

## Indexicals, Fictions, and Ficta

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### ABSTRACT

We defend the view that an indexical uttered by an actor works on the model of deferred reference. If it defers to a character which does not exist, it is an empty term, just as ‘Hamlet’ and ‘Ophelia’ are. The utterance in which it appears does not express a proposition and thus lacks a truth value. We advocate an ontologically parsimonious, anti-realist, position. We show how the notion of truth in our use and understanding of indexicals (and fictional names) as they appear within a fiction is not a central issue. We claim that our use and understanding of indexicals (and names) rests on the fact that their cognitive contribution is not exhausted by their semantic contribution.

To say that unicorns have an existence in heraldry, or in literature, or in imagination, is a most pitiful and paltry evasion. (Russell 1919, 169)

### 1. Introduction

The literature on fictional names is rich. It is not unusual to find papers with names such as ‘Sherlock Holmes’ appearing in the title. There have been roughly three attitudes vis-à-vis fictional names. Some claim that they refer to fictional characters (Meinong 1904, Predelli 2002, Salmon 1998 and 1994, Zalta 1983, to name but a few)<sup>1</sup>, some claim that they are not names at all but disguised descriptions (Russell 1918, Currie 1993), while others claim that they are *empty* names, i.e. that they lack a referent (Braun 1993, Donnellan 1974, Perry 2001). However, little attention has been given to the way in which

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid confusion, we should mention that we are dealing with *ficta*, i.e. fictional characters, which by no means have the same ontological status as *possibilia*. *Ficta* are defined as kinds of constructed abstract objects (essentially, they are incomplete abstract entities) such as Robin Hood and Santa Claus, whereas *possibilia* are concrete objects that *could* have existed: they concretely exhibit the way this world, and the things in it, could have turned out. As such, possible worlds are constructed out of *possibilia* (see Voltolini 1994 for more on the *ficta/possibilia* distinction). Since reference to the two kinds of entities is not intuitively comparable, we only deal with *ficta*, i.e. characters appearing within a fictional discourse, in this paper.

indexical expressions work in a fiction. Following the literature on fictional names, one can take one of three stances:

- (i) Indexicals in fiction refer to fictional characters (to ficta)
- (ii) Indexicals in fiction are not singular terms but disguised descriptions
- (iii) Indexicals in fiction are empty terms

The first stance commits one to the ontological thesis that there exist fictional characters, while the second stance commits one to the view that indexicals, contrary to appearances, are not singular terms. This view argues that they are descriptions, which the alleged referent must satisfy. In this paper, we shall defend the third stance, for we believe that it is the most economical and appealing. It does not force us to posit ficta *qua* referents of indexicals appearing in fictional discourse and it does not force us to embrace the revisionary view that indexicals in fiction are not singular terms. In other words, we do not assume that there exist two categories of indexicals, one that can be captured using the Kaplanian content/character distinction (the usual case) and one containing abbreviated or disguised descriptions (the case of fiction).<sup>2</sup>

We will also aim to be ontologically parsimonious. We attempt to explain how indexicals work in fictional discourse without committing ourselves to the existence of ficta.<sup>3</sup>

The view on which indexicals are not singular terms but, say disguised descriptions when they appear within a fiction appears *prima facie* to provide an account of fictional discourse that does not commit us to the existence of fictional characters. Another way to rule out the existence of fictional characters would be to argue that alleged indexicals work like anaphors when they appear within a fiction. Such anaphors are syntactically linked to a noun phrase, which can be either a quantified expression (in which case no referent is contributed to the proposition expressed) or a singular term, such as a proper name. In the latter case, if one wants to avoid committing oneself to the existence of fictional characters, one must hold the view that the fictional names initiating the anaphoric chain are empty terms. An indexical *qua* anaphora would not inherit a semantic value; it would be an empty or null anaphora. We will not pursue this view any further: we simply mention it as one possibility in our logical space.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that some people (e.g. Nunberg 1993 and King 2001) argue that all indexical expressions are not singular terms but quantified expressions. For argument's sake we do not discuss their position and assume the Kaplanian (i.e. direct reference) framework. For a detailed discussion and criticism of King's quantificational treatment of complex demonstratives (i.e. expressions of the form 'that F'), see Corazza 2003.

<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that we rule out, *a priori*, the possibility of a name referring if used within a fiction. Real people, places and events may be incorporated into a fictional work, and we allow the possibility of their respective names referring from within that fiction.

