

# Abstract Artifact Theory about Fictional Characters Defended — Why Sainsbury’s Category-Mistake Objection is Mistaken

Zsófia Zvolenszky\*

*Institute of Philosophy, Eötvös University (ELTE)*

**ABSTRACT.** In this paper, I explore a line of argument against one form of realism about fictional characters: abstract artifact theory (‘artifactualism’, for short), the view according to which fictional characters like Harry Potter are part of our reality, but (unlike concrete entities like the Big Ben and J. K. Rowling), they are abstract objects created by humans, akin to the institution of marriage and the game of soccer. I will defend artifactualism against an objection that Mark Sainsbury (2010) considers decisive against it: the category-mistake objection. The objection has it that artifactualism attributes to people who produce and process sentences and thoughts about Harry Potter massive error, indeed, a category mistake about what kind of thing Harry Potter is; for an abstract object (such as the institution of marriage) isn’t the sort of thing that can wear glasses, ride a double-decker bus, attend school. Given problems with this objection, artifactualism, I shall conclude, remains a tenable contender.

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, I will explore a line of argument against one form of realism about fictional characters: *abstract artifact theory* about fictional characters (‘*artifactualism*’ for short), the view according to which fictional characters like Harry Potter are part of our reality, but (unlike concrete entities like the Big Ben and J. K. Rowling), they are abstract objects created by humans, akin to the institution of marriage and the game of soccer. I shall defend this view against an objection that Mark Sainsbury (2010) considers decisive against artifactualism: “When we think about fictional entities,

---

\* Email: [zvolenszky@elte.hu](mailto:zvolenszky@elte.hu)

we do not think of them as abstract. Authors, who ought to know, would fiercely resist the suggestion that they are abstract. Abstract artifact theory entails that producers and consumers of fiction are sunk in error” (III). In other words, artifactualism attributes to people who produce and process sentences and thoughts about Harry Potter massive error, indeed, a category mistake about what kind of thing Harry Potter is. For an abstract object (such as the institution of marriage) isn’t the sort of thing that can wear glasses or ride a double-decker bus. I shall call this the *category-mistake objection*.

In Section 2, I will distinguish artifactualism from various other forms of realism about fictional characters, and from the position of *irrealism* about the likes of Harry Potter, a view according to which fictional characters don’t exist; only the works of fiction portraying them do. In Section 3, I will consider and deflect the category-mistake objection, which, according to Sainsbury, gives an edge to irrealism over artifactualism. Artifactualism, I shall conclude (in Section 4), remains a tenable contender.

## 2. Realist and Irrealist Positions about Harry Potter

We may, along with Mark Sainsbury (2010, 44–114), distinguish three realist alternatives about fictional characters: there really are such things just as there are ordinary concrete objects occupying space and time; but unlike those ordinary objects like cups, saucers and the Big Ben, ...

- fictional characters *don’t exist*, according to *Meinongianism* about fictional characters;<sup>1</sup>
- fictional characters *are not actual* but merely possible, according to *nonactualism*;<sup>2</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> For brevity’s sake, I’ll suppress the qualification ‘about fictional characters’ and will simply talk of realism, irrealism, Meinongianism, nonactualism, artifactualism, Platonism. Whenever these labels appear unqualified, they are shorthand for theories about fictional characters. Parsons (1980) is a contemporary proponent of Alexius Meinong’s (1904) eponymous theory.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis (1978) put forth such a view. This position is sometimes called possibilism about fictional characters. See also Kripke’s earlier (1963) view about Sherlock Holmes.

- fictional characters *are not concrete* but abstract, created by the activities of authors according to *artifactualism*.<sup>3</sup>

Sainsbury (2010) argues that artifactualism is the most tenable of these three positions.

I won't explore his arguments here but will move ahead to explore artifactualism. The artifactualist position raises the intricate issue of deciding what exactly the abstract/concrete distinction consists in. The assumption so far has been that abstract objects (unlike concrete ones) don't occupy space and time. Another option is that abstract objects (unlike concrete ones) lack causal powers. A third option is to identify paradigmatic examples of concrete and of abstract objects in order to illuminate the distinction.<sup>4</sup> I won't dwell on these options here, because the ways in which the abstract/concrete distinction is traditionally drawn are called into question precisely in the light of abstract object created by human activity, *abstract artifacts*, that is—for example, the institution of marriage and the game of chess.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Kripke (1973/2013), Searle (1979), van Inwagen (1977), Fine (1982), Schiffer (1996), Salmon (1998), Thomasson (1999) are prominent proponents who hold that authors' creative process of writing novels, stories, etc. creates fictional characters. This position is sometimes called creationism about fictional characters.

