
Fictional Contexts

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1 The problem

In event semantics the content of sentences such as:

- (1) James Joyce shaved on the platform of the Martello tower

and

- (2) Andrea Bonomi wrote a letter to the dean on April 4th, 1984

is accounted for, among other things, in terms of particular relations between events (or states¹) and places or times. Roughly speaking, an event α is said to *occur* in a place p (or interval t) if the spatial (temporal) extension of α is located in p (or t). Let the predicate ‘Occ’ denote such a relation. From this point of view, part of the content of the above sentences can be associated, respectively, with formulas such as:

- (1’) $\text{Occ}(f, \text{the platform of the Martello tower})$

- (2’) $\text{Occ}(e, 04.04.84)$,

where f is the event of Joyce’s shaving and e is the event of Andrea Bonomi’s writing a letter to the dean.

¹In the present paper I will concentrate on events proper and I will ignore states. But this point has no relevance with respect to the general issue I am going to discuss.

I presented elsewhere an argument² to the effect that the content of true³ sentences like:

- (3) Buck Mulligan shaved on the platform of the Martello tower
- (4) Winston Smith started writing his diary on April 4th, 1984

cannot be reconstructed in terms of a simple relation of occurrence between a fictional event such as Mulligan’s shaving or Smith’s writing his diary and a particular place (the platform of the Martello tower) or a particular time (April 4th, 1984).

In general, saying that an event α occurs in some place p or in some interval of time t entails some systematic relations between *parts* of α and *parts* of p (or t). For example, if the event g of Joyce’s propping a mirror on the parapet of the platform is a proper part of the event f of Joyce’s shaving, and if u is the spatial extension of f , then there must be a proper part v of u such that v is the spatial extension of g . In the same way, if the event d of my writing the address is a proper part of the event e of my writing a letter to the dean, and if u is the temporal extension of e , then there must be a proper part v of u such that v is the temporal extension of d . Using ‘Ext’ to denote a function which assigns spatial (or temporal) extensions to objects or events and ‘ \subset ’ to denote the relation *part-of*, it is possible to state the following general principle:

$$(PE) \quad \text{Ext}(\alpha) = u \ \& \ \beta \subset \alpha \rightarrow \exists x[\text{Ext}(\beta) = x \ \& \ x \subset u].$$

In the case of events, (PE) means that an event β which is a proper part of an event α must have a spatial (or temporal) extension which is a proper part of the spatial (or temporal) extension of α .

Intuitively speaking, principle (PE) expresses a necessary condition for an event α to have a spatial (or temporal) extension u : a condition motivated by the idea that the extension of α is determined by its constitutive parts, i. e. by the events that compose α . So, what the “downward indeterminacy” argument is intended to show is that whilst real events always satisfy this condition, fictional events, as a rule⁴, are

²This argument, based on the “downward indeterminacy” of fictional entities and events, is discussed in Bonomi and Zucchi (2001).

³In view of what is narrated, respectively, in *Ulysses* and *1984*.

⁴This qualification is important because the kind of argument I am going to discuss is not intended to prove that it is *always* impossible to attribute a definite extension (in the spatio-temporal context of real events and objects) to fictional events, but that this is the default case at least when we have to do with novels or related cultural artifacts. As shown here, this is so even in the rare situations where the text refers to a place or time which is exactly specified. A peculiar problem is

unable to satisfy it.

Consider, for instance, examples (3) and (4). These are privileged situations, because there is an explicit reference to a certain object (which is a real tower) or a certain date (which is a particular day), so that one might say that the spatial (or temporal) extension u of this object (or day) is the spatial or temporal extension of the fictional event α at issue. The problem is that, as we will see in a moment, it is not possible to attribute, in the world which surrounds us, an appropriate extension to the subparts of α . Therefore, because of such a violation of principle (PE), no real extension, in this world, can be attributed to α and, strictly speaking, one cannot say that α occurs in u , i. e. the spatial (or temporal) extension, in our world, of the relevant place (or date).