In what follows we maintain that indexicals work in their customary way whether they appear within a fiction or not. We also assume that the Kaplanian framework is the right one with which to capture their function. In other words, we reject any view which posits ambiguity, i.e. that terms such as “I”, “here” and “now” function as referential terms in factual discourse, in accordance with the Kaplanian framework, but have a distinct linguistic function in fictional discourse. In particular, we aim to show how indexicals can be treated as *singular* terms whether they appear within a fiction or not.<sup>4</sup>

Before going further, it may be worth mentioning the following objection to the view that indexicals (and proper names) are singular terms when embedded in a fictional discourse. One could claim (as Currie, for instance, does) that to pick out a particular individual indexicals such as ‘I’ or ‘you’ in fiction are not generally used to single out an individual, but instead are used by an author (or actor) to induce the audience to imagine that they are used to pick out a particular person. In other words, indexicals in fiction do not function as singular terms. We believe that this kind of objection blurs the distinction between singular terms and quantifier expressions. There are two main features that allow us to distinguish the two types: First, it is often claimed (see, for instance, May 1985) that grammar provides for a direct representation of quantificational structure. A quantifier expression can be moved at the level of logical form (LF) – and will leave a trace, *e* (a bound variable, roughly) – while singular terms cannot be moved in the LF.<sup>5</sup> Second, it is often assumed that a singular term, unlike a quantified expression, is a *rigid designator*, i.e. an expression designating the same object in all possible worlds in which it exists. A name such as ‘Robin Hood’ is thus a rigid *non*-designator, i.e. a name that does not refer to anyone in any possible world. If ‘Robin Hood’ were a description, on the other hand, it may refer to some object or other in some possible worlds, i.e. to the individual who happens to satisfy the description, if any, in that world. Indexical expressions are akin to proper names in this regard: in each possible world, an indexical refers to the object it picks out in the actual world. If it does not pick out an object in the actual world, it will be a rigid non-designator. Hence, we campaign in favor of a distinction between

<sup>4</sup> If an indexical were not a singular term, it would work as a variable bound by a quantifier (e.g. ‘she’ in “Every woman tells Jon the *she* hates him”) or as an anaphoric pronoun (e.g. ‘she’ in “Jane came home and *she* went to bed”). For a discussion of some “deviant” uses of indexicals (e.g. ‘now’ in “In 1785 Mary visited her husband, *now* an old gentleman” or ‘here’ in “If an entire neighborhood could qualify as an outdoor museum, the Mount Washington district would probably charge admission. *Here*, just northwest of downtown, are several picture-book expressions of desert culture within a few blocks”) see Corazza 2004.

<sup>5</sup> LF is the level of syntactic representation of the properties relevant to semantic interpretation, i.e. the syntactic structures relevant to a semantic interpretation.

singular terms and quantifier expressions *w* do not believe that one should, *pace* Currie, distinguish between indexicals (and proper names) *qua* singular terms (as they appear in ordinary discourse) and indexicals (and proper names) *qua* quantifier expressions (when they appear in fictional discourse). A noun phrase is either a singular term or a quantified expression. The fact that a noun phrase can be used in a fictional discourse with different intent from its use in a non-fictional discourse is best explained by invoking pragmatic considerations. As such, it does not affect the semantic and syntactic behavior of the noun phrase.

If indexicals are singular terms, then how is it possible that an indexical within a fiction turns out to be an empty term? If one says ‘I’, or ‘now’, it appears that one cannot but refer to oneself or to the time of the utterance. Kaplan thus claims that pure indexicals such as ‘I’, ‘now’, ‘today’ and the like cannot be empty terms. Even if Jane were drugged and kidnapped, so that she wakes up without knowing who she is and having lost track of the time, she still refers to herself and the relevant time with ‘I’ and ‘now’. It thus appears that, with an utterance of, “Now I am happy,” an actor must refer to himself with ‘I’ and the time of utterance with ‘now’. We deal with this question in section 3.

We now turn to discuss and evaluate fictional realism, i.e. the view that assumes the existence of fictional characters or *ficta*. Sherlock Holmes and Hamlet are considered as abstract entities and as the referents of the fictional names ‘Holmes’ and ‘Hamlet’ respectively.

## 2. Fictional Realism

In recent years, many philosophers have come to the view that the function of a proper name is simply to name something: this has been labelled Millianism. What, then, are we to make of the function of names such as ‘Hamlet’ and ‘Sherlock Holmes’? Neither refer to a concrete individual. If we suppose, however, that each name refers to the empty set, then we should be able to replace one name with the other in any extensional context without altering truth-values. However, we feel unease in claiming that “Hamlet fought Moriarty” is as acceptable as “Holmes fought Moriarty”.

