**The Ontology of Literary Works**

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**I. Introduction**

To ask “what is the ontological status of the literary work?” is to ask what sort of an entity a work of literature is: Is a work of literature a physical object one can hold in one’s hands and see with one’s eyes; or is it an abstract sequence of letters, words, or meanings; or perhaps even a performance of a particular kind by an author that takes place in a particular cultural and historical context? Questions about the ontology of works of literature are tied up with questions about the existence, survival, and identity conditions of works of literature, and in general about their modal properties. We might wish to know what it takes for a work of literature to exist: does a work of literature have to be brought into existence by an author, or should we think of authors instead as somehow ‘discovering’ their works? If we think a work of literature must be created by an author, does the author have to write down a poem to create it, or could it come into existence just ‘in the poet’s head’? Could the same short story have come into existence in a completely different cultural context, with different cultural practices or a different literary history? We might also wonder sorts of change a work of literature can survive: If all copies of a novel are destroyed, does it cease to exist? If copies remain but all capable readers of it die, does the novel survive? Questions about identity conditions for works of literature are also relevant here: If a novel is copied wrongly, is the copy an instance of the same work as the original? If I read a Rilke poem in translation, am I reading the same poem as my German friends?

Questions about the ontological status of works of literature must be clearly separated from definitional questions about what counts as literature*.* We may, for example (following Robert Howell) define literary works as “that body of works, essentially and significantly involving the use of words, that are, or that are put forward to be, objects with aesthetically relevant features” (2002, 67)—or alter this definition in various ways—without having answered the ontological question (except to the extent that we note that works of literature *essentially* involve the use of words). Questions about ontological status must also be clearly separated from evaluative questions about what makes a work of literature a good work, or what makes it a work of art. If we can get a general answer to the question of what the ontological status of works of literature is, it should apply equally well to literary classics and to creative writing assignments completed by reluctant students.

The question ‘what sort of a thing is a work of literature?’ arises as a puzzle once we notice that works of literature, as we normally understand them, speak of them, and deal with them in engaging in criticism and interpretation, cannot be physical objects. Richard Wollheim (1980) argues persuasively against what he calls the ‘physical object hypothesis’: the view that there is a physical object, for example, “that can be identified as *Ulysses*” (1980, 5). It cannot be the copy on my bookshelf, for “it would follow that if I lost my copy of *Ulysses, Ulysses* would become a lost work” (1980, 5). Moreover, we might add, many things are true of my copy (that it is tattered, weighs 10 ounces, etc.) that are not true of the work itself. Nor can we identify it with the author’s original manuscript, since that may be destroyed while the work remains in existence.

The mystery deepens when we notice that works of literature not only cannot easily be classified as physical objects—they do not readily fit into *any* standard ontological categories. In perhaps the earliest, and still one of the best, works on the ontology of literature, *The Literary Work of Art,* (1931/1973) Roman Ingarden convincingly argues that a work of literature cannot be successfully placed in either the category of real objects or ideal objects (1931, 9-16).[[1]](#endnote-1) The category of real objects, for Ingarden, includes both physical objects and mental experiences—indeed it includes anything that originates at some point in time, exists for a time, may change, and may cease to exist. Works of literature, he argues, not only cannot be identified with physical objects, they also cannot be treated as experiences (either of authors or readers) without various absurdities. For if the work were the experiences of the author, it would be completely unknowable to readers and would cease to exist when the relevant experiences do. If we attempted to identify the work with the experiences of readers, we could not rightly speak of there being a single work at all, since readers’ experiences are so disparate (nor could we argue about who was reading the work correctly). He concludes that a work of literature cannot be a ‘real’ object in his sense. Ingarden also argues against the idea that the work of literature is an ideal object (like a number, a triangle, or the property of redness), on grounds that if it were “it would be inconceivable for it to come into being at a given time and change in the course of its existence, as is actually the case” (1931/1973, 11). (Nonetheless, as we shall see, views that treat works of literature as ideal objects have been common in analytic philosophical circles, where Ingarden’s work was little known.)