There is a position in logical space for holding that fictional characters are abstract but exist timelessly, and authors don't create but discover them—we might call such a view Platonism about fictional characters. Zalta's (1983) unorthodox neo-*Meinongian* proposal can be considered an instance of such an account. The only kind of abstract-object theory I will consider in this paper is artifactualism, given the overwhelming popularity and attention that this position has been enjoying (compared to Platonism), as well as the advantages that I think it has over rival theories (Platonism included) precisely because it treats fictional characters as human-created objects.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of these and other ways of drawing the abstract/concrete distinction, see Rosen (2012).

<sup>5</sup> See Rosen (2012) and Fine (1982, 130–131) motivating the claim that there should be room for abstract objects that come into existence contingently:

...what underlies the platonist's position is a certain ontological prejudice. ... These philosophers suppose ... that certain features should go together, so that the same entities will be material, will exist in space and time, will exist contingently, etc., and the same entities will be immaterial, not exist in space and time, be necessarily existent, etc. Now although paradigmatic cases of concrete and abstract objects may have exactly the features from

Instead of defining the categories of abstract versus concrete, I will therefore take as my point of departure a broad and fairly uncontroversial range of examples for both concrete and abstract objects. Concrete objects clearly include things like cups, saucers, actual batches of pudding, the Big Ben, J. K. Rowling. Many of those who posit abstract objects count among them numbers, sets, propositions and properties like being tall and being human. Those who consider these abstract objects agree that typically,<sup>6</sup> they are *timelessly existing abstract objects that are mind-independent* in the following sense: their existence at a time *t* is independent of any mental activity at *t*.

There is, however, another type of abstract object one might posit: *abstract artifacts*. Notice that an abstract artifact like the game of chess does have temporal features, after all: the game of chess didn't exist before 1000 A.D. and has been in existence for several centuries (but beyond that, there is disagreement). Nonetheless, an abstract artifact would still be mind-independent in the above sense: the game of chess can exist at a time without anyone having any chess-related mental activity at that time. It's worth giving a variety of examples of abstract artifacts:

- the games of soccer and chess; the chess move of castling;
- the institution of marriage and the office of prime minister;
- the letters of the alphabet;
- words and names of a language, including fairly recent additions like 'netiquette' (rules governing polite behavior in interactions on the internet); also the first name 'Dweezil' for boys, coined by Frank Zappa;
- musical works like Mozart's serenade *A Little Night Music* and opera *The Magic Flute*;

---

one or other of these groups, it must be recognized that there are objects of intermediate status that share features from both.

<sup>6</sup> Barring exceptions like the singleton set of my red mental image upon spotting a strawberry. There are various ways to go on the status of such sets: we could conclude that not all sets are abstract after all or that the notion of mind-independence at work should be revised to allow such sets to be abstract (see Rosen 2012).

- literary works like the seven Harry Potter novels.

We thus have a long and varied list of candidates for abstract social and cultural (legal, artistic, linguistic etc.) artifacts among which it is natural to make room for fictional characters like Harry Potter also—the defender of artifactualism suggests (see especially Thomasson 1999).

Another option is to forgo realism about fictional characters altogether: opting for *irrealism*, which denies all forms of ontological commitment to fictional entities.<sup>7</sup>

The nonactualist position relies on a notion of possibility and actuality, which are usually cashed out by reference to possible worlds and the actual world; we can lay out some useful considerations for the upcoming section (and also understand nonactualism better) by enumerating briefly the various stances one might adopt with respect to the nature of possible worlds. According to nonactualism, Harry Potter is a merely possible object, so a sentence like (1) is analyzed as (1'):

(1) Harry had a thin face, knobby knees, black hair, bright green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape...<sup>8</sup>

(1') There is a nonactual possible world in which Harry Potter has a thin face, knobby knees, black hair, bright green eyes, wears round glasses held together with Scotch tape.