A common response to examples of terms that appear to refer, such as the names of fictional characters, is to claim that the world really is as our language, taken quite literally, represents it as being. From the time of Plato, philosophers have supposed that terms such as ‘red’, for example, have a referent independently of any particular red object, namely the property of *redness*. After all, we can talk of *redness* as an entity, as in “red is a color”. We can deal with the problem of fictional names in a similar way. Nathan Salmon, for instance, assumes that characters such as Sherlock Holmes are, in some sense, real:

To be sure, wholly fictional characters like Sherlock Holmes, though real, are not real people, neither physical objects nor mental objects. Instead they are, in this sense, abstract entities. They are not eternal entities, like numbers; they are man-made artifacts created by fiction writers. But they exist just as robustly as the fiction themselves, the novel, stories, etc. in which they occur. Indeed, fictional characters have the same ontological status as fictions, which are also abstract entities created by the authors. And certain things are true of these fictional characters. (Salmon 1998, 293)

On this view, fictional names are genuine referring terms.<sup>6</sup> They refer to real entities that, although not the same as you or I, nevertheless exhibit features and properties of which we can state true things. These might include *living at 221b Baker Street*, *being a detective* and *being a cocaine user*. Even though characters such as Sherlock Holmes “are not real people”, they thus share many properties with real people.<sup>7</sup> This being so, we arrive at a picture according to which fictional characters inhabit an abstract world that instantiates all the properties predicated of it by the relevant work of fiction. Since Conan Doyle wrote that Sherlock Holmes lives in 221b Baker Street, we can say that Holmes really does live there (although the character, the house and the street are all abstract entities, parts of an abstract fictional world).

Thus, we can truly utter sentences such as “Sherlock Holmes lived at 221b Baker Street”, just as truly as we can say “The Queen of England lives at Buckingham Palace”. Both utterances express a complete proposition; the only difference is that the former utterance expresses a proposition with an abstract character as a constituent, whereas the latter contains a real person. On this view, a proposition can just as truly be expressed by Sherlock Holmes as it can by any of us. Let us imagine that an actor, Jon, playing Hamlet, addresses an actress, Jane, playing Ophelia with:

(1) I love you

To whom do ‘I’ and ‘you’ in (1) refer? Do they refer to the actors playing Hamlet and Ophelia, or do they instead refer to Hamlet and Ophelia? It is unlikely that they refer to the actors. After all, Jon is not claiming that he loves Jane. (1) does not state that Jon loves Jane. It appears that, when an actor playing Hamlet utters the first person pronoun, the reference of ‘I’ is not selected from a context containing the actor. Under the assumption that Hamlet exists (in some sense), the referent of ‘I’ must be selected from a context in which Hamlet is the agent of the utterance, not the actor.<sup>8</sup> Within the fiction, Hamlet is

<sup>6</sup> Predelli 2002 hold a similar view.

<sup>7</sup> This opens a new possibility in the case of biographical characters. A biographical character (e.g. Napoleon, as he may appear in a historical novel or biography) may be an abstract counterpart of the real person, such that every property of the abstract individual is also property of the real person (except for the somewhat dubious ontological property of *being an abstract individual*), or, in the case of less honest biographies, such that many properties are common to both abstract and concrete individual.

<sup>8</sup> See section 4 below on how such a context shift might take place.

the agent of the utterance and Hamlet refers to himself using 'I'. Jon refers neither to himself nor to Hamlet, for Jon is not portrayed in the fiction.

This seems to be a plausible story, although it comes at an ontological cost. The advantage of this particular version of fictional realism is that, unlike the disguised descriptions approach, it accounts for the cognitive impact of indexicals used within a fiction. It can explain, in other words, our intuition that the same term is used in the same way whether in a fictional or factual discourse. In particular, it is not revisionary as far as the distinction between singular and quantified terms is concerned. In what follows, we will attempt to tell a story that, in many respects, is similar to this. In the next section, we sketch an account that avoids the ontological commitment to *ficta*. Of course, we can act *as if* fictional characters such as Hamlet have some kind of existence; in this case we engage in pretence, i.e. a game of make-believe.<sup>9</sup> We then discuss, in section 4, how it is possible to cognitively process fictional utterances regardless of their referential failure.