For example, suppose that in Orwell's novel it is specified that Smith writes the first three pages of his diary on April 4th, 1984, exactly between 3 and 7 p. m. So, at least in this case, it would seem that there is no difference between the (fictional) event of Smith's writing the first three pages of his diary and the (real) event of Andrea Bonomi's writing a letter to the dean: the temporal extensions of both events might be conceived of as particular intervals on the time axis.

The problem is that in the case of Smith's diary it is *in principle* impossible to determine the temporal extension of the constitutive parts of the event. Take for instance the event of Smith's writing the first page of his diary, which is part of the global event of Smith's writing the first three pages. What is its temporal extension? No answer is possible, and this is so not because of our ignorance, but for the simple reason that no specification is given by the text. This "downward indeterminacy" of temporal qualifications, *which is just an aspect of a more general phenomenon of indeterminacy*, is an essential feature of fictional events or entities: by making our analysis of the internal constituency of these events or entities more and more specific, as a rule we reach a level at which no temporal extension can be attributed to some subpart of the event or entity at issue, and this is a violation of principle (PE).

Since a similar downward indeterminacy affects the spatial characterization of a fictional event or entity x , we can conclude that if a particular time or place in the world around us is selected as the temporal, or spatial, extension of x , a paradox arises: this event or entity would turn out to have a temporal, or spatial, extension even though its constitutive parts have no extension. Once more, this is a violation of principle (PE).

raised by fictional events described in a play or in a film.

A consequence of this argument is not, of course, that the event *e* of Smith's writing the first three pages of his diary has no temporal extension *in* the world of Orwell's novel or that the event *f* of Buck Mulligan's shaving has no spatial extension in the world of Joyce's novel, but only that, unlike the real events described in (1) and (2), *e* and *f* do not have such extensions in our world. Anyway, the argument is sufficient to show that, whilst in the case of (1) it is perfectly appropriate to speak of a genuine relation of occurrence between the event of Joyce's shaving and a real place, such an attribution is problematic in the case of (3). Strictly speaking, it is misleading to refer to a simple relation of occurrence between a fictional event (such as *x*'s writing a diary or *y*'s shaving) and a particular place or time (such as a tower or a given date). Yet, in view of the intuitive truth of a sentence like (3) or like *Sherlock Holmes lives in London*, there must be some relation between the event (e. g. Mulligan's shaving or Sherlock Holmes' living in London) and a real place (e. g. the Martello tower or London). The idea is that this relation is mediated by the existence of the story in question. This is why I will speak, in these cases, of a relation of *scene-setting* between an event, a story and a particular place or time. In what follows I will try and characterize this relation.

2 Types of assertion

A crucial role is assigned, in my reconstruction, to the principle of importation. The intuitive idea is that the use, in fiction, of familiar designators is based on the background information associated with them: the implicit assimilation of this information helps to set up a suitable frame for the story. This is what happens, for instance, in the case of designators referring to places (as the proper name *London*), to times (as the date *April 4th*), to events (as the definite description *The Borodino Battle*), to persons (as the proper name *Napoleon*), and so on.

Before addressing this problem, let us reflect for a while on a different class of designators which occur in fictional stories. Consider, for example, Proust's *Recherche*, where we find proper names such as *Combray* or definite descriptions like *Le Grand-Hôtel de Balbec*. On the one hand no real place is the bearer of these names (although, as we will see, this is no longer true of the name *Combray*), whilst, on the other hand, it is easy to identify which real places can be associated to these names. These places are, respectively, Illiers and Le Grand-Hôtel de Cabourg. In general, this kind of identification is made possible by resorting to the background information concerning these real places

(including the role they played in the creation of the story), which allows us to establish systematic relations between fictional entities and real referents.

More precisely, given a story H and a set of properties X , selected among those which are assumed to characterize an individual α , I will speak of a function g which, thanks to the properties in X , associates a character⁵ β to α . Thus, a statement of the form:

$$(5) \quad g(\alpha, H, X) = \beta$$

means that β is the character which, in the light of the story H and the relevant properties in X , corresponds to the individual α . (In what follows I will often speak of g as a one-place function, under the assumption that the reference to H and X is implicitly fixed by the context.)