Sainsbury points out that nonactualism incurs a commitment about the metaphysics of possible worlds. “Nonactualists wish to locate [fictional] objects in possible worlds; so they need to be realists about possible worlds” (Sainsbury 2010, 74). There are two major classes of realist views on offer about the metaphysics of possible worlds:

- extreme realism about possible worlds, *pw-realism* for short, has it that the actual world is one among a plurality of possible worlds that are causally and spatiotemporally isolated from one another.<sup>9</sup> This

<sup>7</sup> Sainsbury (2010) favors this view, as does Walton (1990).

<sup>8</sup> From Volume 1: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, page 20.

<sup>9</sup> For a long time, Lewis (1973, 1986) remained the lone proponent of pw-realism.

view takes (r') at face value.<sup>10</sup>

- Ersatz realism about possible worlds, *pw-ersatzism* for short, has it that a possible world is abstract, for example, a maximally consistent set of propositions representing a way the world could be;<sup>11</sup>

this yields the following analysis of (r):

(r'') there is something abstract, a set of (maximally consistent) propositions representing Harry Potter as having a thin face, knobbly knees... etc.

Sainsbury (2010, 222, fn. 8) points out that *pw-ersatzism* collapses into a view according to which fictional characters are abstract objects (in our case: a representation comprising propositions about Harry Potter, for example). “For then the true metaphysical nature of a supposedly nonactual fictional character is actual”: an actual set of propositions. It is only in conjunction with *pw-realism* that nonactualism offers a distinct alternative to artifactualism.

Nonactualism therefore comes in a package bundled with *pw-realism*, a controversial proposal. Elsewhere (Zvolenszky 2012), I argue that artifactualism has crucial advantages over rival realist theories like nonactualism. In this paper, my aim is more modest: showing that artifactualism can be defended against Sainsbury’s category-mistake objection, to which we now turn.

---

<sup>10</sup> There is a problem, however (Sainsbury 2010, 85–87): in the novels, Harry Potter’s isn’t given a complete description, down to his last detail about sock color; Potter is thus incomplete. But all possible objects are complete (they have the same ontological status we do, it’s just that some of them are nonactual, inhabiting merely possible worlds). One of the more tenable options for the nonactualist is to relate the incomplete Harry Potter to various possible objects—Potter-surrogates—that have all the properties that the novels ascribe to Potter, but are complete (down to the last detail about sock color). Given that on this option, the nonactualist has to quantify over Potter-surrogates to account for (r), she cannot take (r') at face value in the end.

<sup>11</sup> *Pw-ersatzism* has had many proponents. Adams (1974) held this particular, proposition-based version of *pw-ersatzism*.

### 3. Deflecting the Category-Mistake Objection

Sainsbury, an advocate of irrealism, maintains that among realist contenders, artifactualism has the edge. According to him (2010, 111), in the end, artifactualism suffers a crucial blow, however:

...the problems for abstract artifact theory ... have the form: on abstract artifact theories, fictional characters just are not the kinds of things we want them to be. We want them to be as they are said to be in the stories, to be detectives and to play the violin, but they are said to be something of an entirely different kind. ... Fictional characters do not have the properties they are ascribed during their creation. This is mysterious: Conan Doyle stipulates that Holmes wears a deerstalker, there is such an entity as Holmes, yet that entity does not end up having (i.e. exemplifying) the property of wearing a deerstalker. He does end up having (exemplifying) a genuine property, that of encoding wearing a deerstalker, but this is not a property that's intellectually accessible to most authors. People can, of course, fail to understand what they are doing, but it's surprising to be told that so many authors, perhaps all, fail so often and so seriously.

Sainsbury is here relying on a distinction between exemplifying and encoding originally suggested by Meinong's student Mally (1912): a concrete object like J.K. Rowling doesn't encode any properties; but she does *exemplify* being British and fails to exemplify wearing glasses. Meanwhile, Harry Potter *encodes* wearing glasses and being British, but exemplifies neither of these properties. He does, however, exemplify being abstract and being a fictional character.

Part of Sainsbury's objection then is that according to artifactualism, fictional characters are of the wrong ontological category—abstract rather than concrete—to exemplify the sorts of properties ascribed to them by the authors who create them. I call this *the category-mistake objection*. A consequence of the category-mistake objection is that artifactualism attributes massive error to those who create, read about and discuss fictional characters.

