifacts, relevantly similar to other social and cultural entities including particular laws of state…, works of music…, and the works of literature in which fictional characters appear. (Thomasson 2003, 220)

[1] "Fictional realism" is also sometimes used in the literature for this view.

There is one peculiar aspect in Kripke's meditations: Kripke gives quite a lot of weight in his argumentation to iterated fiction, i.e., fictions inside fictions, and related characters. He seems to think that analyzing them requires AOT. Kripke reflects on two examples. First, he considers *Hamlet* and Gonzago. Namely, in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, there is a play (inside the play) called *The Murder of Gonzago*. (Such a play has apparently never existed.) Inside the story, Hamlet is a real person, but Gonzago is a fictional character. According to Kripke, in our reality, "real life," Hamlet exists as an abstract object, but Gonzago apparently does not exist. Gonzago is what Kripke calls "a fictional fictional character." Second, Kripke considers Moloch, the famous pagan god whom the Canaanites apparently worshipped. Child sacrifice and fire are often associated with Moloch. However, as Kripke points out, some scholars now contend that this is all confusion: according to them, "MLK" in ancient Hebrew just meant either "king" or "lord," or the kind of "sacrifice," and did not name a particular pagan god at all.[2] Kripke concludes that if so, there was no such pagan god as Moloch. But there really was, say, Astoreth[3] (a pagan goddess) as an abstract object (fictional entity).[4] Kripke seems to suggest that AOT is needed to make such distinctions between real and existing fictional entities, such as Hamlet and Astoreth, and characters such as Gonzago and Moloch, which do not exist in "real life."[5]

The philosophical literature on fictional names and fictional entities is now vast and has many ramifications; it would not be realistic to try to cover it comprehensively in one paper. My aims here are much more limited: I want to discuss critically especially the above-mentioned ideas of Kripke and, to some extent, the related ideas of a few other philosophers, which have not received much attention. Kripke's arguments are always to be taken seriously, and he certainly makes a number of apt observations here too. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to agree with him on this particular issue, i.e., on AOT. This paper is my attempt to spell out my reasons for that.[6]

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[2] As Kripke notes in various footnotes, these are controversial theories, but let us assume with Kripke, for the sake of argument, that something like this is true.

[3] Kripke does not talk about Astoreth but only about Zeus; I have introduced Astoreth to make the two cases more directly comparable; apparently Astoreth was actually worshipped by the Canaanites.

[4] However, Kripke does not in the end treat Moloch (assuming that some of the critical theories Kripke mentions are correct) as a fictional fictional entity; he compares "Moloch" to failed names such as "Vulcan"—both are, according to Kripke, empty names—and says that the whole idea that there is such a legendary object is "based on a *confusion*" (Kripke 2013, 78).

[5] For example, in the Buenos Aires workshop (2013), if my memory does not fail me, Kripke seemed to take this as a major advantage of AOT, speaking in its favor. I must admit that I find the relevant passages in Kripke 2013 and Kripke 2011 puzzling.

[6] For some further complementary critical arguments against AOT or "creationism" in general, see Caplan 2004 and Brock 2010.

2 Fictional entities as social entities?

As we have noted, at least Kripke and Thomasson suggest that (real) fictional entities are more or less similar to social entities, such as *nations* (Kripke) or particular *laws* of state such as the U.S. Constitution or the Miranda laws (Thomasson), "which exist in virtue of the activities of human beings and their interrelations" (Kripke).

On the one hand, it seems evident that for a *social entity* to exist, to be real,[7] some sort of collective intention—commonly accepted rules and norms, habits, practices, and regular behavior patterns—of sufficiently many people is required. That is why they are called *social* entities. For example, I cannot myself alone create a new nation, legislate a new social norm or law, or make, say, pinecones count as currency, simply by entertaining the idea; some kind of recognition by some other people, a collective acceptance or agreement, is required. So, are fictional entities something like that?