To make this point clearer, consider the distinction, made in Bonomi (1987), between three different types of sentences having to do with fiction. First of all there are “textual” sentences, i. e. sentences which are part of the text itself, as for instance:

$$(6) \quad \text{M. Vinteuil s'était retiré auprès de Combray.}$$

We will see how these sentences are treated in Frege's theoretical framework. For the moment, I shall confine myself to observing that when we run into a textual sentence like (6) in the process of reading the *Recherche* we hardly ask ourselves whether Proust (or, more precisely, the narrator) is saying anything true or false. On the other hand, a fictional story, in so far as it is transmitted by a text within a community, can be considered as a particular context of information which allows *us* to make true (or false) statements with respect to the content of the story itself. This is what happens, for example, when *we* say to a friend of ours:

$$(7) \quad \text{Vinteuil lives in Combray.}$$

By means of such sentences (that I will call *paratextual* sentences) we can state something true (or false) on the basis of the story narrated in the *Recherche*. In general, the idea is that paratextual sentences refer to a given context of information, provided by the story. Once this contextual reference is taken into account, we obtain the intended interpretation of a sentence such (7), that is:

$$(7') \quad \text{(In the } Recherche) \text{ Vinteuil lives in Combray.}$$

⁵This term is used in a broad sense in order to include fictional places or times, rivers, animals, etc.

To account for this interpretation in a suitable theoretical framework, let us adopt a formal language like the one illustrated in Bonomi (1977, 1979), where particular indices⁶ are used to refer to contexts. So, if A is sentence and D an index referring to a story (the story narrated in the *Recherche*, in our example), the sentence '(A)_D' can be roughly paraphrased as 'In the context of the story D we have that A'. (It should be noticed that this is not an ad hoc move: this kind of reference is a general pragmatic phenomenon, as shown in Bonomi (1998).) For example, under the interpretation illustrated by (7'), in such a formal language (7) would be associated to this formula:

(7'') [lives-in(Combray, Vinteuil)]_R

where 'R' is an index which refers to the *Recherche*. (7'') can be read as follows: In the context of the *Recherche* we have that Vinteuil lives in Combray.

The problem, with this kind of approach, is that it is essentially based on the use of an index to fix the implicit or explicit reference to the text or to the story associated with that text: so, it can be applied *only* to paratextual sentences, i. e. sentences that we might utter to make a report about that story or text. Yet, this solution is not available in the case of genuine textual sentences such as (6), which of course do *not* occur in *our* talks about texts or stories. Moreover, there is another kind of sentence having to do with fictional entities which cannot be accounted for by the use of indexed sentences. This is the case of *metatextual* sentences like:

(8) Orson Welles loves Don Quixote.

In fact, what we state here is simply something true *in the context of the real world* (given Orson's well-known passion for this character), not something true in the story. In this case, the text and the characters that it generates do not represent the relevant context of information, but they are mere *objects* of discourse (exactly as other cultural artifacts⁷, like a symphony or a statue). As a matter of fact, the truth of (8) does not depend on the information provided by the story: we

⁶The role of indices, as variables over contexts, is discussed in the appendix. A different treatment of the prefix 'In the story X,' based on the analysis developed in Lewis (1978), is presented in Ross (1997). The semantics of this prefix is also discussed in Currie (1990).

⁷In Kripke (1973) characters are presented as entities existing in the context of our world (in virtue of the existence of the relevant stories). An analysis of characters as cultural artifacts is sketched in Bonomi (1994). For a full analysis of this notion see Thomasson (1999).

can utter (8) truthfully even if we know nothing about the content of the novel. As a consequence such sentences cannot be interpreted in terms of paratextual sentences like (7): once more, indexing (as used in the case of (7)) is no solution. In principle, metatextual sentences and paratextual sentences must be distinguished, for mixing these two different levels might give rise to very odd statements. For instance, let us suppose that someone asks us:

(9) Who loves Don Quixote?

