14. Fictional Characters

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1. What's in a Fictional Character?

Discussions over fictional characters tend to be pushed to two extremes, giving rise to what I will call, the "puzzle of who or what fictional characters are?" On the one hand, philosophical mystery revolves around the question of non-existent objects that we can nevertheless refer to, make true or false claims about, even shed tears for. Philosophers of language, metaphysicians and logicians have spared no ink trying to explain what it is in our language that makes it possible for us to do so. How to make sense of claims such as "Emma Bovary is unhappy" given that, allegedly at least, there is no Emma Bovary, or if there is, her existence (though arguably not her unhappiness) is of a different kind than the existence of you or me? On the other hand, literary critics, fuelled by various sorts of Freudian, Marxist or Feminist theories, have done just as admirably lot of work to explain why she is unhappy, to a great extent unbothered with the fact that they are explaining emotional states of a nonexistent woman. Equally unbothered by Emma's nonexistence were millions of readers who followed her on her path to decay, some annoyed by her temper, some taking pity on her misery. How can that be?

In this paper, I set out to provide an account of the identity of fictional characters,[1] taking as my starting point the puzzling fact that although fictional characters are non-existent, we treat them as real, so much so in fact, that from our earlier days we are told stories about them. Whether we are rejoicing at the "happily ever after" that awaits the Sleeping Beauty, or are grief-stricken when little Nell dies, believing in fictional characters, taking interest in them, and, most importantly, having a more or less developed account of who they are and why they do what they do, is part of a normal, healthy cognitive and moral development.[2] It is also an indispensable part

[1] While many of the elements of my account can easily be adjusted to apply to fictional characters found in cinematic and performing art, my focus here will be limited to characters found in literary fiction. As a point of reference I will use Gustave Flaubert's masterpiece *Madam Bovary*, but note that what I have to say about it should not be taken as interpretation of this amazing literary achievement.

[2] From Darwinian explanations to psychological accounts, various theories suggest that

of literary practice[3] and literary criticism.[4] This tendency raises a host of issues, since fictional characters are neither real people (they do not exist!) nor are they like *real* people given that they have some properties (like being fictional) that people lack. This goes for those characters which are entirely the creation of a writer's imagination (think of Peter Pan), as for those which represent real world people (such as Napoleon from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*) or are to some extent based on someone real, including authors themselves.[5] How then to solve the puzzle of their identity?

I should say at the outset that many philosophers would reject the claims I made in the opening paragraph, pointing to a variety of metaphysical theories which offer different accounts of the existence of fictional characters (taken jointly, these are fictional realists). From the idea that they are abstract entities or possible people, to the idea that they are created by their authors, from the idea that they have subsistence but not existence, philosophers do not lack resources to explain how fictional characters exist.[6] Naturally, they do not exist as "real people" (even when there were real people who served, willingly, knowingly or not, as models for fictional characters) or as natural kinds such as trees or buildings, but they do exist as "creations" or "inventions" or "discoveries" (for those who prefer Platonism) made by real people (literary authors) and in that sense exist as part of the fabric of our world. You can't take Emma out for coffee, but you can have coffee while you contemplate about things she did (even if only in Flaubert's novel, that is, in the fictional world of *Madam Bovary*)[7]

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exposure to stories is an important factor in one's moral and psychological development. See Zunshine 2015.

[3] Jennefer Robinson writes "Understanding character is essential to understanding the great realist novels… understanding character is relevantly like understanding real people…" (2005: 126).

[4] As when a critic refers to Emma as a "simple sentimental malcontent" and claims she "is miserable and her dreams of romantic love are unfulfilled in her petty provincial life married to a humble doctor …" (from the Introduction to Wordsworth Classics).

[5] How far is one willing to stretch the notion of "someone real" depends on how one feels about the claim that all, or most, literature faithfully represents the real world, at least in the sense that no matter how imaginative the writer might seem, all of his creations are traceable to something in the real world that might get somehow modified, but never so transfigured as to lose its roots in reality. Given that I am strongly committed to this claim – which I see as motivating literary cognitivism, a view according to which literature is cognitively valuable because it is a source of knowledge – in most of this paper I will presuppose that literary fiction, and by extension, fictional characters, do in fact tell us something about the real world and people who inhabit it.

[6] For an overview of realist positions, see Thomasson (2003) and Brock (2002, 2010). See Jandrić (2016) for a criticism of Thomasson.

[7] As Amie Thomasson, whose theory I am greatly influenced by, puts the point, fictional characters "are not concrete artefacts like chairs and tables, for they are not par-

which suffices for her to be part of our world, since your thoughts about her (and the thoughts Flaubert had while composing the novel) are part of this world. While I am sympathetic to the idea that fictional characters are created, and that they exist as part of our literary practice and cultural heritage (more on this below), I find this approach insufficient to explicate all that goes into character identity.

In coming up with the explanation of how fictional characters exist, realist theories for the most part ignore the fact that fictional characters are primarily part of our *artistic* practice of storytelling. Rarely do they acknowledge the fact that fictional characters – the way they are described and the role they play within the story, and in generating aesthetic experience and pleasure – are an indispensable element of the *art of literature*.[8] These theories tend to be concerned with questions of reference and denotation, truth conditions and meaning of nonexistent objects or abstract entities, rather than with the way fictional characters come to life within the established literary practices (including, roughly, writing, reading and discussing literary works). This approach – which, for the ease of exposition I will call LMS approach, since it is the approach taken by logicians, metaphysicians and semanticists – is not satisfying from the point of view of literary aesthetics (LA), which I am presupposing here. My reasons for preferring LA approach have to do with the fact that fictional characters are, first and foremost, artistic creations, and while it is to be expected that they will raise interesting questions for philosophers across the board, in talking about their identity, we should not neglect their artistic status and the fact that they originate in literary works of art. Against this context, fictional characters are indeterminate, open to interpretations, imbued with properties we recognize as human, and also with all sorts of artistic qualities, serving a specific role within the fictional world, and outside of it, as fictional characters can be a vehicle of author's irony, satire, symbolism or mockery. On my view, these are all relevant aspects of who fictional characters are, aspects which remain out of sight of those who are only concerned with their ontological status.

