

Review of: Amie L. Thomasson: Fiction and Metaphysics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

The aim of this book is to investigate the nature and ontological status of fictional characters on the one hand (i. e., entities like Sherlock Holmes, Hamlet, or Anna Karenina) and literary works on the other. The overall question is: What kinds of objects are fictional characters and literary works, and how are they related to our everyday world? Thomasson advocates a realist, non-reductionist theory of fictitious objects whose main principles are: Fictional characters exist - just as literary works exist. Fictional characters as well as literary works are abstract objects (i. e., lack spatiotemporal location), are created (and thus contingent), are brought into existence through the intentional acts of an author, can go on existing without intentional acts of an author, and are existentially dependent objects in a variety of ways. Thomasson develops a subtle theory of ontological dependence.

The review contains a detailed account of Thomasson's "artifactual theory" as well as detailed criticism of some pivotal points. While I am, in principle, sympathetic to the non-reductionist approach, I object against some of Thomasson's specific dependency claims. Furthermore, I defend so-called "Meinongian" theories of fiction against Thomasson's objections. Finally, I raise questions concerning, among other things, the relation between a literary work and its "text", the proposed identity conditions for literary works, the relation between a literary work and its (fictitious) objects.