**II. Meanings, Texts, and Authors**

Having argued that works of literature can be neither real nor ideal, Ingarden goes on to argue that a literary work is of a different ontological kind: it is a “purely intentional” object—that is, an object that depends for its existence on minds—it “comes into being and exists only by our grace” (1931/1973, 373). The literary work, on his view, depends on the sentence-forming activities of its author(s) to *come into* existence, but can remain in existence long after the author’s work is done. It is maintained in existence by some public copy of these sentences, making it an enduring and public entity, despite its mind-dependence. The work of literature, on Ingarden’s view, also depends for its existence and essence on a relation to certain ideal meanings ‘actualized’ in the sentences of the text. While ideal meanings are not themselves *parts of* the literary work, the relation to these ideal meanings, on Ingarden’s view, secures the ‘identity and unity’ of the literary work, so that the work may survive even when no one is thinking of it, and so that many different readers may read one and the same work of literature (1931/1973, 19). (Though each may apprehend a different *concretization* of the work—the work as concretely experienced on a particular reading, which depends on both the literary work itself and on the experience of the individual reader (1931/1973, 336)). Yet despite its dependence on ideal meanings, (as mentioned above) he argues that the literary work itself cannot be an ideal object, since it originates at a certain point in time, may change, and may cease to exist.

In the analytic tradition, work on the ontology of literature traces back most directly to Nelson Goodman and Richard Wollheim. Goodman begins from the interesting and influential idea that some works of art are ‘autographic’ (those for which the distinction between the original and a forgery is significant) and others are allographic(where the question of forgery doesn’t arise). In explaining why works of literature are not subject to forgery in the way that paintings, for example, are, he suggests that for literature, all that matters for being a genuine copy of the work is ‘sameness of spelling’—as a result of which even a perfectly copied forgery of an author’s original manuscript would be a genuine copy of the work (1976, 115). This leaves us with a view according to which instances of works of literature are identified solely in terms of sameness of “sequences of letters, spaces, and punctuation marks” (1976, 115). It isn’t immediately obvious whether Goodman is treating this as a necessary condition or merely as a sufficient condition for being a genuine instance of the work. Since he speaks of correct spelling as the ‘sole requirement’ for being a genuine instance (1976, 117), he seems to take it as a necessary as well as sufficient condition.[[2]](#endnote-2) But this necessary condition might be considered too strict, for we normally do count slightly misprinted copies of a novel as genuine copies of the work (imagine an extra space is inserted between two words of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*). Indeed we even tend to count revised editions and translations as genuine instances of a work.

So far, that only gives us a view about the conditions under which we have two copies of a literary work. But what is the literary work, of which both copies are instances? One cannot readily treat it as the class of its copies, since the work may be finished although the class is not (Wollheim 1968/1980, 8). Nor can it be the set of its copies. For (as Nicholas Wolterstorff points out) sets are generally taken to have their members essentially, but clearly *Pride and Prejudice* remains the same work even when new copies are created, or old ones destroyed. Richard Wollheim argues that a literary work is to be identified not with a class or a universal, but rather with a type, of which copies are tokens (1968/1980, 74-6). One advantage of treating the work of literature as a type is that we can sensibly ascribe physical properties to types (but not, say, to sets)—so we can make sense of things critics say such as that “Donne’s *Satires* are harsh on the ear” (1968/1980, 82). Wollheim does not directly address the question of under what conditions two tokens are tokens of the same type (1980, 79), though he does at least consider the Goodmanian suggestion that “tokens of a certain poem are the many different inscriptions that occur in books reproducing the word order of the poet’s manuscript” (1968/1980, 80).[[3]](#endnote-3)

As we have seen, one problem with the view that works of literature are types (or any sort of abstract entity) identified by the sequence of letters or words is that it prevents us from counting slightly mistaken copies as instances of the same work of literature. Nicholas Wolterstorff avoids this problem by arguing that works of literature are what he calls ‘norm-kinds’ (1980, 58). Norm kinds, on his view, include not just works of art but also species; they are kinds that may have properly or improperly formed examples. So, for example, it is true to say that ‘The Pronghorned Antelope has four legs’ even if some individual, malformed members of the kind are born with only three. Similarly, we can allow that a slightly mistaken copy of *Pride and Prejudice* remains an example of the work. Norm-kinds have certain properties normative within them: those properties anything must have to be a properly formed example of the kind. Thus, we may say that it is normative for copies of *Pride and Prejudice* that they be spelled in the same sequence of letters, punctuation and spaces as the original manuscript, but we can still allow that some copies may fail to meet this norm and yet still be genuine instances of the work.