If logicians, metaphysicians and semanticists are guilty of occasionally at least neglecting the artistic and aesthetic aspect of fictional characters, so too are literary critics and theoreticians who sometimes seem oblivious to the fact that fictional characters are first and foremost linguistic cre-

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ticular material objects, and (although they are created at a certain time), they lack a spatio-temporal location. No informed reader expects to meet a fictional character, or thinks that they can be found at any place at any time." (Thomasson 2003)

[8] Notable exceptions I am much in debt to are Amie Thomasson (2003) and Peter Lamarque (2009, 2010).

ations and treat them as real people. As the philosophical wisdom teaches us, even if there was a person saliently similar or even identical to Emma Bovary (in terms of her physical appearance, mental states, her character and the things she does), she wouldn't be identical to Emma, nor could we claim that Emma really exists. However, there are some beneficial lessons about the phenomenology of our engagement with literary fiction to be gained when we explore in greater detail our tendency to treat fictional characters as real people. Our natural propensity to do so speaks volumes about the way in which literature is connected to the real world, the connection understood as one of mimesis. We do not employ different sets of skills in order to understand what fictional characters are doing as opposed to understand what our fellow human beings, and we ourselves, are doing; we even have the same set of ethical, psychological and moral set of words at our disposal for thinking, criticizing, making sense of, explaining both of these.[9] Judgments of "mimetic reliability" readers make in reference to different portrayals of characters in a work show that we bring insights from the real world into our reading of fiction – part of the reason why the value of Shakespeare or Dostoyevsky so greatly exceeds that of Zane Gray or Judith Krantz lies in the fact that characters in Shakespeare's plays or Dostoyevsky's novels are much more psychologically realistic in their mental and emotional states and we as readers recognize and respond to that. This isn't to say that all characters in all great works of literature are appropriately psychologically similar to real people, but discrepancies can be accounted for by the conventions of genre, by the lack of artistic skills or by author's intentions. I do not want to give too much space to defending literary cognitivism here, (to the idea that fiction offers valuable insights into our world and our human nature) but it is important to bear in mind that, when it comes to fictional characters, it is not the *character* that is fictional. Further, recognizing the "real world" aspects in fictional characters (i.e. why we treat them as people) explains why we have emotional reactions to them. If fictional characters are "place holders" for things that can happen to us, for the emotional and mental states we can have and experiences we can undergo, it is only natural that we take interest in them and show concern for them.[10] Their destinies can easily become our destinies.

In what follows, I will propose a "multi-layered account" of the identity of fictional characters. I will claim that due of their embeddedness in narrative art, which is itself embedded in culturally determined literary practice, fictional characters have identities which are composed of various layers:

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[9] Hagberg (2016) insists on this point, see also his 2010 and Robinson 2005.
[10] I take the notion of a "place holder" from Ema Dadlez, personal communication.

those connected to author's activities in creating them and those involved in readers' activities in responding to them when imaginatively engaged with works in which these characters appear. Once this multy-layeredness is acknowledged, it becomes easier to explain their dual nature, namely the fact that, though they are artistic creations, we often think of them as real people. However, my account will only make sense if we presuppose that philosophers are right when they make a distinction between two perspectives we can take on fictional characters. If we focus on what is going on *in the fictional world*, our perspective is internal and we treat fictional characters as real people, focusing for the most part on their portrayed emotional, psychological states, and we connect with them on the grounds of the shared similarity between their interests, predicaments and destinies, and our own.[11] If however our interest is artistically motivated and we aim at exploring *the fictional world as a work of art*, then fictional characters will remain linguistic creations imbued with aesthetic and artistic features and our interest will be in exploring their function in the overall artistic design, achieved as it is through the way they are portrayed via language, not via real world psychological make-up. It is from this perspective that fictional characters gain their artistic, symbolic, referential and cultural significance, which is an extremely relevant aspect of their identity.

2.1. A Touch of Ontology: Creating Fictional Characters and Keeping Them Alive

To ask about the identity of an artistic object is to ask about the conditions of its creation (i.e. its coming into existence), conditions of its destruction (i.e. its disappearance), conditions of its persistence or survival (how does a character survive over time), about its modal properties (which, if any, of its features are necessary), and issues having to do with individuation, that is, with distinguishing one object from the other. Given this framework, an *ontological* account of the identity of fictional characters will have to explain:

i. What does it take to create a fictional character?
ii. How do fictional characters survive through time (regardless of what happens to them in the stories they originate with)?
iii. What does it take to destroy a fictional character?
iv. How do we distinguish between different fictional characters?
v. Which of the many features of fictional characters are necessary for their identity?

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[11] For the "two perspectives" approach see Lamarque (2009, 2010) and Thomasson (2003).

Among various ontological accounts dealing with (i) – (v) issues, all or some of them, I find Amie Thomasson's artifactualist theory the most in line with my LA approach, as Thomasson is committed to respecting our common sense beliefs about fictional characters and the norms of doing so established by our literary practices.[12] According to her, fictional characters are created at a certain time through the mental and physical acts of an author writing a literary work of fiction. They are contingent, in the sense that, had the circumstances of Flaubert's life been different, he might not had had the time to write *Madam Bovary* and the characters of Emma, Charles, Leon and others would not exist. Most specifically, fictional characters "are abstract artifacts – relevantly similar to entities as ordinary as theories, laws, governments, and literary works, and tethered to the everyday world around us by dependencies on books, readers, and authors." (Thomasson 1999: xi)

By claiming that fictional characters are abstract, Thomasson wants to stress that they lack spatio-temporal location, which isn't to say that they are of the same status as Platonic ideas – this is why they are created, not discovered, as Platonists would argue.[13] Fictional characters are found in works of fiction, but, as discussed above, we do not expect to find them anywhere in the real world (i.e. neither on the location that the narrative in which they appear specifies nor on the location where the material copy of the book itself is). They are man-made, not natural kinds or eternal objects existing in the domain of platonic ideas. Were it not for the literary (one among many cultural) practice – the practice of storytelling, or, for those who prefer Lamarque and Olsen's institutional theory of literature, the practice of literature-reading and writing – there would not be fictional characters. This claim might seem trivial, but it decisively blocks certain anti-realist views according to which there are no fictional characters given that they are nowhere to be found[14]. To paraphrase Thomasson, were it not for the practice of storytelling, it would take something of a belief in a massive deception to explain why we believe in the existence of fictional characters.

By claiming that fictional characters depend on "books, readers, and authors," artifactualist account gives us means to answer (i) – (iv). To create a fictional character, there needs to be a work of fiction, i.e. a narrative which tells a story, that gives rise to the character. In other words, fictional characters do not exist without the creative act of a writer who, through

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[12] See Thomasson 1999.

[13] See Gaskin (2013) for a defence of platonism with respect to literary creation.