On the other hand, Kripke and Thomasson (and some other advocates of AOT) also clearly think that a fictional entity is created and begins to exist as soon as the author writes the relevant story that first introduces the character in question, in the act of pretense. Kripke writes, for example: "On my view, to write a novel is, ordinarily, to create several fictional characters" (Kripke 2013, 72). This in no way requires any audience, any sharing with a wider community. Therefore, the fictional entity can't really be, in this picture, a social or cultural entity in any normal sense. This amounts to—if not a plain contradiction—at least a serious tension within AOT, as Kripke and Thomasson, for example, develop it. What about fictional texts that are never published?[8] How about texts that are never read by anyone else but the author? Furthermore, *writing* the story down cannot be essential: as Kripke (2013, 71) also notes, fictional folktales have often been passed orally from one generation to the next without them being written down. However, if neither community nor writing down is required, it seems to follow that any entity ever imagined exists (as an abstract object of imagination). But this seems excessive: it brings with it the metaphysical problem of the overpopulation of the realm of existing things.[9]

Furthermore, it seems that the latter liberal line (according to which any entity every imagined exists) would collapse Kripke's central distinction between fictional and fictional fictional entities: for surely *a* cannot imagine that *b* imagines that *P* without *a* herself imagining that *P*. For example, Shakespeare cannot imagine that an

[7] There are obviously also eliminativist views on social entities, but here only the views according to which social entities are, in some sense, real and exist, are relevant.

[8] Interestingly, Salmon writes: "Kripke believes that a fictional character does not come into existence until the final draft of the fiction is *published*" (Salmon 2011, 69, fn. 24; my emphasis; Salmon himself disagrees). I can't find anything in Kripke 2013 or Kripke 2011 that would support this; rather, they seem to support my interpretation here. But perhaps Kripke has later qualified his view this way, and Salmon has some first-hand knowledge of that—Salmon refers in another footnote to Kripke's seminars he attended in 1981 and 1983. Be that as it may, there are critical questions also in that case: What if nobody reads the published fiction? How about orally transmitted folktales or widely circulated manuscripts that never get published? Clearly being published cannot be a plausible demarcation line here.

[9] I owe the key observations of this paragraph to Jenni Tyynelä.

unnamed author had imagined Gonzago (and his murder) without himself imagining Gonzago. But then also Gonzago and not only Hamlet should exist as an abstract object.

Then again, Kripke wants to think that fictional entities do *not* exist "automatically," but it is an empirical question whether a certain fictional entity exists (Kripke 2013, 71):

> Was there a fictional or legendary character who married his grandmother? ... If there was, this will be true in virtue of appropriate works of fiction or legend having been written, or at least told orally, or something of the kind. If there is such a fictional work, then there is such a fictional character. (Kripke 2013, 71)

> The question of their [fictional characters'] existence is a question about the actual world. It depends on whether certain works have actually been written, certain stories in fiction have actually been told. (Kripke 2011, 63)

Here it seems that the existence of a fictional entity depends on the existence of the relevant *fictional work*—where the latter seems for Kripke here to require something more substantial than just someone momentarily imagining that entity. For example, apparently the made-up play *The Murder of Gonzago* does not exist by Kripke's standards, and it would seem to follow that Gonzago does not therefore exist as an abstract object in the real world. But this does not cohere with the liberal conclusion we ended up with just a moment ago. I repeat: there is a serious tension here.

3 Fiction inside fiction

Let us next reflect on iterated fiction and related issues in more detail. Do such cases support AOT? To begin with, Kripke's example of Moloch seems to be a bit off-topic. It is not really a case of a fictional work and its content; it essentially turns to the factual historical question of whether certain people in a certain place and time really believed in and worshipped such-and-such a pagan god in such-and-such a way. It may be a false historical hypothesis that there was such-and-such a religion or cult in the land of Canaan around 1200–800 BC, that the Canaanites worshipped at the time such-and-such a pagan god, etc. But I fail to see why any of this would require us to think that, in contrast, say, Astoreth, exists or existed (apparently, she was really worshipped by the Canaanites at that time). I think we can analyze quite easily the sentence

> Canaanites, around 1200–800 BC, worshipped a god of fire, called "Moloch" (or something like that), essentially by sacrificing children to him by burning them

as false (if the above-mentioned hypothesis is correct) without being required to conclude that Moloch does (or did) not exist, but Zeus and Astoreth, in contrast, do (or did) exist. These are questions about certain specific groups of people, in a specific time period, and whether they held such-and-such beliefs, whether they practiced such-and-such religions, worshipped such-and-such gods in such-and-such a way, etc. It is neither natural nor very helpful to interpret this as a question of whether this or that

god exists (or existed) or not. Anyway, these are factual questions of beliefs, and not questions about imagination and fiction.

