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Do fictional characters exist? Well, obviously, if they are *fictional* characters, they should not exist. After all, that's what fiction is all about. Do fictional names name? Well, obviously, if they are fictional *names*, they should name. After all, that's what names are all about.

It might never have struck you before, but these two obvious intuitions conflict, given other assumptions about reference. If one refers to something, then that something must exist in some sense. Equivalently, if a thing does not exist, one cannot refer to it. Linguistic reference, thus conceived, is a relation between a thing and a speaker: a relation presupposes the existence of its relata. So we are left with an alternative: either say that fictional characters exist in some sense (that is called "realism about fictional characters") or say that fictional names do not name (that is called "antirealism about fictional characters").

The debate between realists and antirealist is going on for at least 20 years and it is still an open debate. In this debate, a lot of light has been shed on a distinction between two broad contexts of use for fictional names. Fictional names can be used in fictional texts to invite a reader to imagine some fictional situation: for instance, by reading the opening sentence of Jane Austen's *Emma*: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence.", you should imagine a healthy, witty young woman whose feelings and sentiments will distract you upon reading the novel. However, fictional names can also be used in metafictional contexts, as for instance in an encyclopedia entry, where the reader should look at the fictional character from an external perspective. If you read "Emma Woodhouse is a fictional character and main protagonist of Jane Austen's *Emma*.", you are not supposed to imagine the young woman, but on the contrary entertain the idea of an entity belonging to our world, more precisely to our world's literary history. Emma Woodhouse the young lady to be imagine, I call the "flesh-and-blood individual"; and Emma Woodhouse the cultural item, I call the "individual of paper". This intuitive distinction has been made precise using the notions of truth and reference, for it seems clear that what we can truly say of the individual of paper does not apply to the flesh-and-blood individual.

Using this distinction, a version of realism has gained a lot of attention: so-called "hybrid accounts" of fictional characters argue that individuals of paper do exist, while fictional flesh-and-blood individuals do not. They thus hold that fictional names are polysemous, since they change their meaning depending of the context of use: in fictional contexts they do not refer whereas in metafictional contexts they do refer. The realist research program today consists in explaining the details of this polysemy and thus to explain the systematic links there are between fictional flesh-and-blood individuals and individuals of paper.

In this research project, I argue that realism is false and misleading. I defend a version of antirealism whose central tenet is: fictional characters do not exist.

In the first part of my project, I explain why the existing antirealist accounts are not up to the task. In doing so, I show that the existing metafictional linguistic data is a lot more heterogeneous than it seems. Indeed, one can have external perspectives on fictional characters without, *prima facie*, talking about the individual of paper. If I say: "my neighbour is in love with Emma Woodhouse", it seems very implausible to infer that my neighbour is in love with an abstract entity, namely the individual of paper which is a part of world's literature. However, since my neighbour has no place within Emma Woodhouse's fictional world, the perspective one takes on Emma here cannot be said to be internal in the same way fictional contexts take an internal perspective. Giving a systematic, comprehensive description of the metafictional data is the first outcome of this research project.

The second part of this research project consists in providing a theory of the metafictional data which is in keeping with the antirealist tenet. In order to do this, I need to account for the problematic statements which are unmistakably talking about individuals of paper. I do this by holding that fictional names are a kind of empty name (i.e. names that do not refer) and provide a semantic account for these. Instead of thinking, like the realist, that fictional names are polysemous and somehow acquire a referent in metafictional contexts while having none in fictional contexts, I argue that fictional names are introduced in the language *qua* empty names with some information about their origin. Fictional names are not polysemous, they are empty names originating in fiction. The main achievement of this second part of the project consists in articulating this account with existing, main stream theories for fictional data in order to offer a comprehensive antirealist story for fictional characters.