[14] I'm paraphrasing Brock here, see his Brock (2002).

manipulation of language, i.e. selection of words, creates a character and gives it a certain shape and properties. The creation of a fictional character is thus a linguistic act, one for which the author of a work is solely responsible, though, as Lamarque and Olsen showed, these kinds of acts are possible due to the institutional practice of literature. In that sense, the author brings a character into existence.[15]

Many philosophers claim that the act of naming a character is crucial for its creation, as means are given to refer to one particular character rather than the other. The opening line of *Mrs Dalloway* is a case in point: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers." To engage with the story, a reader simply takes it for granted that there is someone called Mrs. Dalloway[16]. Given that not all characters have names, we should recognize other resources, besides names, that authors can employ to bring characters into existence. Consider the opening sentence of *Madam Bovary*: "We were in class when the head master came in, followed by a 'new fellow,' not wearing school uniform, and a school servant carrying a large desk" (iii). In this case, characters are created and discerned by the use of a pronoun (we), by their occupation (the head master and the school servant) and by description (the new fellow, not wearing a school uniform).[17]

Giving a name, or using a pronoun or some kind of description to create a character is a first step to creating a linguistic entity readers will recognize as (sufficiently similar to) real people. Because I am interested in characters' identity, not just in what it takes to create them, I will claim that all the descriptions involving and relating to a character x are relevant for x's identity. I will have more to say about this below, for now, it is enough to say that once an author makes a decision that a work is done, the foundations of each character are determined by what is described in the story, and the linguistic descriptions that give rise to it are unchangeable (though they give rise to variety of interpretations, that is, various answers to the

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[15] This isn't to say that we do not need an additional, psychological story to explain what goes into the creation of literary works and characters, explanation which would include author's intentions, desires and goals. Linguistic act itself is preceded by the mental act – a decision an author makes to write a story. However, while all of these aspects are necessary for the creation of a work and fictional characters, they are not sufficient, in that unless there is a linguistic act (written or oral), no one but the author himself has access to his creations.

[16] Thomasson (1999) draws the analogy with the speech act theories of language to explain how the authorial "say so" generates something into existence. See Lamarque and Olsen (1994) and Lamarque (2010) for a discussion over speech act theories and fiction.

[17] This strategy can accommodate fictional characters such as Dr.Jekyll - Mr.Hyde, and those like the nameless Monster from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

question of who that character is). I will refer to this as the "linguistic description foundation."[18]

Turning now to (ii), the existence of a character. After their creation, fictional characters no longer depend on the linguistic acts of an author, but on the existence of the narratives in which they occur (though this does not imply that they depend on any material copy in particular) and on competent and knowledgeable readers who engage with these narratives (or, in the case of oral literature, pass them on orally). Consequently, once such readers disappear, or once the works themselves disappear, fictional characters disappear too. In that sense, our answer to (iii) is the following: fictional characters can only be destroyed in the sense that they vanish from our literary horizon due to the destruction of material copies of works in which they first appeared, making it impossible for potential readers to engage with these works. In case of oral literature, disappearance of readers who have the relevant memory and knowledge of the works would bring about the destruction of characters that appear in these stories.

Another aspect of the ontological account of fictional characters concerns their individuation: fictional characters might seem diverse, but really are not. (Lamarque 2009, 2010) After all, in a sense, fictional characters are nothing but a set of properties assembled together and united under a name, and not even the most imaginative authors out there can invent new properties; they just borrow them from what they see in the real world. At best, they can imagine an original set of properties, but properties themselves – being smart, handsome, romantic, unhappy, honest, a crook, a rascal and what have you – are not, and cannot be imagined or invented. On this view, a creation of a fictional character is more a matter of "pick and choose" than a matter of creating something. Despite the surface differences in what Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler and Sara Paretsky are doing (in writing, respectively, about C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Philip Marlowe and V. I. Warshawski), they are not really creating fictional characters, since they neither created a detective, nor any of the properties associated with these characters.

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[18] Minor potential issues can be ignored for the time being, issues having to do with potential errors in transcript or omission of words from one copy to the other (or, in the case of oral literature, errors in retelling story from one person to the next), change of word-meaning that might significantly change a description (think of gay as adjective), variations in word connotations in different languages etc. My point is, the identity of fictional characters, being tied to the narrative in which they originate, is therefore fixed by the narrative (although, as we will see below, this grounding can be extremely loose, in which case the identity of character will be very poorly grounded).

What is the power of this argument? On my view, even if authors do not, even cannot, imagine properties which would be so original as to not be susceptible to the charge considered above, that still would not imply that they are not creating fictional characters by putting together, via linguistic means, particular, aesthetically intriguing descriptions that give readers means by which to imaginatively engage with the narrative, to follow the story it tells, and most importantly, to gain aesthetically rewarding experiences from doing so. After all, those authors who are genuinely capable of doing so, go down in history as geniuses, those who fail are quickly forgotten. What actually matters, in relation to (iv), is the kind of interest we bring to the work.[19] We might be interested in assessing how an artist describes an instantiated version of a character type that exists independently of his work, i.e. how she fills in the blank space that a certain genre requires. In that case, we will focus on linguistic means that, say, A.C. Doyle employs in order to create a detective which shares some features with other (fictional) detectives – like the feature of solving crimes, outsmarting the baddies, outwitting the opponents, getting the lady, salvaging a damsel in distress etc. – but is also unique in its own way (playing the violin and smoking opium). From this perspective, our interest is in comparing and contrasting how one work falls back on the tradition in which a certain character exists. On the other hand, we can be interested in the fictional world of the work itself, in which case we will be less concerned with characters as instantiated types. What makes Sherlock Holmes so immensely fascinating as a literary achievement is only partly determined by Conan Doyle's depiction of a detective and those seeking artistic qualities of his novels will move beyond considering Holmes' portrayal in comparison to other detectives to consider the fictional world of Conan Doyle's stories.

How then to differentiate between characters? My suggestion is that a reader is capable of individuating a certain character when she (a) successfully traces its narrative of origin, (b) has a sufficiently informed understanding of what makes that particular character – character x, distinct from other fictional characters that have features in common with character x, as well as from other characters within the same work. For example, to individuate Emma Bovary from other fictional adulteresses, one needs to trace its origin to the novel *Madam Bovary*, rather than to *Anna Karenina*. To individuate it from other characters from the novel (say Charles' first wife), one needs to have a sufficiently informed understanding of how the two women are distinct. In order to gain such understanding, readers need to carefully pick up textual clues relating to each of the character and use them to construct their own image of each of them.

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[19] See Lamarque 2010

It is an additional question, having to do with issues of modality, whether one should also trace Emma to Flaubert rather than to Tolstoy, i.e. whether it is a necessary feature of Emma that it was created by Flaubert.[20] In a sense, asking whether it was necessary that Flaubert is the author of *Madam Bovary* is the same as asking whether it was necessary that the penicillin was discovered by Alexander Fleming – once we can enjoy the benefits of penicillin being around, does it really matter that it was Fleming who discovered it? On that analogy, once we can aesthetically enjoy *Madam Bovary*, does it really matter that it was Flaubert who is to be credited with creating it? However, things are more complicated given that we tend to ascribe authors originality, innovativeness, creativity and praise them along these lines for their creations. The aesthetic achievements of Flaubert, exhibited in *Madam Bovary,* were unique at the time when Flaubert (and no one else) wrote the novel, which is an important part of the value this novel has as a literary achievement, and Flaubert as a literary artist. A word-for-word identical novel written by someone else, at some other time, would not have the same literary qualities as *Madam Bovary*. Therefore, I am more inclined towards claiming that once it is established that Flaubert wrote *Madam Bovary*, his authorship has to be acknowledged for Emma's identity, although only for her external identity (i.e. when we are interested in a work as a piece of art and in the character of Emma Bovary as an integral part of that particular novel)[21]. For her internal identity (i.e. who she is in a fictional world), the fact that she originates in Flaubert's work is less significant, as a reader who lacks knowledge of the work and character's origin can still appreciate the novel or have an understanding of who Emma is, though this understanding, and the overall experience afforded by the work, will be impoverished.