### 3. Fictional Anti-Realism

While we often suspend our disbelief and engage in fiction as if it were real, we hold the view that this is merely an act of the imagination and as such does not entail an ontological commitment. This imaginative act involves us in the language games of fiction, within which our existential presuppositions are retracted. Our actors *pretend* to be Hamlet and Ophelia. It is thus unnatural, if not blatantly contradictory, to argue that 'I' and 'you' used in the play can refer to Jon and Jane. We will, in what follows, drop our assumption that works of fiction bring abstract individuals into existence. In fact, we assume the opposite, namely that fictional names are empty. We thus set ourselves the task of explaining how it is that indexicals used in a fiction can be empty and still have the effect they do on us.

The way indexicals are used in a fiction mirrors, we claim, the way indexicals can be used in deferred reference or ostension. That is to say, we defend the thesis that when an indexical is used within a game of make-believe – i.e. when it is within the scope of a pretence operator – the indexical term works on the model of deferred reference.

One can, for example, refer to Bill Gates by pointing to his expensive car and saying, "He is very rich", or by pointing to a Microsoft advertisement and saying, "He made millions". The referent of the demonstrative is not the car, or the advertisement, but Bill Gates, because Bill Gates is the entity most

<sup>9</sup> On the notion of pretence (and for a discussion of the processes involved) see Walton 1978, 1990.

closely associated with the car pointed at (or with Microsoft) that also satisfies the nominal 'he'.<sup>10</sup> One may also refer to an individual through a representation. One can point to a campaign poster featuring Tony Blair and yet refer to the *individual* Tony Blair with "That man is Bush's puppy". The situation becomes more complicated when the representation medium satisfies the same nominal as the represented item: a man playing G. W. Bush, for example. One may point towards the actor and claim that:

(2) He is an imperialist

On our criterion, the demonstrative 'he' may refer either to Bush or to the actor, for both satisfy the lexical feature +male of 'he', yet it seems clear that (2) should pick out Bush. Following Kaplan (1977), we can claim that demonstratives such as 'he' are not, in themselves, semantically complete terms. That is, they require something else in order to have a semantic value. Typically, demonstratives are accompanied by a demonstration, but need not be. One may refer to an item without pointing simply in virtue of its being the most salient item of its type. We can view a demonstration as a particular type of semantic condition, reducing the class of possible referents (possibly to a singleton class). Conversational salience can have a similar effect on the class of items we can talk about, and so can also be viewed as a condition on referential processes within a discourse. In general, then, we can say that some condition is required in addition to an utterance of a demonstrative term in order to secure a referent. We can represent the condition as a description and the resulting demonstrative as a complex singular term. Following Kaplan, we use the operator 'DTHAT'.<sup>11</sup> "He is very rich" can thus be represented as:

(3) DTHAT{the male owner of that car} is very rich

and "He is Bush's puppet" as:

(4) DTHAT{the man represented in the poster} is Bush's puppet

This idea helps us distinguish reference to Bush from reference to the actor in our problematic example:

(5) DTHAT{the man *fictionally represented* by the actor/by the man I am pointing to} is an imperialist

(6) DTHAT{the actor/the man I am pointing to} is an imperialist

<sup>10</sup> We may thus think of the nominal 'he' as a semantic filter applying to a list of individuals introduced by the demonstrative. On this view, the demonstration introduces a class of entities, including the demonstrated item along with various related entities, which are then filtered by the nominal 'he' to obtain a unique referent.

<sup>11</sup> To be precise we should distinguish between DTHAT as a rigidifier and DTHAT as a demonstrative surrogate (see Kaplan 1989). Only DTHAT-terms with DTHAT as a demonstrative surrogate are singular terms. When DTHAT is mere rigidifier the DTHAT-terms is not singular, i.e. it does not contribute a referent into the proposition expressed. It rather works like a rigid definite description like 'the successor of 1'.

Assuming that the pupil refers to Bush and not the actor in (2), we can say that (2) has the form of (5). Once again, we can appeal to a notion of *pretense* and claim that, in pretending to be Bush, the actor instigates a language game that may affect subsequent discourse. We make the shift from fact to fiction. One effect this may have is to change the conditions that are contextually imposed on demonstrative completion. The completing condition “the actor/the man I am pointing to” becomes “the man *fictionally represented* by the actor/by the man I am pointing to”, simply in virtue of the new language game instigated by the role-play.