This question, in its *paratextual* interpretation, might be followed by an answer such as:

(10) Sancho Panza loves Don Quixote.

In its *metatextual* interpretation it would be associated quite naturally to an answer like (8). Yet, the answer:

(11) ?Orson Welles and Sancho Panza love Don Quixote

would sound very odd because two different levels of discourse are confused. The intuition is, of course, that Sancho Panza loves, *in the story*, Don Quixote as a person, whilst what Welles loves, *in the real world*, is a character, i. e. an entity generated by the text. In other terms, Welles can love a character exactly as he can love a brand of cigars. Both the character and the brand of cigars exist in the real world (unlike the person Don Quixote, who does not exist in this world): the latter as a result of a material production, the former as a cultural artifact generated by a linguistic activity culminating in a text.

3 Complex types of assertion

Unfortunately, things are not that simple, for there are sentences about fiction which call for some refinements of the above analysis. To see the complexity of the problem, consider the following sentence:

(12) In the *Recherche* Miss Vinteuil's father is a very shy piano teacher and an underestimated composer. Proust created this character after studying several musicians.

The definite description *Miss Vinteuil's father*, in the first sentence, is the antecedent of the anaphoric description *this character* in the second sentence. But notice that the definite description in the first sentence occurs in a paratextual context, because it is used to mention certain properties that a *person* has in the light of what is narrated in a fictional

story, whilst in the second sentence the anaphoric expression occurs in a metatextual context, because it is used to mention certain properties that a *character* has in the light of historical information. Indeed, we get an equivalent statement if the anaphoric expression *this character* is replaced by the antecedent expression itself:

- (12a) In the *Recherche* Miss Vinteuil's father is a very shy piano teacher and an underestimated composer. Proust created Miss Vinteuil's father after studying several musicians.

This means that proper names and definite descriptions can be used to speak of persons (or rivers, animals, etc.) in the context of a report about a fictional story or to speak of characters, as cultural artifacts, in the context of real facts.

A natural explanation of the double role of singular terms in sentences about fiction is based on the idea that they can have *different functions in different contexts*. More exactly, we can use a proper name or a definite description to speak of a person (or animal, river, town, etc.) seen against the background of the information provided by the text (and this is the case of paratextual sentences) or to speak of a character seen against the background of the information concerning real facts (and this is the case of metatextual sentences). For instance, in the first sentence in (12a) the reference to the contextual information **R** associated with the *Recherche* allows us to select as the world of evaluation a counterfactual situation *s* where there is a *person* who is Miss Vinteuil's father and who is a very shy piano teacher. As for the second sentence in (12a), an implicit context shift is required to determine its content: what is relevant, this time, is the background information **B** concerning the actual world w_0 . And in *this* context the definite description *Miss Vinteuil's father* (or the proper name *Vinteuil*) is used to speak of a character *stricto sensu*, not of a person.

To sum up, in both cases the *same* proper name is involved (this is why an anaphoric relation is possible in sentences like (12)), although its two roles in different contexts are distinct, as witnessed by the oddity of (11) (where, as we have seen, this distinction is not respected) and by the ambiguity of sentences such as:

- (13) Vinteuil is underestimated

which can be followed either by this kind of explanation

- (13a) Even his friends, in Combray, do not know that he is a great composer

or by this other argument:

- (13b) Literary critics often ignore that this character is very important to understand Proust's ideas about music.

For similar reasons, the following sentences can be consistent (even though they seem to contradict each other):

- (13) Vinteuil is underestimated

(explanation: this is what we know from the *Recherche*, as stated by (13a))

- (14) Vinteuil is not underestimated

(explanation: (13b) is false).

In short, we can speak of a character as a *person* (or a town, a river, an animal, etc.), if the relevant context is the body of information provided by the text, or we can speak of a character as a character *stricto sensu*, i. e. as a cultural artifact, if the relevant context is a body of information concerning empirical facts. A single designator occurs in both circumstances (e. g. a proper name such as *Vinteuil* or a definite description such as *Miss Vinteuil's father*), but this noun phrase is associated with two different roles, for it can be used to describe the character "from within" (i. e. in terms of properties that persons, rivers, animals, etc., have in the story), or "from outside" (i. e. in terms of events involving this character in the world around us).