An issue far more pressing for characters' identity concerns questions such as the following: is it necessary for Emma to fall in love with Rodolphe rather than with Homais? Would she still be the same character if she cheated on Charles with someone other than Rodolpho and Leon, or only with one of them? How relevant is her infatuation with the sentimental, romantic literature for her character? This is a slippery slope argument,

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[20] Amie Thomasson (2003) claims that it is an essential feature of a character to be brought into existence by a particular author; for counterview see Peter Lamarque (2010). See also Greg Currie (2004).

[21] This is particularly relevant when the same character figures in narratives written by different authors, such as the character of Faust. There are also cases when a certain character is "borrowed" from one literary work and inserted into another. With such cases, I would insist that the character comes with the ontological baggage given to him by the author who originally brought him into existence.

as we can modify the story in various ways, wondering whether it is still the same story, with the same characters. More formally, the question ((v) above) is, do fictional characters have core, or essential features, and how do we determine them?

I do not think there is a straightforward answer to this question. It seems we can still "get the story" and "understand the characters" even if certain episodes are absent from the work. This intuition is supported by some practical considerations: it is impossible for a reader (as well as for an author) to bear in mind the entire text of a narrative, in the process of reading as well as afterwards. Our attention as we read is selective – we might ignore certain details in order to grasp the plot line, or we might be interested in one character rather than the other, or in the aesthetics of the prose rather than the story itself. Therefore, we necessarily miss out on details, and consequently, our grasp of the characters is always porous. We are more likely to hold on to the image of Emma as a passionate adulteress and neglect the specific dynamics of her adulterous relations (with Rodolphe, she is submissive, with Leon she is dominant). In that sense, it seems that even if some episodes were absent, we would still get the story, and have a conception of who the characters are. However, from the theoretical angle, we mustn't forget that a character originates in the narrative created by an author, in accordance with her artistic vision. Therefore, we have to presuppose that every element in the story – every episode, every description, every metaphor etc. – is indispensable to that story. Every episode, in other words, has an important function within the overall artistic design of a work.[22] With respect to fictional characters, it follows that everything described in the story, in the way in which it is described, is fundamental for the story and contributes to the identity of a character. This isn't to say that a character is identified with the narrative. Characters are grounded in the linguistic descriptions of a narrative, and every episode within the narrative contributes to their identities, but their identities also depend on the literary practice and upon the activities of those who participate in them, as I will show below. "Who any given character is," on my account, is a function of author's linguistic descriptions (which she judges to best serve her overall artistic vision) and reader's constructive reading, whereby she uses the textual information, her background knowledge of the real world literary practices to come up with an understanding of this character, imbuing it not only with human-like properties, but aesthetic, symbolic, referential, etc. ones.

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[22] I'm following Peter Lamarque (2009) here.

2. Linguistic Description Foundation of Fictional Characters

In this part I will focus on the linguistic descriptions that give rise to characters and set foundations for their identity. They also serve as an epistemic entry point for readers, who can only gain access to characters via these descriptions (more on this below). It matters little here whether an author is describing a real person, drawing inspiration from one, or whether the characters are entirely a result of author assembling together various properties she wants this character to possess. In order to bring a character to life, an author needs to first describe it in a story, i.e. ground it in a narrative, as this is the only way in which a reader can have access to it.[23]

I take the term "description" here in a rather inclusive sense, wider than usually understood, when applied only to an account of characters' physical appearance and personality traits. "Description" in this sense extends to reports of what happens in the story to each character, reports of dialogues, episodes and scenes, as each of these ascribe certain properties to characters, properties relating to characters' physical and psychological aspect, social status, belief system and the like. Given the functionality principle mentioned above, my claim is that a character's identity depends on all of these, as it is grounded in all the details of a narrative (i.e. all the information associated with a given character). Therefore, every episode is relevant for how the reader comes to understand a character. In the next part, I will have more to say on what determines the specific details of these descriptions, for now, I will give few examples of how characters are given through narrative's descriptive resources. While it would be impossible to provide a list of all the ways in which character-descriptions can be laid out, some examples will be helpful.

Consider again the first sentence of *Madam Bovary*. The fact that the "new fellow" lacks a school uniform is a subtle yet powerful way in which Charles is depicted as a man out of place with his environment and people around him, a situation he will be in for most of his life. After the opening sentence, Flaubert has the narrative "we" tell readers more details about his physical appearance and behaviour of "the new fellow," and the reader is expected to pick up clues from the text and construct an image of Charles. The fact that he is "taller than any of" the school boys indicates that he is older than his schoolmates, yet his repeated inability to introduce himself or catch up with coursework shows how poorly prepared for school he is. The sharp contrast between his shabby attire (his short jacket is tight

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[23] Even when real people feature in fictional stories, readers "work with" descriptions provided by the author, rather than with their conception of who the person was, although they might rely on this conception to evaluate author's creation.

around his armholes, his boots are ill-cleaned) and his ludicrous cap indicates parental disharmony and neglect. As details about his parents are narrated, we learn of his mother's domination over Charles and his father's utter disregard for them both. His isolation is reflected in the contrast between those who are retelling the story, we, and "he" – the new fellow. The artistic relevance of these opening scenes is symbolic, in that they prefigure Charles' life and his way of dealing with the world; he will always be the one out of place, ill prepared, ignorant of what is happening and constantly pushed around by those around him.