In the case of our actor representing Bush, we have a role-play representing a real character (i.e. a real object that has been incorporated into a fiction). Hence, the demonstrative ‘he’ is not an empty term; it refers to Bush *qua* personage as he appears within the role-play. However, the fact that Bush exists is quite incidental to the communicative intention of the student who utters (2). If the actor had played an equally famous (but fictional) imperialist, instead of Bush, the situation would have been much the same. The difference would be that, since the fictional imperialist does not exist, no proposition would be expressed in the latter case.<sup>12</sup> Since one may know that the actor is portraying Bush (or a fictional imperialist) and yet not know whether Bush or the fictional imperialist exists (or ever existed), we consider the truth of the proposition expressed containing Bush to be incidental to the communicative enterprise. Our view is that cases concerning real facts expressed in a fiction need not have any impact on the fictional enterprise. An author writing a fiction, unlike a historian, does not pay attention to (and cannot be driven by) truth. This is the difference between historical and fictional discourse.

What about cases in which one demonstratively indicates an actor who does not represent a real person? What is going on when our actor-*qua*-Hamlet, pointing to the actor playing Ophelia, claims:

(7) She is my lover.

Here, too, we have a kind of deferred reference, for our actor does not refer to Jane, the actor playing Ophelia. The demonstrative is of the form:

(8) DTHAT{the female fictionally represented by the person I am pointing to} is my lover

and thus purports to refer to Ophelia, for the reference is a deferred reference. But since Ophelia does not exist, there is no object satisfying the condition

<sup>12</sup> Not even, *pace* Braun 1993, a gappy proposition. Gappy propositions, i.e. a proposition with an empty slot, are introduced in order to maintain that sentences appearing within a fiction have a truth value. We believe that this is an *ad hoc* move and we maintain that truth in fiction does not (and should not) matter. For a similar conclusion see Perry 2001.

‘the female fictionally represented by the person I am pointing to’ and hence the pronoun ‘she’ is an empty term, just as is ‘Ophelia’ in

(9) Ophelia is my lover

is empty when uttered by Jon in the play.

In the case of the indexicals ‘I’, ‘now’, ‘today’ and the like, however, we do not need to stipulate a completing condition, for these indexicals are already complete. The linguistic rule governing their use, their character, will automatically select the value of the term, given a context. They are, to use Kaplan’s terminology, pure indexicals. However, as in the case of demonstrative reference, making the switch from fact to fiction changes the language game. In particular, as in the case of demonstrative reference, it affects the class of possible referents. Thus, in the language game instigated by the fiction, Jon and Jane are no longer available to indexical reference (just as they are not available to demonstrative reference). Only if we retreat from the fiction, and thus revert to our factual language game, can we pick out Jon and Jane in the usual way.

Since Jon and Jane are not available as contextual parameters, and since indexicals refer by taking contextual parameter values as content, other values must be found. In the case of an actor representing Napoleon, for example, an uttered token of ‘I’ should refer to Napoleon, not the actor. If Napoleon (and not an actor) is to be the referent of an indexical term, then the indexical must obtain its value from a context containing Napoleon, i.e. a context in which Napoleon himself and not the actor is the agent of the utterance containing ‘I’. On this view, entering a language game of fiction entails a quantified context shift, from the regular contexts to contexts containing the people represented in the fiction (if any). Usually the actors are no longer part of the semantic domain; they have been replaced by the people they represent. This does not preclude that in some cases reference can be made to the actors themselves and not the characters they represent. Our view bears some resemblance to Gordon’s view of simulation:

To simulate *Mr Tess* in his situation requires an egocentric shift, a recentering of my egocentric map on Mr Tess. He becomes in my imagination the referent of the first person ‘I’, and the time and place of his missing the plane become the referents of ‘now’ and ‘here’. And I, RGM, *cease* to be the referent of the first person pronoun: what is imagined is not the truth of the counterfactual, “RGM is Mr Tess”. Such recentering is the prelude to transforming myself in imagination into Mr Tess much as actors become the characters they play. Although some actors (“method” actors, for example) occasionally step back from the role they are playing and ask, “What would I *myself* do, think, and feel in this situation?” and then transfer their answer (with or without adjustment) to the character, the typical stance of modern actors is that of being, not actors pretending to be characters in a play, but the characters themselves. (Gordon 1995, 55)