My aim is to show that the strategy behind the category-mistake objection, if it were to work, would show far too much with respect to a broad

range of metaphysical debates. The strategy is therefore objectionable. I will formulate two arguments to demonstrate that the category-mistake strategy does not withstand scrutiny.

My first argument is about the metaphysics of possible worlds. In Section 2, we distinguished two positions in the debate about the nature of possible worlds: realism versus ersatzism about possible worlds (pw-realism and pw-ersatzism). According to pw-ersatzism, possible worlds are abstract, for example, maximally consistent sets of propositions representing ways the world could be. And merely possible individuals are likewise abstract (as Sainsbury acknowledges): representations comprising propositions about the individual. Now, when I consider a counterfactual scenario in which I dye my hair green today, I am ascribing to myself the property of having green hair, or so it seems to me when I reflect on my mental episode. Yet the category mistake objection could be raised here: according to pw-ersatzism, possible objects are of the wrong ontological category—abstract rather than concrete—to exemplify the sorts of properties ascribed to them by those who entertain counterfactual scenarios. This objection would apply to all forms of pw-ersatzism, regardless of whether they construe worlds in terms of states of affairs, universals or sentences. On all these versions, possible objects are the wrong kinds of things to be ascribed the properties we ordinarily ascribe to them. Anyone who thinks pw-ersatzism cannot be dismissed quite so quickly has reason to consider the strategy behind the category-mistake objection (as targeting artifactualism as well as pw-ersatzism) specious.<sup>12</sup>

Another point casts further doubt on the category-mistake strategy. The category-mistake objection against pw-ersatzism, if it were to work, would seem to leave the rather controversial position of pw-realism, famous for eliciting incredulous stares (Lewis 1973, 86), as the only realist

<sup>12</sup> An argument from authority (whatever its merits might be): interestingly, while Lewis (1986) carefully considered a long list of arguments against pw-ersatzism, he did not address the category-mistake objection against it.

Of course, one person's *modus tollens* is another *modus ponens*; I have motivated the following conditional: if the category-mistake objection is effective against artifactualism, then it is effective against pw-ersatzism. I have taken the *modus tollens* direction and concluded that the objection is ineffective against artifactualism. Someone else might take the *modus ponens* direction and conclude that the objection is a new and effective one against pw-ersatzism.



account of possible worlds. According to pw-realism, the actual world is one among a plurality of possible worlds that are causally and spatiotemporally isolated from one another. A moment's further thought reveals that an objection closely related to the category-mistake objection affects pw-realism also. If an ordinary speaker were asked if she thought there are countless merely possible worlds and countless merely possible objects, and if she thought such things have the same ontological status as the actual world and actual objects, respectively, she would answer in the negative to both questions. Hence the incredulous stare that confronts pw-realism. Yet, contrary to people's intuitions, pw-realism posits that possible worlds have the same ontological status as that enjoyed by the actual world, and possible concrete objects have the same ontological status enjoyed by actual concrete objects. Call this the *mistaken-ontological-status objection to pw-realism*. It is unclear why this objection should have any less force than the category-mistake objection against pw-ersatzism. But if that objection were effective against pw-ersatzism while the mistaken-ontological-status objection were effective against pw-realism, then irrealist accounts of possible worlds would be left as the only alternatives standing. This conclusion seems much too quickly and easily obtained for irrealists about possible worlds (including Sainsbury). The pair of objections seem, from the outset, to rig the stakes against *all* forms of realism about possible worlds. Anyone who thinks that realism about possible worlds cannot be dismissed quite so easily has reason to consider at least one of the two objections specious. Until the irrealist about possible worlds provides special reasons that discredit the mistaken-ontological-category objection, both objections remain suspect.