Reader's construction of who Charles is depends on her successfully picking up information available from several different perspectives via which Charles is depicted. The anonymous "we" that first introduce Charles and give readers an insight into his childhood and parental relations[24] give way to a more sympathetic perspective, as when the happiness he found in marriage to Emma[25] and professional success[26] are contrasted with how Emma sees him. As Flaubert handles over the narration to her, a different image of Charles emerges, an image of a man who "could neither swim, nor fence, nor shoot…," a man who "taught nothing, knew nothing, wished nothing." (p.26) As the discrepancy between the two spouses grows, a discrepancy to which Charles is tragically oblivious as he constantly misinterprets her behaviour, Emma starts to feel more and more annoyed by him, blaming him for her misery. "Was it not for him, the obstacle to all felicity, the cause of all misery, and, as it were, the sharp clasp of that complex strap that buckled her in on all sides?" (p.68) The reader of course knows that it is not "for Charles" that she is so unhappy; given Flaubert's masterful

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[24] "His time at school, when he remained shut up within the high walls, alone, in the midst of companions richer than he or cleverer at their work, who laughed at his accent, who jeered at his clothes, and whose mothers came to school with cakes in their muffs? Later on, when he studied medicine, and never had his purse full enough to treat some little work-girl who would have become his mistress? Afterwards, he had lived for fourteen months with the widow, whose feet in bed were cold as icicles." (p.22)

[25] "But now he had for life this beautiful woman whom he adored. For him the universe did not extend beyond the circumference of her petticoat, and he reproached himself with not loving her. He wanted to see her again; he turned back quickly, ran up the stairs with a beating heart. Emma, in her room, was dressing; he came up on tiptoe, kissed her back, she gave a cry." (p.22)

[26] "He was well, looked well; his reputation was firmly established, the country-folk loved him because he was not proud. He petted the children, never went to the public house, and moreover, his morals inspired confidence. He was specially successful with catarrhs and chest complaints. Being much afraid of killing his patients, Charles, in fact, only prescribed sedatives, from time to time emetic, a foot-bath, or leeches. It was not that he was afraid of surgery: he bled people copiously like horses, and for the taking out of teeth he had the "devil's own wrist." (p.38)

depiction of Emma, it is clear that her selfishness and self-absorption prevent her from appreciating Charles' qualities as a husband and a father. As Joshua Landy (2010) warns us, in coming up with an image of Charles, it is important to keep in mind that Emma's perspective on him is to be taken with a grain of salt.

Another technique often employed by authors to describe fictional characters involves a direct description of their mental states. The events in *Madam Bovary* are narrated from Emma's perspective, and her internal identity (who she is in the novel) starts to take shape as we learn more and more of her desires, her hopes, dreams and fears. Consider the way Flaubert describes her yearning, blind and unspecified, but so fundamental to who she is, a yearning that will later on push her into a shopping spree (which she will misinterpret as expression of her refined taste) and bed-hopping (which she will misinterpret for a true love):

> At bottom of her heart, however, she was waiting for something to happen. Like shipwrecked sailors, she turned despairing eyes upon the solitude of her life, seeking afar off some white sail in the mists of the horizon. She did not know what this chance would be, what wind would bring it her, towards what shore it would drive her, if it would be a shallop or a threedecker, laden with anguish or full of bliss to the port-holes. But each morning, as she awoke, she hoped it would come; that day she listened to ever sound, sprang with a start, wondered that it did not come; then at sunset, always more saddened, she longed for the morrow. (p.39)

Descriptions like this serve important function not only from the internal perspectives (Emma's unhappiness and a desire for "something more" explain what pushes her into adultery), but from the external one as well. It takes a somewhat sophisticated reader to connect Emma's blind yearnings and unfulfilled desires to the tradition of Romanticism, and to see Emma as a fallen romantic hero. Because Flaubert vacillates between Romanticism and Realism, Emma, as an artistic artifact, unites both. Her yearnings for a better life, for something exotic and mystic, however unspecified and blind, remain at the core of her character, pushing her around, as she is incapable of controlling her passions. Considering herself better than and superior to everyone else, Emma embodies the Romantic hero's entitlement to love, fame and wealth. However, she also embodies some features of a realist character: she is given to us in a "close up," she is firmly set in her environment which is, unlike the environment of romantic heroes, socially dense and populated with characters that occupy Flaubert's attention to a significantly lesser degree than Emma, but still sufficiently so as to offer a glimpse into the lives of a small village in French province circa 1840-ties.[27]

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[27] See Doering (1981) for the way romanticism and realism come together in Flaubert,

Though Emma can't identify where her yearnings come from, she is more than painfully aware of where they are taking her: her progression in space and time is progression that follows from her inner states, which Flaubert conveys in impressionistic manner: "Then the lusts of the flesh, the longing for the money, and the melancholy of passion all blended themselves into one suffering, and instead of turning her thoughts from it, she clave to it the more, urging herself to pain, and seeking everywhere occasions for it." (p.68)

Dialogues and monologues are another descriptive resource relevant for depiction of characters.[28] Emma's utter incapability to care for others is best captured in her exclamation "You bother me" (p.60), when the troubled nurse asks her for help. The rottenness of Rodolphe's character is exposed in his interior monologue. We recognize his shrewdness and as he contemplates on how to seduce Emma ("With three words of gallantry she'd adore one, I'm sure of it."), given that his current mistress is "decidedly beginning to grow fat" (p.82), and we find him blameworthy for lack of ethical concerns for others, when we read that his only concern regarding the affair is "how to get rid of [Emma] afterwards?" (p.82)

There are many indirect techniques that can contribute to characters' identity, such as juxtaposition of one character against the other, as when Homais' shrewdness is contrasted with Charles' naivety, his rationalistic nature with Emma's sensual and idealistic. Name symbolism, a technique so dear to giants such as James Joyce or Charles Dickens, figures greatly in Flaubert. It is not a coincidence that Charles' surname is Bovary, a word so strikingly similar to "bovine," or that Emma is a name so often associated with English romantic literature.[29]

I suggested above that each episode is relevant for depiction of a certain character. Consider the episode in which Charles unsuccessfully performs a clubfoot operation on a stable boy Hyppolyte. While in itself a minor character, Hyppolyte's function in the story is relevant from the internal perspective, in how the clubfoot operation illuminates Emma, Charles and Homais, three characters central to the story, and from the external one, as the mockery he is exposed to because of his physical defect reflects complacent human stupidity and shallowness that so annoyed Flaubert. The episode exposes the limits of Charles' medical competence and his lack

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and Weinstein (2009) for an account of realism and its techniques for character-depiction.

[28] In some genres, such as plays, this is the only means available. Hemingway's *Hills like White Elephants* is a short story that consists almost entirely of conversations and it is only through what is said that a reader can access the two characters.