How do we go about representing the effect of this shift in our semantics? One way would be to introduce an operator, [S], to represent the shift from factual

to fictional discourse. The effect of [S] on sentences is to switch the semantic value of context-sensitive terms within its scope whilst leaving context independent terms unaffected.<sup>13</sup> Suppose that the fiction operator [S] shifts the context relevant to indexical content determination from a factual context  $c$  to a fictional context  $c^*$ . Then, a sentence  $f$  is true iff  $\phi$  is true in the fiction, i.e. with items of the actual context  $c$  replaced by items from the world of the fiction:

$$[[ [S]\phi ]]^{c,s} = 1 \text{ iff } [[ \phi ]]^{c^*,s} = 1, \text{ for the appropriate } c^*$$

We thus might read '[S]' as 'in the fiction ...'. When a character in our play utters a sentence " $s$ ", the above schema thus treats it as: *in the fiction, "s" is true*. But constructions of the form: *in the fiction, "s" is true* are not the kind of utterances made by actors at all; they are *factual* utterances *about* whatever fiction the actors are enacting. Within this fiction, an utterance should be treated just as any factual utterance is treated outside the fiction, i.e.: " $s$  is true, quite simply, *if and only if s*. This view, then, is no longer consonant with the picture we aimed at capturing. In supposing that an operator [S] is responsible for the required context shift, we find ourselves forced to switch our focus; discourse *within* the fiction becomes discourse *about* the fiction. This cannot be the right approach.

The problem is common to semantic context shifting frameworks (see Whitsley 2003 for further discussion of this point). As a comparison, consider the function of a belief ascription. Its function is, in part, to describe the world from the point of view of the attributee. Thus, if we suppose that

(10) Smith believed that  $s$

tells us something about the world according to Smith, we can say that the ascription of " $s$ " to Smith can shift the perspective of our audience to one in line with Smith's point of view. In fact, some languages even have pronouns, known as *logophoric pronouns*, which explicitly represent the agent's point of view and not the point of view of the reporter.<sup>14</sup> One way to accommodate logophoric pronouns is to posit a context shift, from the context of the report to the context in which the sentence " $s$ " was entertained. However, we do not simply ascribe the *sentence* " $s$ " to Smith; we ascribe the *belief in s* to him. Our report is about *what Smith believes*, and makes no assumptions about the truth-value of " $s$ ". Similarly, the shift in *context* from factual to fictional discourse is equivalent to a shift in *focus* from talk *within* a fiction to talk *about* a fiction.

<sup>13</sup> Thus, although sentences prefixed by ( $S$ ) are treated intensionally, this only affects the resulting truth-condition in the case of sentences containing context-sensitive terms. For a discussion of the 'in the fiction' operator see Lewis 1978. Lewis appeals to his modal realism to handle fictions and his position is very different from the one we advocate.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed study of such languages and logophoric pronouns see for instance Hagège 1974 and Culy 1994, 1997.

However, we need not suppose that context shifting *operators* are the only way in which a context can be shifted. Quite generally, we can suppose that it is simply a feature of the language games involved in fictional discourse that contexts are shifted. Consider a parallel example: when an answering machine replays the message “I’m not here now, please leave a message”, a context shift must take place. We know this because, whoever the referent of ‘I’ is, s/he is the agent of a context also containing *her/his* location at the time of the call. Thus, if Jon is the agent of a context *c*, then wherever Jon is must also be the value of the parameter  $c_{location}$ .<sup>15</sup> Thus, if “I’m not here now” expresses a true proposition, it must obtain its referents from distinct contexts. ‘I’ takes its referent from a context containing the person who was called, whereas ‘here’ takes its referent from the context containing the location of the answering machine. Since the former is not located at the latter, these must be two distinct contexts. Yet, as can plainly be seen, “I’m not here now” contains no context shifting operator. In fact, the very same sentence, uttered directly by you or I, would be contradictory. We can incorporate this kind of datum by once again appealing to the notion of a language game. Since the language games attached to the use of answering machines (and other devices used to record speech or to make deferred utterances, such as post-it notes) play a very different role in our communicative activities, we should not expect language to function as normal within them.<sup>16</sup> In the case of fiction, just as in the case of answering machines, we claim that context shifts are simply a feature of the language games involved, and as such require no further explanation.