But views that would identify a work of literature with a certain textually identified abstract kind face a problem, even if we take the kind to be a ‘norm-kind’. That is roughly the problem that Roman Ingarden (1931/1973) had identified long ago with taking works of literature to be ‘ideal’ objects: Unlike standard abstract objects such as numbers or platonic universals, works of literature come into existence at a certain time, may change, and may cease to exist. (Of course the same could be said of species, as other norm-kinds.) In the analytic literature, the first worry along these lines was articulated by Jerrold Levinson, whose work focuses on music, but is (as he recognizes) easily extended to works of literature. He argues that works of music (and presumably also literature) must be things brought into existence by a composer (or author’s) creative activity. Thus, he argues, they should be treated not as pure structures of sounds (or words), but rather as ‘indicated structures’. A work of literature, on this view, is a word structure *as indicated by a certain creator*. Moreover, he argues, the aesthetic properties of works of music (or literature) typically depend on who created it, at what time, with what influences, and in what place in the relevant cultural-historical context. Levinson argues that, provided we take a work’s aesthetic properties as essential to it, a work could not have originated from any other creator or in any other cultural-historical context. Speaking directly of literature, he writes: “a poem is not just a given word sequence. A poem is the product of a particular individual at a specific time and place, with a reasonably definite meaning and aesthetic character that is in part a function of that time and place… I would be inclined to regard a poem of the standard sort as a word structure-as-indicated-by-X-at-t” (1990, 97).[[4]](#endnote-4) Levinson’s ideas that works of art (including literature) must be created, and that the source and circumstances of creation play a crucial role in the identity conditions for works of art have been widely taken on board. Nonetheless, disagreement remains about whether a work of literature is essentially tied to that very author (or if a very similar person or ‘twin’ could have written the work), or to that very time, place, and cultural context. (And in each case, disagreement remains about how much variation in each is allowable).[[5]](#endnote-5)

Guy Rohrbaugh (2003) goes further with criticizing purely ‘structural’ view of works of art of any kind, on grounds directly reminiscent of Ingarden’s. He argues that no work of art may be identified with an abstract structure (not even as-indicated by a certain creator), since works of art come into and go out of existence, may change even in their intrinsic qualities over time, and are ‘modally flexible’ in that they could have had different (intrinsic) qualities than those they in fact have (178). Instead of thinking of works of literature as structural individuals (such as sequences of words, propositions, or plot sequences), he argues, we should consider them to be historical individuals that persist through time and are subject to change, but that depend for their existence on certain physical particulars (copies of them). This, he argues, means that works of literature (and the other arts) fit in none of the standard ontological categories (physical objects, sets, properties, types…).[[6]](#endnote-6) To get an adequate ontology of literature then will require acknowledging entities of a new kind: “non-physical historical individuals, continuants which stand in a relation of ontological dependence to a causally-connected series of physical (sometimes mental) particulars” (2003, 198).

**III. Works and their cultural contexts**

Another question this raises is what the relationship of the work of literature is to the cultural context in which it is created. Thinking of a work of literature just as a series of symbols elides the important role cultural background may play in making it the work of literature that it is. Some dependence on cultural context might already be implicit if we think of the text semantically, and think of meaning as culturally-dependent (rather than, say, just thinking of the text as a sequence of letters, spaces and punctuation). But cultural context might also be thought to play more of a role in supplying the background assumptions needed to make sense of the story told, or in supplying the artistic context to make sense of the particular aesthetic properties and achievements in a work of literature. In *Fiction and Metaphysics* (1999) I drew out a three-way distinction between texts (sequences of symbols in a language), compositions (texts as created by a certain author in a certain historical circumstance) and literary works (compositions as having certain aesthetic qualities, telling a certain tale, etc.), and argued that to be instances of the same literary work compositions must also demand the same sorts of background assumptions and language capacities of their readers (1999, 64-66). Peter Lamarque distinguishes (throughout the arts) between the object and the work, where the work is “a cultural entity whose existence depends essentially on appropriate cultural conditions”. (2012, 4) On Lamarque’s view, works essentially possess ‘intentional properties of an aesthetic, artistic, or representational kind’ where ‘the possession of those properties is made possible only in the appropriate cultural context’ (2012, 54). The appropriate cultural context seems centrally to involve normative practices and conventions. For example, our normative practices about how things are to be individuated, treated, and interpreted, include conventions that define different *categories* of art, and the category a work belongs to may make a difference to its aesthetic and artistic properties.