[29] See Porter and Gray (2002).

of self-awareness with respect to it, the intensity of Homais' ambition and the strength of Emma's lust for money. From the external perspective, the episode is relevant for the structure of the novel, as it parallels the situation in which Charles and Emma first met. While their mutual mending of Mr. Rouault's leg was successful and led them into wedlock, with Hyppolyte's operation their cooperation, like their marriage, is utterly dysfunctional, causing the boy to lose his leg and Charles to lose his place in Emma's bed. Given Flaubert's family background (his father was a physician) some commentators see this episode as his commentary on the medical scene of his time and introduction of experimental sciences into medicine.[30]

Some characters may have a minor role within the fictional world, but their overall contribution to depiction of other characters might be enormous. The Blind Beggar is of marginal importance for what happens in *Madam Bovary*, but his symbolic meaning can hardly be overstated. His blindness symbolizes and reinforces the blindness of every other character: Emma is blind to Charles' goodness and devotion, to Rodolphe's deceptions, to Leon's cowardice, even to her own inability to cope with the situations she orchestrated; Charles is blind to the fact that his wife is stealing from him and is being adulterous; Homais is blind to human passions, pain and suffering; his neighbours are blind to how he instrumentalizes them; the city itself is blind to its own gullibility and mediocrity and, in a sense, people generally, Flaubert wants to say, are blind to how limited their options really are.[31] As the blindness could be an outcome of syphilis, some interpreters claim that the Beggar serves as a judgement on unrestrained sexuality and in that sense parallels Emma's feeling of being punished. Because of the way Homais, who embodies all that Flaubert finds unbearable in his social surroundings, exploits him, the character of a Blind Beggar symbolizes the helplessness of people in the face of those with financial superiority and intellectual mediocracy. Fictional characters thus often have functions that extend beyond the fictional world of a story and relate to author's aim of being ironic, satirical or didactic, or achieving aims with their works beside the artistic ones, as reflected in this critical commentary on Homais' character: "Just as there are Emmas suffering in twenty villages of France, so too are there Homaises triumphant in every city, town, and village. Flaubert bequeaths to the reader a dark vision of the future: the inevitable rise to power of the Homaises of the world, the triumph of *betise*, and the rise of totalitarian state." (p.92) On the view proposed here, this kind of functional role is another relevant aspect of who a character is.

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[30] Porter and Gray (2002).

[31] For the relevance of Flaubert's pessimism in relation to *Madam Bovary*, see Porter and Gray (2002).

3. Fictional Characters, Linguistic Descriptions and Literary Practices

In the previous part I showed some descriptive resources available to authors for creation and description of characters; naming, direct description, description via perspective of another character, character's expression of thoughts (access to the mental states), dialogues and monologues, juxta positioning of characters, intratextual and intertextual references and name-symbolism and the function that a character has internally and externally. This list is not meant to be conclusive but illustrative, with some of the resources relating to the identity that a character has within the story and some with their aesthetic character external to the work. In what follows, I will focus on some factors, entangled and mutually dependant, that determine the choice of linguistic descriptions: those related to mimetic aspect of a work and those related to art-historic context of creation.

Mimetic dimension of literature should be understood as literature's intimate and inseparable connection with the real world: in it, we find our real world practices, institutions and cultural ways reflected, as well as our emotional, sexual, behavioural and the like patterns of human interactions. To put it simply, literature is concerned with the real world, and the real world is reflected in literary works.[32] Unique as Flaubert's heroine might seem in her futile struggles to overcome her boredom and find excitement, Emma is not unlike many of Flaubert's female contemporaries, for whom loveless, passionless marriages were the only alternatives to choices available at the time – a life of servitude, religion or prostitution. In a world where a woman could not divorce, "vote, move, open a bank account, hold a passport, or start a business without their husband's permission…" (Porter and Gray 2002: xiv), Emma's aspirations for freedom and the sense of entrapment are easier to understand. The tragedy is not only hers, as she represents a whole generation of females suffering in "twenty villages of France."[33]

How exactly mimetic dimension of a work is spelled out artistically depends on the art-historic period within which a work is created. Each art-historic period is specific in making some, but not other, artistic means available. Writing at the intersection of two periods, Flaubert could use the

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[32] See Gibson (2007). Because of its mimetic aspect, it is often claimed that literature is a source of knowledge about the real world. I am happy to accept that claim, but it is not necessary for my discussion of fictional characters.

[33] See Porter and Gray (2002), who provide an excellent background to the social context within which Flaubert wrote Madam Bovary, and a critical discussion of his merging together the tendencies of literary realism to describe the real world and his aesthetic theory at the center of which is the form of a work.

resources of Realism – the factographic aesthetics and empirical precision of observing and describing – to convey an image of a life in a small town and the emotional commotions of his overly sensitive romantic heroine. Just couple of decades before, his Romanticist colleagues had other resources to choose from (consider the elements of the gothic novel and nationalistic tendencies in writers pertaining to this period) and as the century progressed and Realism gave way to Naturalism, forces darker than sentimental romantic literature, so detrimental to poor Emma, pushed Thérèse Raquin into the arms of Laurent LeClaire. As the public norms of what was acceptable as a topic of literature kept lowering, the way was open for authors such as Octave Mirbeau to unravel the most hidden and deviant aspects of human psychology (and only indirectly, of society), as characters such as Celestine found themselves at the mercy of sexual perverts, voyeurs and upper class gentlemen for whom extramarital sexual relations were a daily routine.

An important element of art-historic period includes genre, since conventions of genre dominant at any given point greatly influence the choice and depiction of characters, and consequently, one aspect of their identity.[34] A certain degree of formulaic consistency at the level of story creates a blank space for a particular type of a character. Consider a detective novel, which, from its birth under the genius pen of Edgar Allan Poe, centres on the character of a detective: an eccentric weirdo whose high efficiency in solving crimes is only matched by his high inefficiency in finding his way around the mores of social norms. Other such formulaic blind spots include the character of a mad scientist (gothic genre and science fiction), the "greater than life hero" (epic myths, tales of frontiers in American literature and Australian national literature), the young woman who has to guard her virtues (early 19th century sentimental novel), prince and princess (fairy tales), the pair of lovers (romances) etc. This isn't to say that authors do not experiment, break the rules and impose new directions – after all, paradigm shifts occur as much in art as they do in sciences – but certain properties of artworks, such as the choice and depiction of fictional characters in literary works, are best understood if the context of creation, and the genre conventions, are taken into consideration.

4. Fictional Characters as Representatives of Types or Classes

It is a common tendency in literary criticism, as reflected in the quote above, to claim that fictional characters represent types or classes of people,

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[34] By claiming this however I do not want to make genre exclusively a historical catee gory.

where "type" can designate any sort of psychological, emotional, moral, sexual or the like etiquette that can be applied to people, and "class" can be taken in its sociological, educational, geographical, economical, religious etc. meaning. Many of Flaubert's characters represent real people in this sense: Homais represents a man desperately trying to rise above his social status, on the quest for authority and power, Rodolphe represents a rich womanizer who takes advantages of his gender (something that a contemporary reader might be blind to) and social status, unbothered by the consequences of his actions and indifferent to the emotions of his fellow citizens. Charles represents naïve and timid people who lack the imagination and courage to look at reality and are therefore easily pushed around and manipulated by others. The question to consider is, if each, or the majority of fictional characters, represent some type or class of people, what does that tell us about their identities?