And why, if AOT is correct, instead of saying that Moloch never existed (as Kripke suggests), do we not say that he/it did not exist around 1200–800 BC, but was created later and has existed? After all, the idea of Moloch has been later widely shared in the Jewish and Christian world. Compare this to the following scenario: Imagine that it turned out that *Hamlet* was *not* really written by Shakespeare around 1600; instead, there had been an ingenious hoax and the work had been written only in the 19th century. Should we conclude, according to AOT, that Hamlet never existed? Or just that Hamlet was created later and has existed for a shorter time than we had assumed?[10] In sum, it is quite unclear whether and how the Moloch case supports AOT (if that ever was Kripke's idea).

Kripke's alleged conclusion that Gonzago, in contrast to Hamlet, does not exist may feel intuitively appealing, because *Hamlet* (the play) leaves the fictional fictional story of Gonzago so sparse, superficial, and incomplete: we are told very little about Gonzago in *Hamlet*, and the character is left highly unspecified. But I think that our *prima facie* intuitions may vary depending on the vividness or the specificity of the fictional fictional story.

For example, let us rather consider *The Taming of the Shrew*, another famous play by Shakespeare. In it, the frame story is quite short and unspecified. Its main character is a drunk tinker named Christopher Sly. When he wakes up, he is tricked, as a prank, into believing that he is actually a nobleman. A play is then performed for Sly that includes as characters two daughters of the rich lord Baptista Minola and several of their suitors. It is this play inside the play that is the main plot developed in detail, and which is best-known, having vivid characters such as the wild daughter Katherina and her harsh suitor Petruchio. I think we are much less inclined to conclude that only Sly really exists as an abstract fictional entity but that Katherina and Petruchio do not. But this is what Kripke's view would presumably require us to conclude if we were to follow it consistently.

"The Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky is one of the best-known passages in literature, and the Inquisitor himself a very well-known character. However, the tale is a fiction inside fiction, a story told by Ivan, one of the fictional brothers. Again, I think it is not obvious—if we were ever to accept fictional entities as abstract objects to our ontology—that the famous Inquisitor does not exist, but only the brothers and their father do. In *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne, the brief frame story includes only Christopher Robin and the narrator (apparently his father).[11] The narrator then tells stories about the adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh and other familiar characters to Christopher Robin. Again, if we accept fictional entities as existing abstract objects at all, it is far from obvious that we should only accept Christopher Robin and the narrator as such, but not the famous Winnie-the-Pooh, Piglet, etc. Consider also *One Thousand and One Nights*: In its frame story, Shahrazad

[10] In Kripke 2011, in a footnote (29) added presumably somewhat later (than the original 1973 talk), Kripke reflects briefly on what is seemingly the same point.

[11] For simplicity, I shall ignore the historical fact that they were apparently modelled after Milne and his son, and treat them as purely fictional characters here.

tells tales to her husband Sultan Shahryar over many nights. The best-known characters, such as Aladdin and Sinbad, occur in these tales and are only "fictional fictional characters" (in Kripke's sense).

I contend that if we accept fictional entities into our ontology at all, we should certainly include, for example, the Inquisitor, Winnie-the-Pooh, and Aladdin, and not only the characters of the frame stories. The former world-famous characters are cultural entities if anything is, even if they are only "fictional fictional entities" by Kripke's standards. But if so, AOT cannot then be used to make the distinction between fictional entities (which, according to AOT, exist) and fictional fictional entities (which allegedly do not exist), as Kripke seems to suggest. However, then it cannot be used as an argument in favor of AOT that it enables a line to be drawn between them in the first place.

Further, if it supports AOT that it allows us to distinguish fictional characters from fictional fictional characters, what about extra iterations? For example, in *One Thousand and One Nights*, one of Shahrazad's (level 1) stories is the tale of the Fisherman and the Jinni (level 2). In that story, the fisherman then tells the Jinni the tale of the Vizier and the Sage Duban (level 3). And in this story, King Yunan in turn tells the Vizier the tale of the Husband and the Parrot (level 4). Kripke's AOT, which seems to classify both the fisherman (level 2), the Vizier (level 3), and the husband (level 4) as non-existent, cannot as such distinguish these levels from each other.[12] Clearly we need some other, simpler, and more fundamental way to keep track of the different levels of fictional stories. But presumably we can then also distinguish levels 1 and 2 without having to assume that the characters of level 1 exist as abstract objects but the characters of level 2 do not exist.

