

What Makes a Version of a Work a *Version of That* Work?

Alberto Voltolini

University of Turin

alberto.voltolini@unito.it

MITE Research Seminars

Apr 17 2024, Macerata

The main thesis

- There is a chance of keeping the Meinongian account of the individuation of fictional works and apply it to the versions of such a work, provided one takes into account the role of the make-believe process underlying the generation of the fictional characters involved in such works

The state of the art

- Here are the five main accounts for individuating fictional works (for details, cf. Lebens – von Solodkoff 2024)
- A first one is *textualist*: a fictional work coincides with its text, as individuated morpho-syntactically (Goodman-Elgin 1988)
- A second one is *Meinongian*: fictional works are sets of propositions (including both what is said and what is implied in a story) that involve fictional characters (e.g. Zalta 1983, Voltolini 2006).
- A third one is *artefactualist*: a fictional work is a composition that traces a set of sentences back to a moment of origin and to certain author's intentions (Thomasson 1999). (Actually, Thomasson further distinguishes compositions from literary works, since the latter are also objects of aesthetic evaluation, but this further distinction is inessential for me)

Cont.'d

- A fourth one is *evenementialist*: fictional works are happenings, historical doings in which one utters something (Davies 2004)
- A fifth one is *eliminativist*: properly speaking, there are no fictional works, there are only copies linked via certain translation relations (Lebens 2015)

Assessment

- The fifth account is very problematic, not only because it relies on a implausible conception of what counts as a translation relation («the translation relation holds between two sentences, in a given context, if they both express the same proposition, in that context, with sufficiently similar style and tone», Lebens – von Sokoloff 2024:59; yet what about translations of *Finnegan's Wake*, to say nothing of translations of *Jabberwocky*?), but also because it can hardly account for what we will be concerned with in this talk, namely work versions
- How can different literary productions be versions of the same literary work, since there is no translation relation, not even a homophonic one, holding between them (versions of the same work can well be semantically different)?

Cont'd.

- The first account does not explain the 'Menard'- puzzle, as revived in Voltolini (2006): two even contemporary authors (Cervantes and an admittedly idealized Menard) may write exactly the same morphosyntactically individuated text and however generate two fictional works concerning different fictional protagonists
- The same problem also arises for the fourth account: how can one account for Cervantes and Menard enacting two different works, since unlike events, processes are not individuated spatiotemporally?
- The third one avoids this problem by appealing to different origins (different authorial intentions), but it leaves open the issue of how the work is made (doesn't a fictional work also consist of propositions, and if so how are they individuated)?

Cont'd. again

- The second account is for me definitely the best one
- For in including fictional characters among the propositional constituents of a fictional work, it does not need to appeal either to origins or to intentions for the individuation of such a way
- Cervantes and Menard work are different for they contain, via their propositions, different fictional characters, Cervantes' Quijote and Menard's Quijote
- Moreover, it may not be Platonist, if fictional characters are taken to be bound idealities generated in time, which however, unlike compositions (Caplan-Matheson 2004), are everlasting, since they mobilize property *sets* (Voltolini 2006)

A consequence of the Meinongian account

- Since for the Meinongians a fictional character a necessary condition (actually, not sufficient precisely because of the ‘Menard’- puzzle) for the individuation of fictional character is their having the same set of either *nuclear* – Parsons 1980, Routley 1980 – or *internally predicated* – Castañeda 1989, Zalta 1983 – properties, it turns out that if a character changes one of such properties, it becomes an utterly different character
- This individuation indeed makes it the case that two fictional characters whose properties overlap but for one property are different, hence the fictional works in which they figure are different as well because of the different propositions they contain

A worse consequence for the Meinongian account

- Also versions of the same fictional work that differ only for the ascription of a single property to a fictional character turn out to be different versions of that work, since they contain different characters
- Yet what makes it the case that they are different versions of the same work, instead of merely being different works?
- Manzoni's *Fermo and Lucia* seems to be a version of *The Betrothed*, actually its first version; yet, since it is made of a character whose name is «Fermo» and not «Renzo», it seems to already be an altogether different work

A possible answer

- Can there be a contextual essence that enables to individuate two literary productions as different versions of the same fictional work (in line with an analogous proposal made by Orilia 2002, 2006 for individuating fictional characters)?
- Yet contextual reidentification is not transitive. The contextual essence that putatively individuates V_1 and V_2 as versions of the same work may not be the contextual essence that putatively individuates V_2 and V_3 as versions of the same work. Yet in actual fact, V_1 , V_2 and V_3 are versions of the very same work (perhaps the case of the different versions of *Hamlet*, starting from the medieval Danish one to be found in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, moving to the Icelandic version, the *Saga of King Rolf Kraki*, up to Shakespeare's version, is a case in point)