Consider first one difficulty. All characters are created by their authors putting together some set of features; should it happen that there are real people who can be described as having sufficiently similar set of features (yet without the feature of being fictional), it might be claimed that they are represented by those fictional characters who, in addition to being fictional, possess those same features as people in question. Yet, not only would it be incredibly unlikely to find real people and fictional characters with exactly the same set of features (with the exception of being real vs. being fictional), it would be equally hard to come up with a list of features that would completely exhaust all that goes into a real person, and all that a fictional character stands for. Are we to focus on Emma being unhappily married, and claim that she represents all unhappily married women, or should we specify this further and claim that she represents all unhappily married women who have lovers and pile up debts? In other words, how are we to identify the relevant set of features (both, with reference to fictional characters and with reference to real people) that would justify the claim that a distinctive fictional character represents a distinctive group of people? To generalize this line of thought, it can be claimed that fictional characters are too much entangled with the details of a narrative to be of interest to us as representatives of real people – any attempt to break them down to some features that would serve as criteria on whom exactly they represent fails. Some philosophers see this as a reason to reject not only claims regarding similarities between fictional characters and real people, but also claims regarding literature's ability to tell us something about the real world and its inhabitants.[35]

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[35] See Lamarque and Olsen 1994

I think more beneficial lessons are to be gained if we consider what this difficulty tells us about the activities that go into writing and reading literary fiction. First, it reinforces our claim that authors create, rather than discover, fictional characters by putting together a certain set of features. In doing so, they are guided by their artistic vision, and the kinds of characters they create serve that vision best. Very often, illuminating some aspects of our world, and types of people, via their works, is what authors want to do. The set of features they ascribe to their characters is therefore determined by their aim of telling us something about the real people. In one important aspect therefore, it is plausible to see fictional characters as type or class representatives – this only adds fuel to the mimetic aspect of a work and further inspires the intuition that literature is cognitively valuable: if fictional characters represent real world people, we can learn something about them by engaging with fictional characters. Second, recognizing some kind of representational links between fictional characters and real people explains why there is nothing mysterious in our ability to recognize real people in fictional characters, as these characters simply hold a mirror to real people.[36]

The fact that the correspondence between fictional characters' features and real people represented by those characters is not perfect should not be an obstacle to fictional characters representing types of real people. After all, when real individuals serve as representatives of some real world type or class (for statistical purposes for example), we do not demand that they are exactly alike all the people they represent. However, it is important to keep in mind that characters' representative functions are only one of their aspects, which shouldn't overcloud the relevance they have as artistic creations, or the uniqueness they have as inhabitants of fictional worlds. The fact that we recognize some fictional characters as representing some type or class of people should be taken as one among many different layers that contributes to who they are and how they are depicted. It is important to keep in mind that the parallels between fictional characters and real people

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[36] As a case in point, consider a critical commentary on William Dean Howells's novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes*: "Howells paints a panoramic portrait of urban life. His novel abounds in richly detailed descriptions of people representing the socio-economic spectrum, including recent immigrants, transplanted Southerners, old money and the newly rich, artists and writers. The points of view expressed by these characters include a property-is-theft socialism, a conservative Gospel of Wealth capitalism, and a remnant of the Old South's feudal aristocratic perspective. The crisis of Howell's novel, a bloody riot, reflects the harsh inequities of capitalism in the late nineteenth century and the class conflict simmering just below the surface of New York society." (Crane 2007: 161) Other interesting and illuminating studies on the role that real people have in works of narrative fiction include Head (2002), Ivanits (2008).

are, on the whole, slim, and extend only to internal perspective on a work, when we take fictional characters as real people in order to make sense of the story.[37] Readers' reactions to fictional characters extend beyond acknowledging their "real world" properties; as mentioned above, fictional characters are imbued with artistic qualities that can only be recognized and acknowledged if we take external perspective on a work.

5. Readers' Role in the Construction of Fictional Characters

I claimed above that linguistic descriptions – vehicles, as it were, via which an author creates his characters and provides information about them – are epistemic entry points for readers. Readers' task is to pick up information and text clues, associate them with each specific character and merge them together, in order to come up with an understanding of who each character is and what role it has in the fictional world, and outside of it, given its artistic properties. As textual clues are always inconclusive, undetermined and susceptible to multiple interpretations, the identity of a fictional character – who that character is – will be a matter of constructive, reflective reading, not simply a matter of author's descriptions.

It is a separate issue how these two forces work together and what is the authority of each. Some aestheticians argue that the authority of an author is absolute, in that he determines what a reader is to imagine – in other words, things are the way an author wants them to be. If this were so, the identity of fictional characters would be exhausted by the creative act of the author (though activities of readers would still be necessary for their survival, as explained by Thomasson's account). However, many aestheticians are willing to loosen up the authority of authors, some, like Barthes, even to the point of denying it completely. Derek Attridge (2015) claimed that an author creates only a text, and it is the reader, i.e. an act of reading, that realizes a given text into a literary work. If this is a proper way to think about the ontology of literature and phenomenology of reading, then we should conclude that the identity of fictional characters is more conclusively determined by the activities of readers, with author's descriptions being minimally authoritative or only causally relevant, in creating a set of sentences that, when read, give rise to the reader's construction of fictional characters. Though there are some counterintuitive consequences of

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[37] Because we see fictional characters as real people, we can make sense of those stories which feature animal characters, and stories which feature characters who are in some salient way different from ordinary folks, such as stories in the genre of science fiction. Characters that embody abstract notions, such as the character of Death, can be understood along these lines.

this view – a potential infinity of works being one and the infinitely many Emmas, in some respect incommensurate to one another being the other – Attridge has a point in claiming that an active, constructive engagement on the part of the reader adds up to the creation of a work. On my account, the identity of fictional characters has to include both of these aspects, i.e. the fact that authors determine their features by describing them in a certain way, and the fact that readers shape characters they read about according to their own ideas, expectations, experiences, knowledge etc.

As explained above, linguistic descriptions provide an epistemic entry point for the reader, who, following up on this description and accumulating bits and pieces of information (those expressed directly and those that are only implied) available in the narrative, comes up with his own idea of who the character is. For such a construction to take place, reader has to engage with descriptive resources provided by the work itself and built up from there, applying various character traits labels, ethical judgments, concepts regarding the real world and cultural knowledge, and various artistic and value-laden concepts, to descriptions that ground the character. These descriptions are never so detailed, as to add up to a complete image of a character. We are told a lot about Emma, but it is still indeterminate whether she is a victim of her own foolish romanticism or of a social arrangement and stagnant institutions. This is one way in which characters are indeterminate: not all possible details about them can ever be given. Another way in which characters are indeterminate has to do with the fact that linguistic descriptions in which they are grounded are (like works themselves) susceptible to interpretations: it is in this part that the active, reflective reading plays a role in constructing a character's identity.