In sum, postulating fictional entities as abstract objects cannot be supported—if that was Kripke's intended argument—with the help of the differences between fictional tales and tales inside such tales. In any case, Kripke seems to put too much weight on this distinction. If an author creates, in whatever sense, first-level fictional entities, he or she similarly creates the second-level entities which are fictional fictional. There does not seem to be any principled metaphysical difference between them: either both exist, or neither of them do.

4 Quantification over fictional entities

The fact remains that we often seem to quantify over fictional entities. Does this mean that we are thereby ontologically committing ourselves to the existence of fictional entities? Kripke and especially van Inwagen suggest that we do, and that this supports AOT. I contend that this issue requires closer examination. (However, I must necessarily be rather brief and selective here.)

[12] To be sure, one could say that *inside* the frame story, Shahrazad and Shahryar are real persons but the Jinni, for example, is an abstract fictional entity, and the Vizier, as a fictional fictional entity, does not exist. Similarly, *inside* the tale of the Fisherman and the Jinni, the Jinni is a real entity but the Vizier is an abstract fictional entity, and the Husband does not exist. But it is quite unclear what would be achieved with such a complicated way of talking, or whether it is in any way necessarily required.

To begin with, as Kripke already clearly notes, there are two importantly different contexts of quantification here. First, there is quantification within fiction:

> In the fictional story *S*, there is a detective such that...

But second, there are statements *about* fiction, i.e., uses outside the scope of the imagining. For example, from the apparent fact that Sherlock Holmes was created by Arthur Conan Doyle, one could conclude:

> There is an *x* such that *x* is Sherlock Holmes and *x* was created by Conan Doyle.

Whereas the former may be quite harmless, as the apparent quantification occurs inside the fictional story and is part of the pretense in general, the latter cannot be that easily swept under the rug. These are the cases that, according to some philosophers, really commit us ontologically to fictional entities. In the rest of this section, I shall argue that this is not necessarily the case.

There have obviously been attempts to avoid this conclusion. Yagisawa (2001) has suggested that perhaps quantification in such cases could be interpreted as substitutional quantification and not as standard objectual quantification. I am not, however, convinced that the strategy could work in general. One problem is that fictional stories frequently include unnamed characters. Then again, Priest (2005) and Crane (2013), for example, have proposed the radical view that we should in general give up the association between quantification and ontological commitment.[13] I am not entirely unsympathetic toward such proposals; there is much to be said on their behalf. However, at least in the case of fiction in particular, a less radical approach seems sufficient. Namely, clearly fiction is closely related to imagination. They both result in *intensional contexts*:

> In the fictional story *S*, *p*
>
> *a* imagines that *p*

The latter is a kind of propositional attitude, the intensional logic of which has been pursued for many decades. It is well-known that in intensional contexts quantification is not necessarily ontologically committing. This is the case already in the standard alethic modal logic (i.e., the logic of necessity and possibility): there are strong pressures either to adopt free logic or to treat objects in the domain of quantification as merely possible objects, not necessarily as objects that actually exist (see e.g., Garson 1984).

In the case of propositional attitudes, things are even more complicated. Intensional logics and possible world semantics for them have been developed especially by Hintikka and his followers. Hintikka (1962) has famously presented logic for *knowledge* and *belief*. However, it was his logic of *perception* (see Hintikka 1969,

[13] In *The John Locke Lectures* (Kripke 2013), Kripke shows some sympathy towards the idea that existence would be treated as a predicate, and thus separated from quantification. It is not clear to me how this harmonizes with the idea that quantification over fictional entities speaks in favor of the existence of fictional entities.

1975; cf. Niiniluoto 1979, 1982; Saarinen 1987), in connection to which Hintikka developed certain insights on quantification, that we will discuss shortly. It was left to Niiniluoto (1983, 1986) to develop a similar logic for *imagination* as a propositional attitude.

As to perception and hallucination, David Lewis once wrote:

> What do we see when we see what isn't there?
>
> Macbeth the hallucinator sees a dagger. There is no dagger there to be seen ... There is no reason to think that our world contains any such thing. But the lack of a dagger makes it mysterious how we can describe Macbeth's state, as we do, by means of predicates applying to the dagger he seems to see ...
>
> The case of the missing dagger has been solved by inspector Hintikka. I accept his solution... (Lewis 1983, 3)

I contend, following Niiniluoto (1983, 1986), that a related solution can be given for the mystery of objects of imagination and fiction. So, let us review how apparently the most well-developed and sophisticated account of imagination and quantification available treats them.[14] Along familiar lines, we can first stipulate:

a imagines that *p* = in all possible worlds[15] compatible with what *a* imagines it is the case that *p*.