Of course, in the case of Hamlet and Ophelia, there can be no values for the parameter *agent* to take, for neither Hamlet nor Ophelia exist. We could argue that a context with no content is not truly a context at all. On this view, the language games of fiction, which would otherwise shift the context, make a *context block*. However, for the sake of consistency, we can choose to allow empty contextual parameters. Thus, we can view the shift as a shift to a *null context*, in which case the very same context is in play whenever an empty fictional name is uttered.<sup>17</sup> We can view context shifts instigated by the rules of whichever language game a discourse takes place in as a special case of deferred reference. The advantage of this position over views on which terms

<sup>15</sup> This is why Kaplan claims that “I’m here now” is true in all contexts. It is indeed true when the characters of ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ take the same context as their domain and thus, if we forbid context-shifting, the two notions are equivalent.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of indexicals as they appear in answering machines and similar devices see Corazza, Fish & Gorravet 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Strictly, we allow empty contextual parameters, so it is possible to have contexts in which some, but not all, parameters are empty (for instance, in the case of Sherlock Holmes stories, every context has a null agent, whereas some contexts have *London* as the value *place*).

such as 'I' and 'here' are disguised descriptions when used in fiction is that, on our view, terms such as these refer in the same way however they are used, whether it be in factual or fictional discourse. What changes is the language game we play.

Very similar considerations apply to written fiction. When reading an indexical sentence in written fiction, reference defers or is shifted from the context containing the author or reader to a context containing an empty contextual parameter or, in the case of biography, to another context. Notice that the story we have told about deferred reference could also be told by the fictional realist. In fact, one may claim that we implicitly assume the existence of ficta, for how else can we explain the contribution that fictional utterances make to a discourse? That is, if we assume that all indexicals within fiction are empty, we face the possibility of having the very same context, i.e. the context with the same (empty) parameters. In that case, how do we account for the difference between utterances that are *prima facie* about Hamlet and those that are about, say, Sherlock Holmes? To be sure, there is a difference here, and we would indeed need to posit ficta if we were working within a framework according to which the *only* contribution of an indexical to a discourse is its referent. In the next section, however, we explain why this assumption is mistaken. That is, we explain how indexicals contribute more than just their referent, and that their further contribution is what ultimately allows us to deal with the problem of cognitive significance and to explain how indexicals can be used successfully within a fictional discourse even if they turn out to be empty terms.

#### 4. Indexicals and Cognitive Significance

According to Millianism the semantic contribution of a proper name is exhausted by its reference. Thus, the semantic contribution of 'Ulyanov' and 'Lenin' cannot differ. In saying that a name's semantic contribution is exhausted by the object it refers to, we are *not* saying that this is its unique contribution. A directly referential term may contribute plenty of interesting information; its *semantic* contribution may not even be the most interesting or important.

A Millian should be happy with the idea that a name's cognitive significance is not encapsulated within its semantic value. Questions about semantic value and questions about cognitive value must be kept aside. As Kripke 1980 forcefully emphasised, one can competently use 'Feynman' and 'Gell-Man' without knowing who they were, or without associating any description with either, or even without knowing that they were famous physicists. One need not know anything about an individual in order to use a name, but one

must know that it is a name and that a name is usually used to refer to an individual.<sup>18</sup> One must know that there is a *convention* relating the name with its bearer. This (tacit) knowledge can be spelled out as follows.<sup>19</sup> When a competent speaker hears an utterance like:

(11) Maradona snorted cocaine

she comes to understand at least that:

(11a) There is an individual  $x$  and a convention  $C$  such that

(i)  $C$  is exploited by (11)

(ii)  $C$  permits one to designate  $x$  with 'Maradona'

(iii)  $x$  snorted cocaine

Our competent speaker understands this whether or not she also knows that Maradona was a famous Argentinean football player, that within the British community he is best known as "the hand of God" or whether or not she is able to single out Maradona from other individuals. By the simple fact that one knows that 'Maradona' is a proper name, one comes to understand (11a). Of course, one may not be able to spell out one's understanding in this way, for one could say (following Wittgenstein) that this competence or knowledge is *manifested* in the accurate way one uses proper names, i.e. in mastering the language games involving proper names. This competence is also what helps us to explain the cognitive significance we associate with names. When one hears and accepts an identity utterance like:

(12) Ulyanov is Lenin

one comes to understand at least that:

(12a) There is an individual  $x$ , an individual  $y$  and conventions  $C$  and  $C^*$  such that

(i)  $C$  and  $C^*$  are exploited by (12)

(ii)  $C$  permits one to designate  $x$  with 'Ulyanov' and  $C^*$  permits one to designate  $y$  with 'Lenin'

(iii)  $x = y$

(12a) aims to capture and spell out in a more detailed way the platitude that, when one comes to understand and accept as true an identity statement involving proper names, what one comes to understand is that the names stand for the same thing, i.e. that they corefer or codesignate.