In the process of constructing the identity of characters she reads about, reader draws extensively on her knowledge of the real world, her experience (worldly experience as well as artistic/literary experience) and her knowledge of the conventions of genre and art-historical context in which the work was created. Not all readers are equipped with this kind of information and while here it is not the place to discuss how all of these factors come together in the act of reading, it is important to note that how one comes to understand, appreciate and evaluate a story (in all of its elements, including fictional characters) will partly at least depend on one's background and literary experience. Reader familiar with descriptive resources available to a realist novelist will be better equipped to appreciate the way Flaubert uses them to bring Emma, Charles and others to life, and she will be able to spot Flaubert's influence on and distinction from later generation of naturalist writers. Familiarity with art-historic context within which a work was created matters, in that it provides resources for a more

informed reading. Knowing about the limited social options available to women around 1840ties, when the story takes place, helps us understand the situation in which Emma finds herself, as well as the options she had at her disposal. Familiarity with reading protocols demanded by literature generally and different genres specifically (like adjusting to the science fiction's breach of natural laws) matters, as well as familiarity with narrative techniques available to authors (a failure to recognize unreliable or self-deceived narrators might severely hinder one's understanding of the text and one's idea of who the characters are). None of what I just said implies that readers who lack this knowledge cannot engage with a work. They will miss out on some literary qualities of a work (its symbolic meaning for example, sources of influence, textual and intertextual references and the like) and potentially formulate some faulty assumptions, but they can still follow the story and enjoy the work from the internal perspective (what happens in the story and what the characters are doing).

In addition to the factors identified above, figuring out who the characters are and constructing them from linguistic descriptions is a process that is interest-relative and depends on how engaged with the work a reader chooses to be. Consider the differences between Rodolphe and Leon. If one is only interested in providing a summary of a story, they can be identified simply by their role: "being Emma's lover" suffices to identify them. However, there are immense differences between them, differences one can only acknowledge (and appreciate their aesthetic relevance) if one pays closer attention to the kind of characters they are. To make the transition from "Emma's lover" to a more elaborated identities Flaubert gives them, reader has to engage with descriptive resources employed to describe them. When Rodolphe first contemplates seducing Emma, sufficient resources are given to conclude that he is immensely insightful and can easily understand other people's state of mind, but it is immediately clear that he is insincere, manipulative, someone who does not respect others and treats women as means for sexual gratification. On the other hand, Leon's sensitivity, reflexivity, lack of experience and sincere affection he feels for Emma make him a somewhat more likeable character, even if we detest his weakness. As the novel progresses, Rodolphe remains fixed in his hedonistic manners while Leon transitions from a romantic dreamer to an urban upper-class. From this perspective, they are as distinct characters as they are artistic creations and the fact that they share the property of being Emma's lover is the only trait they have in common.

6. To Conclude

I offered a multi-layered account of the identity of fictional characters. Borrowing from the artifactualist ontology, I explained how fictional characters come into being, survive and vanish. Analysing ways in which literary descriptions ground characters, I explained the role of mimetic aspect of literary works and the art-historic context of creation for the creation of characters. Along the way, I tackled the question of characters being representatives of types or classes, and I explained how answering questions about identity of characters is relative to the kind of interest we have in the first place. I then turned to the perspective of a reader, claiming that the process of active, engaged, reflective reading matters for the construction of fictional characters' identities. I claimed that the reading process includes "working with" descriptive resources of a narrative in a way which enables readers to recognize human traces in characters, as well as various artistic properties (external perspective). Again, how invested into this a reader is depends on her interest, background knowledge, experience etc.

I will end by noting several potential worries for my theory. First, my insistence on mimetic aspect of literature, determining as I make it to the choice of characters and their descriptions, might strike someone as having too strong a role in how I conceive of literary works (and their constitutive elements) and the aim of literary practice. It might seem that I turn the mimetic aspect of a work into its epistemic function or aim (to instruct, reveal the truth) and I then take this as work's dominant aim, with all the artistic choices secondary and relative to it. While I am sympathetic to literary cognitivism, here I only presupposed that the real world is mirrored in literature and therefore, artistic choices concerning fictional characters are partly at least influenced by that. Nothing in my account denies the relevance of fictional characters for the aesthetic pleasure derived from literature. Character descriptions play an indispensable role in the aesthetic experience provided by the work. Therefore, even those who want to separate the epistemic dimension of a work from its overall design or value, can rest satisfied.

Second, given my account of readers' activities in the construction of a fictional character, there is an element of relativism in character's identity: my Emma is not the same as your Emma, which means there are as many Emmas as there are readers. I am not too bothered by this. On the one hand, the multitude of interpretations reinforces the idea that different readers come up with different understanding of who characters are – for these readers, Emma's identities will be radically different. Second, and more importantly, on my account, characters' "core identity" remains

fixed and unchanged via its foundations in linguistic descriptions and this textual evidence, inconclusive and susceptible to interpretations as it might be, still determines their identity.

Third, there is a pressing worry that I am conflating two notions: the *ontological* notion of identity with the *psychological* notion of a character. In other words, my insistence on reader's activities being necessary for the construction of a fictional character wrongly assumes that a character is an ontological category of equal status as identity. To address this worry, let me restate that my main motivation was to solve the puzzle of who or what fictional characters are, given the LA approach, that is, given how they come to life as part and parcel of our artistic practices. Against that background, it is hard to see how else we might discuss fictional characters. Consider again the difference between Leon and Rodolphe. An account of fictional characters' identity that would not relate to their characters, internal and external, could hardly explain how they differ. Character's identity cannot be identified with the act of its creation through the words written on the page. It necessarily includes reader's constructive contribution: readers impose character trait labels based on what they read and how they understand it, thus constructing identity of characters. Perhaps the lesson here is to contemplate the connection between identity and character on a greater scale, that of relating to people generally.

Finally, because of its multi-layeredness, it might seem that there is too much that goes into identity. Moral judgments inspired by Rodolphe's womanizing competences or Flaubert's ironic commentaries on bourgeois stupidity are phenomenologically interesting and artistically relevant, but do not play a role in Rodolphe or Homais' identities. I think the way to address this challenge is to make explicit one consequence of my view, namely the fact that fictional characters' identity cannot be explicated in any neatly compartmentalized category – when it comes to fictional characters, we lack the equivalent to DNA or fingerprint method that uniquely identifies human beings. Therefore, fictional characters' identity is stretched-out on the continuum between two main points: their creation in the narrative, when they are first brought into existence in the act of being mentioned (via name, pronouns, occupation or more elaborated description) and the full-fledged account of particular character, which includes the properties it has internally and externally. How far one is willing to go on this continuum is a matter of individual choice and preferences. Given my commitment to LA approach, I left behind LMS philosophers' focus on bringing the characters into existence and their ongoing polemics over their ontological status, and I tried to show all that goes into fictional characters' identity given their place in our artistic practices.

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