My second argument is intended to show that for someone who finds a form of pw-ersatzism (a not unpopular view about the metaphysics of possible worlds) independently plausible, there is little reason to *resist* admitting fictional characters as abstract objects, the category-mistake objection notwithstanding. Here is why. Imagine a certain spool of yarn I knit into a sock: Sock<sub>1</sub>, based on a specific set of knitting instructions. Imagine another specific, actual spool of the same yarn that I could have used to knit a qualitatively identical (or very similar) pair to Sock<sub>1</sub>: Sock<sub>2</sub>. As things stand, I never got around to knitting Sock<sub>2</sub>. So Sock<sub>2</sub> doesn't exist, but it might have. According to the pw-ersatzist, Sock<sub>2</sub> is abstract: we

might take it to correspond to a set of propositions representing Sock<sub>2</sub> as having a certain color, shape, size, pattern, person knitting it; the proposition set can then be said to encode color, shape, knitter, etc., and exemplify being abstract and consisting of propositions. This set of propositions actually exists; but the scenario it represents is unactualized (because I never get around to knitting Sock<sub>2</sub>). Now consider the fictional sock that is featured at the end of the second Harry Potter novel: Harry pulls off one of his “slimy, filthy” socks, tricking Lucius Malfoy into unwittingly giving it to his long-suffering house elf, Dobby, thereby releasing Dobby from serving the Malfoy family (house elves are freed when their masters give them an article of clothing). J.K. Rowling doesn’t give this sock a name, but for easy reference, let’s call it DobbySock. According to artifactualism, J.K. Rowling created DobbySock; she specified it as having been worn by Harry Potter, as being slimy and filthy, but she didn’t say what color it was. Whatever form of pw-ersatzism we might opt for, we can go the same way with DobbySock; for example, we can take DobbySock to correspond to a set of propositions representing it as being filthy, slimy, etc.; this set of propositions encodes DobbySock as being filthy, slimy, etc. (in the second Harry Potter novel); and the same set exemplifies being Rowling’s creation, a fictional character, a famous fictional character even. We must realize that by taking these parallel approaches to Sock<sub>2</sub> and DobbySock, there isn’t that great a difference in the nature of the merely possible Sock<sub>2</sub> and the artifact DobbySock: both correspond to sets of propositions representing socks, encoding certain properties (like being a sock) and exemplifying others (like being abstract, containing propositions). One noteworthy difference is that the first set *encodes* being created by me (the knitter), while the second set *exemplifies* being created by J.K. Rowling. But this is a difference we expect, and the similarities are otherwise striking. For a pw-ersatzist, with merely possible objects on board, it would be *ad hoc* to resist what is mostly parallel treatment for fictional characters: a form of artifactualism. Given how costly such an *ad hoc* move would be, the pw-ersatzist should embrace artifactualism and not worry about the category-mistake objection.

It is well to address three worries at this point. First, there is a crucial difference between Sock<sub>2</sub> and DobbySock according to someone who combines pw-ersatzism and artifactualism: (on at least one plausible view

of propositions), the proposition set for Sock<sub>2</sub> exists timelessly, as do the pw-ersatzist's possible worlds; by contrast, DobbySock is an artifact and hence not a timeless existent. Why should the pw-ersatzist be moved to admit the latter kind of beast then, an object that is unlike her possible worlds and objects? Three reasons: (i) beyond this difference, there are crucial similarities between Sock<sub>2</sub> and DobbySock, ones that make it plausible to treat both as abstract; (ii) operas, novels, the institution of marriage, etc. are overwhelmingly plausible candidates for abstract artifacts already; so the burden of providing a workable alternative is on those who want to deny that these are abstract artifacts; (iii) with operas and novels on board as abstract artifacts, between the Platonist and artifactualist alternatives, the latter is a far more tenable choice.<sup>13</sup>

Second, notice that in contrasting encoding and exemplifying above, I have talked about *proposition sets* encoding and exemplifying properties like being knit by me and created by J.K. Rowling. Proposition sets represent ways the world might be; they are representational devices. And “[t]he distinction between encoding and exemplifying is one that is properly available for representational vehicles, but that’s not what fictional characters are. They are what’s represented”, Sainsbury (2010, 112) objects. The worry is that fictional characters qua abstract objects aren’t the right sorts of things to be representational devices and to be encoding properties. This worry is easily responded to: although possible worlds seem at first like really big particular objects, like all-encompassing, gigantic galaxies, the ersatz-realist does not balk at construing them as sets of propositions or as structural universals<sup>14</sup>. In the same way, the artifactualist should

<sup>13</sup> This seems to be a consensus view explaining why Sainsbury (2010) does not even enumerate Platonism among the forms of realism he considers. See my arguments (Zvolenszky 2012) for why artifactualism has the edge over all other forms of realism, Platonism included.