It is fair to say that the dominant view in recent years has been that works of literature are created abstract entities of a certain kind (not ideal or platonistic abstracta), which depend in various ways on acts of creation by authors and on cultural background conditions, and the identity conditions for which are tied to certain circumstances of their creation. But various details remain to be sorted out regarding exactly what they depend on. So, for example, does a work of literature depend on that very author, or might any similarly placed author do? Does a work depend for its survival or merely for its creation on its cultural context? Lamarque defends the view that works depend not just for their creation (and many of their properties) but also for their *survival* on their cultural context and surrounding norms and practices (2012, 54). But even if one agrees with Lamarque that works depend on their surrounding cultural context, one might hold that they depend on this only for coming into existence—not for their survival. In this way, works of art might be thought to be analogous to artifacts such as ancient Egyptian canopic jars, which can only be produced given certain cultural conditions, but may survive even once that culture is no more. At any rate, it remains open for discussion whether works of literature depend on particular authors, which (if any) background cultural conditions they depend on, and whether they depend on them only for coming into existence (and acquiring many of their aesthetic properties) or also for remaining in existence.

**IV. Action-centered views**

But while views that treat works of literature as abstract objects of some kind or other have been dominant, an entirely different approach has also been proposed: the idea that works of literature—along with all works of arts—are not objects of any kind at all (neither physical nor abstract). The rival view, held in different forms by Gregory Currie and David Davies, holds that works of art should not be regarded as *objects* at all but rather as *actions:* types of actions (Currie 1989) or individual (token) actions (Davies 2004). Currie defends what he labels the ‘Action Type Hypothesis’: the view that works of art (whether visual, musical, literary, or whatever) are types of events—namely the event of someone at some time discovering a given structure via a given heuristic path (1989, 70). In the case of a work of literature such as *Pride and Prejudice,* for example, it would be the event of Jane Austen discovering a certain word structure by way of certain literary influences, sources for her ideas, conventions of the genre, etc. (1989, 68-9). The proposal has the consequence that (*pace* Levinson) different individuals could, in principle, create the same work if they discover the same word structure via the same heuristic path.

David Davies (2004) picks up the idea that in appreciating a work we are appreciating a performance. But he takes it even more literally than Currie, holding that works of art not action *types* but rather individual (*token*) performances. In those performances, on Davies’ view, an artist’s activities should be thought of not in terms of discovering an abstract structure via a heuristic path, but rather as specifying a particular ‘focus of appreciation’ (a text, canvas, etc.) (2004, 81). On this view, then, a work of literature such as *Pride and Prejudice* would be identified with the individual action of Jane Austen specifying a certain text as a focus of appreciation—but it is Austen’s action, not the text specified that (on Davies’ view) is the true work of art.

Part of the inspiration for these action-oriented views is the idea that we should identify the work of art with the object of appreciation, critical attention, etc., combined with the idea that (as Currie puts it) our appreciation is at least in part “an appreciation of the artist’s achievement in arriving at [a given] pattern or structure [of words or sounds]”, in a given cultural context (1989, 68). This sort of account seems to sit well with critical practices in evaluating and appreciating a work, much of which is focused on appreciating what an artist has done in creating a particular work. As Currie writes “The work is the action type that the artist performs. In appreciating the work we are thereby appreciating the artist’s performance” (1989, 71).

Action-centered views have been widely criticized, however, on grounds that they don’t sit well with the ways we ordinarily talk about and individuate works of art. For we normally think of works of art—including literature—as *products of* an artist’s activity, not the processes whereby they are produced (cf. Davies 2004, 141-2). So, for example, we normally say things such as that a given work of literature has seventeen chapters, is being released in a second edition, has been translated into twelve languages, is written in rhyming couplets, and so on. Yet none of these attributes can sensibly be ascribed to an artist’s performance or type of action. Instead, they all apply to the *product* of the artist’s activities. Similarly, we normally think we can read works of literature—but one cannot read the artist’s performance (and indeed if we think of the work as the performance token, it typically no longer exists at those later years at which we think of the work as existing). As Davies himself summarizes the problem, action-oriented views “entail that much of our ordinary discourse about art is either false or hopelessly imprecise” (2004, 178).

**V. Methodological issues**

Objections like these have led first-order discussions of the ontology of works of literature to intersect in interesting ways with meta-ontological discussions about what we are doing in formulating a view about the ontological status of a work of literature, and how we should evaluate competing proposals. I have argued elsewhere (2005, 2006) that work in the ontology of art must go by way of analyzing the conceptions at work in those who ground and re-ground the reference of the relevant art-kind term (‘painting’, ‘novel’, etc.), since these conceptions fix the modal features of the entities, if any, the relevant sortal terms refer to. This form of conceptual analysis, I have argued (2006), involves attending to the ways in which we treat works as the same or different, as surviving or being destroyed, and so on. If we adopt this methodology, we will have reason to reject action-centered proposals.