Let us write $I_a\ p$ for "*a* imagines that *p*." But how is an individual identified in different possible worlds? Intuitively, a "world-line" is a line which connects, somewhat like connecting dots, one and the same individual from different worlds. Formally, a "world-line" is a function from worlds to individuals. In the Hintikka-style logic of propositional attitudes, quantified variables range over these world-lines.

A crucial observation here is the following: the sentence "*a* imagines that *b* is *F*," for example, cannot always be adequately formalized in the simple form $I_a\ F(b)$, but in order to distinguish different ways in which *b* is "presented" to *a*, or *a*'s act of imagining is "directed" to *b*, we need (following Hintikka's logic of perception) two different kinds of quantifiers:

(Ex) – physical quantifier (grounded on spatio-temporal or causal continuity)

($\exists x$) – perspectival quantifier (grounded on the role in the context)

[14] I am aware of certain more recent, alternative approaches to the logic of imagination due to Wansing 2017 and Berto 2017. However, their focus is more on the voluntary nature of typical imagination, the well-known failure of logical closure, and such. In any case, they both restrict their attention to propositional logic. Consequently, whatever their virtues, they cannot really illuminate better the behavior of quantification in the context of imagination.

[15] "Possible world" must here be understood in a liberal sense of "possible": many of them may *not* be metaphysically possible in the standard Kripkean sense.

Consider, for example, the sentence:

Michael imagines that David is dancing with a blond woman.

David here is a well-defined "physical" individual; and that can be expressed with a physical quantifier:

$(Ex)\ \mathrm{I_M}\ [x = \text{David}\ \wedge\ x \text{ dances with a blond woman}]$.

However, "the blond woman" is (let us assume) non-specific. She could be, in different worlds (it is compatible with what Michael imagines that she would be), for example, Marilyn Monroe, Dolly Parton, or Debbie Harry, but also (to consider some purely fictional possibilities) Beatrix aka "The Bride" (in *Kill Bill*), Cathrine Tramell (in *Basic Instinct*), Pussy Galore (in *Goldfinger*), etc. They play, in different possible worlds, the same relevant role in what Michael imagines. The perspectival world-line picks out different blond women from different worlds: the blond woman that plays the same role in Michael's field of imagination as the dancing partner of David in that world. This can be expressed with a perspectival quantifier:

$(\exists y)\ \mathrm{I_M}\ [y \text{ is a blond woman}\ \wedge\ \text{David is dancing with } y]$.

And putting the above two together:

$(Ex)(\exists y)\ \mathrm{I_M}\ [x = \text{David}\ \wedge\ y \text{ is a blond woman}\ \wedge\ x \text{ is dancing with } y]$.

The following two:

$(\exists x)\ \mathrm{I_a}\ (x = b)$ – *a* imagines of *b* something;

and

$(\exists x)\ \mathrm{I_a}\ F(x)$ – a imagines an *F*;

do not entail that *b*, or anything that is *F*, exists or is real; they can cover both existing and non-existing entities. In contrast, in the following three cases, even if the perspectival quantifier is used, the object of imagination, *b*, must actually exist:

$(\exists x)\ [x = b\ \wedge\ \mathrm{I_a}\ (\exists y)(x = y)]$ – *a* imagines something about *b*.

$(\exists x)\ [x = b\ \wedge\ \mathrm{I_a}\ (x = c)]$ – *a* imagines *b* as *c*.

$(\exists x)\ [x = b\ \wedge\ \mathrm{I_a}\ F(x)]$ – *a* imagines of *b* that she is an *F*.

This is because "*b*" is outside the scope of the operator "$\mathrm{I_a}$," and its occurrence is transparent. It is also possible to state explicitly, with this formalism, that the object of imagination does not exist:

$(\exists x)\ \mathrm{I_a}\ [x = b\ \wedge\ F(x)]\ \wedge\ \neg\ (\exists x)(Ey)[x = y\ \wedge\ \mathrm{I_a}\ (x = b\ \wedge F(x))]$.

Here the imagined "something" does not exist, not even as an abstract object, in the actual world, nor as a possible object. It is not an object in any particular world, but only a "world-line" that does not continue to the actual world. In Hintikka's words, such objects are "neither here nor there."