In any case, someone who opts for the Platonist view (mentioned in footnote 3 above)—according to which DobbySock is a *timelessly existing* abstract object—would have to reject the category-mistake objection just as much as artifactualism does, for Platonism still entails that people are massively mistaken about the kind of object Harry Potter is.

<sup>14</sup> A paradigmatic example of a structural universal is *being a water molecule*: for an object to instantiate this universal, it has to have the right kinds of parts in the right kind of arrangement.

not worry about taking fictional characters to be sets of propositions (or as structural universals). That it is the proposition set about Harry Potter that encodes and exemplifies various properties is not a problem given that fictional characters correspond to such proposition sets. On the version of *pw*-ersatzism we are considering, “Sock<sub>2</sub> encodes shape, size, pattern and exemplifies being abstract” is loose talk for “The ‘Sock<sub>2</sub>’ proposition set represents Sock<sub>2</sub>, encoding shape, size, pattern, and exemplifying being abstract”. Likewise, on the version of artifactualism we are considering, “DobbySock encodes being filthy and slimy and exemplifies being abstract and created by J.K. Rowling” is loose talk for “The ‘DobbySock’ proposition set represents DobbySock, encoding filthiness, sliminess, and exemplifying being abstract and created by J.K. Rowling.” Perhaps some of the *pw*-ersatzist’s alternatives are conceptually more satisfying in some way than proposition sets; but the point stands: whatever kind of abstract objects the *pw*-ersatzist might posit as her possible objects, she has good reason to extend her theory to some very similar beasts: fictional characters as abstract artifacts. And her choice of construal for these objects can then accommodate the encoding/exemplifying distinction in much the same way as the proposition set construal did.

A third worry arises: aren’t we multiplying abstract objects that are qualitatively identical to one another? Imagine a merely possible sock that is qualitatively identical to DobbySock, as specified in the second Harry Potter novel, call it JustLikeDS. The ‘JustLikeDS’ proposition set encodes the same properties as the ‘DobbySock’ proposition set encodes. The two sets exemplify some of the same properties: being abstract, being sets, consisting of propositions. Now, isn’t it an extravagant proliferation of objects to hold that with JustLikeDS already in existence, J.K. Rowling creates a qualitative duplicate, DobbySock, upon conjuring up the second Harry Potter novel? We can see that this outcome is not worrisome at all if we reflect on some perfectly ordinary scenarios that are analogous.

Consider another abstract object: the swiftly created and enacted new Hungarian constitution (“Fundamental Law” it’s called) didn’t always exist; it came into existence in 2011 only, when it was drafted; indeed, beforehand, many considered it unfathomable that an object like the Fundamental Law should ever be created; but it was. The Fundamental Law is a type that can have instances: printed and electronic copies, a reading event of

the text. The Fundamental Law didn't exist before the current government came into power, but it exists now. Yet a qualitatively identical type, an ordered sequence of propositions, is plausibly an abstract object that existed well before 2011, if not timelessly.<sup>15</sup> Proliferation of this sort is inevitable if we want to maintain that the Fundamental Law is an artifact created in the recent past while types are abstract also. And if proliferation is no cause for concern here, it isn't worrisome in the case of DobbySock and JustLikeDS either.

Consider another example: words being added to the English vocabulary. For example, a fairly recent addition to the English language is the expression 'cot potato', meaning a very young child who spends a lot of time watching television. The expression type 'cot potato' can have handwritten, typed, electronic, spoken, mouthed or signed tokens. Linguists tend to take for granted that expression types are abstract objects, specifically, abstract artifacts that didn't always exist. But (relative to 'cot potato') a qualitatively identical phonological type, orthographic type, and semantic type qua abstract types have been around for much longer,<sup>16</sup> so with the addition of new words like 'cot potato' to the English language, we get a the very same kind of proliferation that DobbySock and JustLikeDS had presented; and this sort of word proliferation is rampant: for any expression type of any language, there is a qualitative duplicate that is an antecedently existing abstract object. If that isn't worrisome, nor is the case of DobbySock and JustLikeDS.