Others, however, do not primarily evaluate ontological proposals by their fit with our concepts or linguistic or other practices, but instead evaluate competing theories by how well they fit with general metaphysical principles. For example Currie criticizes as ‘metaphysically obscure’ Levinson’s proposal that some works of art (including literature) are indicated structures, and argues that it leads (by parity) to the idea that there are lots of other unwanted entities, such as penicillin-as-discovered-by-Fleming (1989, 58). Julian Dodd (2000) raises similar objections to the idea that any works of art are created abstracta, by arguing that abstract entities are never creatable.

Still others explicitly reject the idea that an ontology of art should be evaluated by its fit with our actual practices. Davies meets the charge of revisionism head-on, arguing that, in developing an ontology of art, we should not be concerned so much with its coherence with our actual ways of talking or practices, etc., but rather with how well the proposed ontology fits the norms that *should* govern critical judgments about how works are to be evaluated and appreciated (2004, 143). He thus embraces the revisionism that comes with action-oriented proposals on grounds that it better fits those critical practices we *should* have. If it is the artist’s achievement that is (or should be) of greatest critical importance, then (Davies argues) we can avail ourselves of a useful distinction between the work itself (the performance) and the work-products or specified foci of appreciation. Then we may accept that works of literature are performances, and simply re-interpret those things that cannot be said of performances as things said about work-products ‘rather than discourse about works themselves’ (2004, 144).

**VI. Does all literature have the same ontological status?**

Traditional work on the ontology of art assumed that there is an important ontological distinction between the ontological status of works of literature and music (on the one hand), and that of works of painting and non-cast sculpture (on the other hand). The former, it is generally assumed, are abstract objects of some sort (whether created or discovered), while the latter are apparently concrete entities of some sort. Call this the ‘pluralist’ view in the ontology of art. With this background in mind, an interesting feature of action-centered proposals is that they give us a uniform account of the ontology of works of *all* kinds, treating works of literature, music, painting, and sculpture together.

Even those who offered pluralist proposals distinguishing the ontology of literature and music from that of painting and sculpture, however, tended to assume that one could give a uniform account of the ontological status of (all) works of *literature*—so that we could effectively ask and answer the simple question: What is the ontological status of works of literature?

One of the most interesting and plausible recent developments in work on the ontology of literature is the idea that we are wrong to seek a uniform account of the ontology of works of literature at all. Anna Christina Ribiero (2009) argues against what she calls the ‘generalist’ approach to philosophy of literature, and Robert Howell (2002) argues convincingly that there is no single answer to the question: “What is the ontology of the work of literature?” He makes the case by arguing that none of the major proposals that has been offered applies to all actual and possible works of literature (2002, 68). Theories that take textual type to be central to works of literature, for example, (he argues) fail to apply to fairy tales, traditional ballads or epics, etc. For these, he argues, do not require a fixed text: what makes something an instance of the same fairy tale might require some sameness of plot sequences or themes, but certainly nothing like word-for-word copying (2002, 70-72). Verbal improvisations are even harder to place—as they seem more like token works than anything related to a text type (2002, 75). Davies (2004, 111-113) makes a similar point about context-dependence: a work like Orwell’s *Animal Farm* might be incapable of existing in a historical context in which the Russian Revolution never occurred, but other works (the *Frog and Toad* stories, perhaps) might be far more independent of the details of their historical context. As a result, Davies argues, we should expect no uniform answer to questions about which aspects of provenance are essential to the identity of a work of art.

These are examples of an emerging trend against uniformity assumptions in the ontology of literature and other arts. Even those who accept Howell’s negative arguments against various uniform ontologies may be left wondering why it should be that works of literature vary in their ontological standing. Howell plausibly suggests that it is because ‘work of literature’ does not define an ontological kind: we may understand works of literature as works that essentially involve the use of words and that have (or are supposed to have) aesthetically relevant features. But that leaves open many parameters, regarding whether or not they are essentially tied to their author, to their exact text, or to the precise storyline; and about whether they are particular events (improvisational performances) or associated types (2004, 75). “Works of literature can, in principle, take any ontological form that involves an essential and significant use of words and that yields an object (in a wide sense of ‘object’) with aesthetically relevant properties” (2004, 76), and authors are free to construct these objects with aesthetically relevant features in whatever ways they find effective.