It should be noticed that the first notion of character is not problematic from a semantic point of view, for it involves familiar kinds of individuals, such as persons, animals, rivers, and so on. As we shall see when discussing indexed sentences, what we have to do is simply to point out the *restrictions* which govern reference and quantification in this case. (Roughly speaking, the idea is that only de dicto structures are appropriate here, in order to seal the existence of individuals such as persons, animals, rivers, etc. within a "modality", as suggested in Prior (1968, p. 143), that is within the context of the counterfactual information provided by the story⁸).

What about characters *stricto sensu*, which is the second notion we have just introduced? In this sense, characters do exist in the context of *our* world (as cultural artifacts), and they do *not* coincide with familiar entities like persons, animals, rivers and so on. So, how can they be analyzed from a semantic point of view? Let us consider again

⁸I will address this issue in the Appendix.

sentence (8), repeated here:

(8) Orson Welles loves Don Quixote

and let us compare it with this other sentence:

(15) Orson Welles loves his wife, Rita Hayworth.

Whilst it is quite natural to say that in the case of (15) the second relatum of the relation at issue is a person, such a statement would be problematic in the case of (8), because there is no such person. Probably, what Orson Welles admires or likes is a *type* of person, whose characteristics or properties are fixed by the text. And the same can be said of the second part of sentence (12b): what Proust created is not, of course, a person like you and me, but, once more, a *type* of person, with such and such properties described in the *Recherche*. To “create” a character, in this sense, is nothing but to compound properties of individuals, as is beautifully explained by Rousseau with respect to the main characters of his novel *La nouvelle Héloïse*:

I conjured up love and friendship, the two idols of my heart, under the most ravishing images. I amused myself by giving them all the charms of the sex that I had always adored. I imagined two female friends rather than two of my own sex, because although such friendships are less common, they are more pleasing. I endowed my heroines with two personalities, different but matching, with two faces, not perfectly beautiful, but in accord with my own taste, and animated with benevolence and sensibility. I made one dark the other fair, one lively the other languid, one wise the other weak. . .⁹

In general, the idea is that what I called a character (or, more exactly, what I called here a character *stricto sensu*) is a set of salient properties. So far, we have seen how such an idea can account for situations like those illustrated by (8) or by the second part of (12b), where a character, conceived of as a type, that is a set of properties, is seen from the point of view of its external vicissitudes. The next, necessary step, is to make this notion more definite by introducing a suitable semantic framework. Yet, before addressing this issue, I have to mention a problem raised by other “complex” types of sentences about fiction. Consider the following sentences:

(16) Charlus is taller than Danny DeVito

(17) Charlus is taller than Sancho Panza.

⁹This passage of the *Confessions* is quoted in Cranston (1991, p. 32).

Both sentences are intuitively true (for we know from the *Recherche* that Charlus is very tall, whilst we know from *Don Quixote* that Sancho Panza is very short; moreover, it is a fact that Danny DeVito is very short, too). The problem is that they seem to have the same structure as a sentence like:

(18) Gerard Depardieu is taller than Danny DeVito

where two real persons are involved. But in (16) the comparison is between a character and a person, and in (17) between two characters. On the other hand, these characters are not generated by the same text, so that (17) cannot be assimilated to simple paratextual sentences such as:

(19) Charlus is taller than Bergotte

which is not problematic because, intuitively speaking, we are referring to the world of the *Recherche* and we are speaking of properties that Charlus and Bergotte, as persons, turn out to have in *that* world. But such a reference is not possible in the case of (16) and (17). No text describes a state of affairs in which *both* Charlus and Sancho Panza (or Charlus and Danny DeVito) are persons: this is why, as I have already emphasized, we are inclined to say that the comparison, here, is between two characters (or between a character and a person). If characters, as is obvious, are not persons, how is it possible to account for the fact that we can say, truthfully, that a character x is taller than a person y or that a character x is taller than a character z (where x and z do not belong to the same story)?