Another (preferred) answer

- One may rely on factors that play no proper role in work individuation but they play a role in work grounding (necessarily, if the fictional work exists, then the relevant factor exists as well)
- These factors must have to do with the make-believe games (Walton 1990) underlying the production of a fictional work
- Since these are the very factors that explain how different works count as different episodes of the same cycle, it is quite likely that they can also explain how different literary productions are different versions of the same work

Cycles (Vltolini 2006)

- With respect to storytelling games, a new storyteller (or even a previous one) must start her tale with the intention of *protracting* a previous make-believe process, so that a new episode of the same story takes place (just as one may intend to protract a ball game for some more time)
- She must *inter alia* intend to pretend that the *very same* (concrete) individual that was thought of in the previous make-believe process as being so-and-so is (also) such-and-such

Example

- In the second octave of Canto 1 of the epic *Orlando Enraged*, in impersonating the narrator Ludovico Ariosto says

In the same strain of Roland will I tell/
Things unattempted yet in prose or
rhyme,/ On whom strange madness and rank fury fell,/ A man esteemed so
wise in former time

thereby showing that he intends to continue to tell the same story as Matteo Maria Boiardo did with his *Orlando in Love*, by making believe that a certain individual, Roland, already fallen in love with Angelica, becomes mad for her

Cont'd.

- Yet, the new storyteller's intention to protract a previous make-believe game is only a *necessary* condition for *that* game to be revived
- It is not in fact a *sufficient* condition for that game to be protracted since that intention (like any other intention) may go unfulfilled
- For example, because that intention is seen as thwarted given the intentions of *further* participants in the new storytelling practice to start a new make-believe process that there is an individual doing such-and-such things, or because what the new storyteller happens to make believe "about" the individual whose story is being told is too distant (chronologically or qualitatively) from what the original storyteller(s) made believe

Cont'd. again

- Further participants in the game must also *recognize and accept* that the new game is just the old game protracted
- However, although this is another necessary condition, such recognition by the participants is obviously not also a sufficient condition for the game's revival
- No such recognition prevents the new storyteller in question from making up an entirely new story, albeit resembling an earlier one

Cont'd. again and again

- Yet the storyteller's intention together with the audience recognition and acceptance of that intention may well function as *jointly sufficient* conditions for the revival of a make-believe game. Only in this case does the new practice really amount to reviving the old game
- In that revival of a game, one often continues to pretend that there is a (typically concrete) individual, the very same individual as the one whose existence was pretended beforehand

Versions

- In the case of versions, one must simply reshape the relevant authorial intention
- Instead of intending to protract a previous story-telling make-believe game, the author(s) must intend to *remake* the same game (just as the same guys may intend to play cops and robbers again)

Cont'd.

- Some could deny that the remaking intention is necessary
- Some literary critics may for example say that a certain fictional work by an author is actually another version, possibly either expanded or shrunk, of another work that they take as a previous version of the same work, independently of whether the author so intended (they may say, «she is always singing the same song»)
- Yet even in that case there must be some causal chain linking the two versions that is more intimate than any chain linking two episodes of the same cycle (one may e.g. appeal to hidden psychoanalytic reasons that force one to remake always the same work)

Cont'd. again

- So, the idealized version of Menard cannot write another version of Cervantes' *Don Quijote*, for no intentional-causal relationship holds between such writers
- Yet Pia Pera's *Lo's Diary* is another version of Nabokov's *Lolita*, for she intended to tell Lolita's story again yet from another point of view, not Humbert Humbert's, but precisely Lolita's one (this is why she was charged of plagiarism by Nabokov's heirs)

Cont'd. again and again

- Since versions are basically authorial matters, one might think that the necessary condition, appealing to a causal-intentional remaking link, is also a sufficient one
- But this would be incorrect either. One's authorial intentions notwithstanding, an author may end up telling something utterly different from the previous one (is Roger Waters' new album *TDSOM Redux* a new version of *The Dark Side of the Moon* or an utterly different thing, his intentions notwithstanding – the story told is almost the same?)
- So, it seems that also in the version case recognition and acceptance on the audience's part of some storytelling make-believe game *as a remake* is a necessary, and jointly sufficient with the author(s) original protracting (hidden) intentions, for something to be a new version of the same fictional work

Open problems

- 1) Is the umpteenth Wile E. Coyote & the Road Runner's cartoon another version of the same story-telling game, even if all the relevant intentions and recognitions are at play?
- 2) Is a film adaptation of a novel (or the other way around) a version of the same fictional work another version of the same story-telling game, even if all the relevant intentions and recognitions are at play?
- 3) Is a certain painting another version of a previous painting (e.g., the different versions of Leonardo's *Gioconda*), or does the fact that a painting is an autographic, not an allographic, work (Goodman 1968) makes a change in its individuation?
- 4) What about different versions of the same piece of music, where no story is told, hence no appeal to (even fictional) content can be made?
- 5) Given that, is it possible for a literary production to be another version of a certain piece of music, or even the other way around?
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_songs_that_retell_a_work_of_literature)