Obviously, much more could be said concerning this issue, but that must be left for another occasion. Here I content myself with noting that at least in the context of one of the most well-developed theories in this area, quantifying in the contexts of imagination and in fictional contexts does not force us to assume that the relevant objects of imagination must exist.

As we have noted above, Kripke and Thomasson have compared fictional entities to created social and cultural entities like nations and works of art. Niiniluoto, for his part, has argued that as to the issue of their reality, we should not conflate fictional works of art and fictional entities within the former. He has appealed here to Peirce's "scholastic" criterion of reality, according to which those things are *real* "whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be" (CP 5.311, 5.405). Peirce himself applied this definition in 1878 to distinguish reality and fiction (as opposites), e.g., the fact of my dreaming may be real while the things dreamt are not (CP 5.405). Accordingly, Niiniluoto (1984) has contended that when he imagines a pink elephant, his mental state is real, but the elephant is fictional, since it has only such characters that my thought impresses upon it. Later, he has extended the idea to our very topic. Niiniluoto (2006, 2011) argues that, e.g., Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*—the work of art as a cultural entity—is real. However, the properties of the fictional entity Anna Karenina include only those implied by the novel. Consequently, the latter is not real. I am inclined to agree with Niiniluoto here.

5 Are fictional names ambiguous?

We do enlighten our children with statements such as:

> The bogeyman does not exist.

And such statements are, in all reason, true. AOT must somehow accommodate such obvious facts that it seems to contradict. For such reasons, at least Kripke contends explicitly that fictional names are in fact *ambiguous* (Kripke 2013, 149):[16] for example, "Sherlock Holmes" in "There is an *x* such that *x* is Sherlock Holmes and *x* was created by Conan Doyle" and in "Sherlock Holmes never existed" has, in some sense, different meanings, and consequently both sentences can be true.[17]

[16] Salmon (2011), on the other hand, explicitly denies that fictional names are in this way ambiguous, even if he advocates AOT.

[17] This example is, though, my own construction. Kripke (2013, 149) is talking about "Hamlet", in "Hamlet does not exist" and "Hamlet is only a fictional character."

It is easy to feel that this is a bit *ad hoc*, and we should in my view prefer, if other reasons do not force us to that conclusion, a theory which does not require that fictional names are ambiguous. This general idea is nicely captured in the following maxim referred to by Putnam: "Differences of meaning are not to be postulated without necessity." According to Putnam, Ziff calls this "Occam's eraser" (see Putnam, 1965, 130). Somewhat ironically, in the very same *John Locke Lectures*, Kripke himself mentions the maxim which says that "we are not to postulate ambiguities where they are not needed" (Kripke 2013, 125). Elsewhere, he even writes:

> It is very much the lazy man's approach in philosophy to posit ambiguities when in trouble. If we face a putative counterexample to our favorite philosophical thesis, it is always open to us to protest that some key term is being used in a special sense, different from its use in the thesis. We may be right, but the ease of the move should counsel a policy of caution: Do not posit an ambiguity unless you are really forced to, unless there are really compelling theoretical or intuitive grounds to suppose that an ambiguity really is present. (Kripke 1977, 268)

I'd like to suggest that we should follow this policy also in the case of fictional names.[18]

6 Conclusions

AOT contends that fictional entities are real, existing, abstract social or cultural entities. But the other idea of AOT that the author alone creates the entity does not harmonize well with this. AOT threatens to collapse to the excessive view that any entity ever subjectively imagined even by one subject exists. Kripke's apparent suggestion that AOT makes it possible to distinguish fictional and fictional fictional entities turns out to be, on closer scrutiny, quite unclear. Surely, we need to somehow distinguish different levels in fiction, but AOT does not provide a working tool for it. Finally, quantifying in intensional contexts, such as a fictional context, arguably does not entail existence and ontological commitments.

As we have found the positive arguments in favor of AOT far from conclusive, and it apparently requires us to postulate the ambiguity of the described sort largely just to save the theory, this also speaks in favor of the "tough" view: fictional entities do not exist, just like common sense suggests, and there is no need to postulate ambiguity in the case of fictional names. Santa Claus just does not exist.

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[18] Salmon (2011), though he advocates AOT, is in complete agreement with me here.

joint paper about all of this, but her death came first. Still, I am solely responsible of this paper as it is.

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