<sup>18</sup> From a cognitive point of view, a proper name allows us to label a mental file, where information associated with the proper name can be stored. There is nothing preventing a file associated with an empty name from storing information. We all have a file labeled 'Santa Claus', yet not many of us believe in his existence. One can label an empty folder. We can thus possess a mental file labeled 'Santa Claus', even if 'Santa Claus' is an empty name.

<sup>19</sup> The analysis we propose is borrowed from Perry 2001. Perry characterizes (11a) as the pure truth conditions of (11). The latter should be understood as propositions created by an utterance of (11).

What about empty names though? Following the analysis proposed, an identity statement like:

(13) Clark Kent is Superman

can be analyzed as:

(13a) There is an individual  $x$ , an individual  $y$  and conventions  $C$  and  $C^*$  such that:

(i)  $C$  and  $C^*$  are exploited by (13)

(ii)  $C$  permits one to designate  $x$  with 'Clark Kent' and  $C^*$  permits one to designate  $y$  with 'Superman'

(iii)  $x = y$

However, in claiming that there is a convention permitting one to designate an individual, we do not commit ourselves to the view that the individual *must* exist. In other words, (13a) need not be true. In particular, if we follow Perry and take (13a) to be a proposition, it is a false proposition; the only thing that must exist is the convention itself. To use Donnellan's 1974 happy terminology, a convention can exist even if it ends in a block. Two conventions can end in the same block, as in the case of coreferential empty names such as 'Clark Kent' and 'Superman'. The block corresponds to the novel or fiction. One may also (competently) use an empty name even if one does not know that it is empty: think, for instance, of a child's use of 'Santa Claus' or a pious 'person's use of 'God'.

A similar story can be told about indexical expressions. When a competent speaker uses or comes to understand an utterance like:

(14) I can read [said by Bush]

she comes to understand at least that:

(14a) There is an  $x$  such that:

(i)  $x$  is the agent of (14)

(ii)  $x$  can read

If (14) were read on a post card or as graffiti without knowing who the author was, i.e. without knowing who the referent of 'I' is, a competent speaker comes to understand (14a). Perry characterizes (13a) and (14a) as the *reflexive truth-conditions* of (13) and (14), respectively. These should be distinguished, Perry argues, from the *incremental truth-conditions*. The latter correspond to the intuitive notion of what is said or, to adopt Kaplan's terminology, the proposition expressed. In the case of (14) and

(15) Bush can read

the incremental truth-condition or proposition expressed are the same, i.e., *that Bush can read*. Since the incremental truth-conditions of (14) and (15) do not differ and correspond to the (singular) proposition *that Bush can read*, they are not suited to dealing with the difference in cognitive significance between

(14) and (15)<sup>20</sup>. The latter is dealt with by the reflexive truth-conditions. Roughly, an utterance's reflexive truth-conditions can be understood as the utterance's linguistic meaning or character. The condition "x is the agent of (14)" of (14a) is directly given by the character or linguistic meaning of 'I'. In the case of proper names, we do not have characters. For this very reason the reflexive truth-conditions of an utterance containing a proper name are spelled out, like in (13a), by appealing to a *convention*. In other words, while utterances containing indexicals have their reflexive truth-conditions spelled out by appealing to the indexicals' character, with utterances containing proper names they are spelled out in appealing to the convention governing the use of the relevant term.

If our story is on the right track, we can understand how proper names and indexicals can be used within a fiction, even if they are empty terms. Their use and understanding does not rest on the alleged existence of the referent, but instead on the convention regimenting their use. In a word, our use and understanding of names and indexicals within a fiction rests on reflexive truth-conditions, which are cognitively independent of existential commitment. Hence, the use of indexicals within a fiction does not force one to embrace fictional realism.

### 5. Conclusion

Our picture has the following advantages:

- (i) It rests and exploits an existing phenomenon, deferred reference.
- (ii) It does not commits us to the existence of ficta.
- (iii) It maintains that indexical are singular terms which can be empty.
- (iv) We nonetheless manage to use and understand empty terms within a fiction insofar as their linguistic meaning helps expressing reflexive content.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> It must be stressed that if we are right in claiming that fictional names are empty and that they do not contribute in the expressions of a proposition, we must claim that when empty names are at play there is *no* incremental truth-condition expressed. This thought, does not undermine the idea that what of wether the terms contributing in expressing are empty or not.

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