Sherri Irvin’s work on the ontology of visual art may provide some further insight about why the ontological status of works allows for such variability (2005, 2008). Irvin, parallel to Howell, argues that the question ‘What is the ontological status of works of visual art?’ has no single answer. For, she argues, the ontological features of a work of art (including what features are and are not essential, what sorts of change it can survive, etc.) are determined by what she calls the artist’s ‘sanction’. The sanction is roughly what the artist communicates directly, combined with the background conventions at play in the relevant context.

Applying this idea to the case of literature might suggest the following: Where traditional forms of art are in question, the background conventions may do all the work: thus, presenting a work in the context of traditional Western publications of poetry may ensure that the work is to be treated as having (at least roughly the same) text essentially, but as being repeatable (in multiple copies). Presenting a work in the context of a political rally, or a stand-up show, may invoke different norms, treating it as a singular event. Presenting something as a joke or a detective story may invoke different norms still (e.g. allowing different presentations of roughly the same pun, or different translations of tellings of the same plot sequences). But other works are possible (pushing the boundaries of what counts as a work of literature) in which having the same text alone would not be sufficient to have a copy of the same work. Perhaps in some works, the text would have to have the words printed in a certain pattern or spatial configuration (as in George Herbert’s pattern poems from the 1600s—one of which, for example, was to be printed in a form suggesting the shape of an altar, while another required printing in a pattern suggesting two birds ascending),[[7]](#endnote-7) or along with certain pictures (as in contemporary graphic novels as well as the comic books and classic children’s books of the past) or even with certain token artistic embellishments (as with illuminated manuscripts).[[8]](#endnote-8) And indeed (as Irvin makes clear (and, following her lead, I have argued explicitly elsewhere (2010)), artists may even introduce new kinds of things by making explicit sanctions about what may and may not be changed in their work, where they are not simply relying on standard genre conventions.

**VII. Directions for Future Work**

What remains to be done in the ontology of the work of literature, if we take this lesson on board? First, the project ramifies, for we then must ask not simply what the ontological status of the work of literature is, but rather separately seek to understand the ontology of novels, detective stories, ballads, folktales, poems, graphic novels, etc. Here much valuable work remains to be done, particularly on works of literature other than the traditional novels and poems that were the focus of attention for early work on the ontology of literature. For particularly innovative works, one may even need to work specifically on the ontological status of this or that *work*, rather than on this *type of* work generally.

Secondly, background work remains to be done on meta-ontology, examining what criteria we should and should not treat as relevant to the ontological status of a work of literature: should we evaluate proposals in part or in whole on the basis of how well they fit with our actual practices of discussing, reading, buying, selling, and printing (or performing or displaying) works of literature; or based on what would fit with those critical and evaluative practices we *should* have? Finally, we might wonder whether these proposals really conflict, or rather represent a plurality of acceptable approaches: one of which might tell us what our actual literary works are (given the concepts and categories we work with), while the other might suggest ways in which we should revise our conceptual scheme.[[9]](#endnote-9)

1. For a history of work on the ontology of art (including literature), including some work predating Ingarden’s, see Livingston (2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. And in the case of music, which Goodman takes to be parallel to literature, he suggests that compliance with the score is the ‘decisive test’ for whether or not a performance counts, strictly, as a performance of the work in question. (1976, 117-8) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Noting a point that will become important in later discussion, he does remark that “a very important set of circumstances in which we postulate types… is where we can correlate a class of particulars with a piece of human invention” (1980, 78). But it is not clear whether he would require derivation from the same origin as a condition of two literary tokens being of the same type, nor is it clear whether he requires exact sameness of spelling, etc. as a necessary condition. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This echoes Edward Zalta’s earlier (1983) suggestion that stories are abstract objects that are ‘authored’. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Greg Currie, for example, suggests that Levinson’s ways of individuating works of music may be too fine-grained; it seems possible that a work be composed at a slightly different time, or by different individuals in the same cultural and historical context with the same artistic achievements. (1989, 59-60) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. I make a similar point in my (1999, 131-36 and 148-153), and in my (2004), and develop a similar view that we should think of works of literature and music, as well as fictional characters, as created, dependent abstract entities—what I have called ‘abstract artifacts’. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Thanks to Robert Howell for this example. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For a discussion of ontological issues concerning comic books and graphic novels, see Meskin (2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. My thanks go to Robert Howell for very helpful comments on a prior version of this paper.

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