The upshot of these examples is that proliferation of qualitative duplicates is inevitable for a variety of abstract artifacts across the board. If (like many theorists) we still want our ontology to make room for musical and literary works, social and legal institutions, games, words within a lan-

---

<sup>15</sup> Whether or not we take the ordered sequence of propositions to exist timelessly depends in part on our view of propositions, an issue on which I'd like to maintain neutrality. Either way, the qualitatively identical type enjoys prior existence relative to the Fundamental Law.

<sup>16</sup> I avoid talking about timelessly existing types here for the sake of neutrality on various matters. I want to leave open the possibility that the orthographic type 'cot potato' doesn't exist timelessly because it didn't exist prior to the English orthographic system coming into existence. Likewise, I want to leave open the possibility that the semantic type 'cot potato' doesn't exist timelessly because it didn't exist prior to the existence of television sets.

guage as abstract artifacts, then we should have no qualms about including fictional characters on the list. And overall, the upshot of my second argument has been that for pwersatzists, resisting artifactualism would be an *ad hoc* move.

#### 4. Conclusion

My aim has been to defend artifactualism about fictional characters against Sainsbury's category-mistake objection. He argues that we should ultimately reject realism about fictional characters because artifactualism faces insurmountable difficulties due to the category-mistake objection. I gave two arguments showing that the category-mistake objection is problematic because if it were to work, it would show too much: first, it would show ersatzism about possible worlds (a rather popular position) to be a nonstarter; second, it would prevent the ersatzist from taking on board fictional characters as abstract artifacts, an *ad hoc* move for her. *Pace* Sainsbury, artifactualism about fictional characters remains unscathed by the category-mistake objection.<sup>17</sup>

#### References

- Adams, Robert M. 1974. Theories of Actuality. *Noûs* 8, 211–231.
- Fine, Kit 1982. The Problem of Non-Existents. I. Internalism., *Topoi* 1, 97–140.
- Kripke, Saul 1963. Semantical Considerations on Modal Logic. *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 16, 83–94.

---

<sup>17</sup> This paper has benefited from comments over the past year and half from participants of the conference *Realism within Phenomenology and within Analytic Philosophy* held at Kaposvár University (Hungary) in January 2012, from members of the Erasmus Kollegium and from participants at ESA 2014 in Prague. Special thanks are due to Tibor Bárány, Zsolt Bátori, Zsolt Kapelner and András Simonyi for many thoughtful and incisive suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. This research has been supported by the Integrative Argumentation Studies Grant No. 109456 received from the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA).

- 1973/2013. *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures for 1973*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, David 1973. *Counterfactuals*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 1978. Truth in Fiction. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15, 37–46. Reprinted in David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers* (Volume 1), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, 261–275.
- 1986. *The Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mally, Ernst 1912. *Gegenstandstheoretische Grundlagen der Logik und Logistik*. Leipzig: Barth.
- Meinong, Alexius 1904. Über Gegenstandstheorie. In Alexius Meinong (ed.) *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie*, Leipzig: Barth. Translation by I. Levi, D.B. Terrell, and R.M. Chisholm, in Roderick Chisholm (ed.) *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*. Glencoe: Free Press, 1960, 76–117.
- Parsons, Terence 1980. *Nonexistent Objects*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rosen, Gideon 2012. Abstract Objects. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012 Edition), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/abstract-objects/>>.
- Sainsbury, Mark 2010. *Fiction and Fictionalism*. London: Routledge.
- Salmon, Nathan 1998. Nonexistence. *Noûs* 32, 277–319.
- Searle, John R. 1979. The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse. In P.A. French *et al.* (eds.) *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 233–243.
- Schiffer, Stephen 1996. Language-Created Language-Independent Entities. *Philosophical Topics* 24, 149–166.
- Thomasson, Amie L. 1999. *Fiction and Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Inwagen, Peter 1977. Creatures of Fiction. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, 299–308.
- Walton, Kendall L. 1990. *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Cambridge, MA: Har-

vard University Press.

Zalta, E.N. 1983. *Abstract Objects: An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics*.  
Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

Zvolenszky, Zsófia 2012. Against Sainsbury's Irrealism About Fictional  
Characters: Harry Potter as an Abstract Artifact. *Hungarian Philosophi-  
cal Review (Magyar Filozófiai Szemle)* 2012 (4), special issue: Realism, Gá-  
bor Bács and János Tőzsér (eds.), 83–109.