4 Characters (*stricto sensu*)

I have already mentioned Frege's remarks about the occurrences of proper names in fictional contexts. In spite of their very general character, these remarks are based on a precise idea, which sounds quite intuitive. The idea is that, unlike the sentences of the ordinary discourse, the sentences occurring in a fictional context (i. e. *textual* sentences, in the terminology adopted here) do not determine genuine assertions: they are not used, in Frege's words, to state anything true or false. If this is so, Frege goes on, it is pointless to ask ourselves *what* is denoted by proper names like *Ulysses* (or, in our examples, *Vinteuil*, *Combray*, and so on) when they occur in these sentences.

Frege's remarks stop here. But if they are correct, we can wonder what the role of proper names (or of other singular terms) is in this case. We can wonder, for example, what the role of the proper names

Vinteuil and *Combray* is in a textual sentence discussed at the outset:

(6) M. Vinteuil s'était retiré auprès de Combray.

In fact, one might object that, after all, even in these sentences the use of proper names allows for the attribution of properties and relations, exactly as in ordinary sentences like:

(20) Fellini moved to Rome about sixty years ago.

A possible answer to this question along the lines of Frege's remarks is the following. There is no need to postulate any denotation for a proper name occurring in sentences like (6) because such a name is, here, a mere placeholder which the properties and relations at issue can be appended to. As the story develops, the agglomerate of properties and relations associated with such placeholders increases, thanks to sentences like (6).

I will not go into the details of an appropriate formal semantics, but the general idea is that at the end of this "storing" process what we get, in correspondence with a proper name like *Vinteuil* (or a definite description like *The red-haired woman who fights with Korabliòva in a cell of the prison*¹⁰), is a set of characterizing properties and relations. This is what we call a *character* (*stricto sensu*) and since a peculiar feature of a character is its indeterminacy with respect to most properties and relations, we can also speak of a *type*: a type of person, a type of dog, a type of river, and so on. A character (*stricto sensu*) is what we can refer to in metatextual sentences. For example, we might say that the type (or character) *Vinteuil* has a particular property, like being artistically impeccable, or a particular relation, as being created by Proust or being loved by Orson Welles. Of course, the existence of characters is strictly related to the existence of the relevant texts (or stories¹¹). This is why stories play a crucial role in the following definition of characters.

Let *H* be a story (e. g. Proust's *Recherche* or Tolstoj's *Resurrection*) and α a singular term (or, more exactly, a proper name like *Combray* or a definite description like *The red-haired woman who fights with Korabliòva in a cell of the prison*). What must be specified is the theoretical meaning, in the present reconstruction, of a statement like:

¹⁰No proper name is associated to this character in Tolstoj's *Resurrection*.

¹¹In what follows I will speak of a story and of the text in which that story narrated without introducing the necessary distinctions. This simplification, which would be misleading in different contexts, is not relevant in the present discussion.

(21) α is a character of H (or, in symbols: CHAR(α ,H)).

As we have seen, the intuitive idea is that whilst α is, *within* a story H, a person (or a town, a river, an animal, and so on), when considered from *outside*, i. e. as an object our statements are about, it is a *type*, or, more exactly, a set of properties and relations fixed by H. From this point of view, characters *exist* in our world (and, as a consequence, are not strange creatures like “non-existing” entities). And this is so because there exist, in our world, things like stories or texts, which make characters possible and which, in turn, are generated by some specific activity like writing or story-telling. As other cultural artifacts, e. g. numbers or symphonies, characters exist as abstract objects, whose existence depends on the existence of the relevant story. In this sense, as we will see later on, even the characters associated with real persons (e.g. Napoleon) are abstract entities created in connection with a story (e. g. what we often call *the Napoleon of War and Peace*). In general, the α of H (or, more succinctly, α_H) can be defined in the following terms:

(22) $\alpha_H = \lambda P[P(\alpha)]_H$.

That is, a character α_H ,¹² relative to a text or a story H, is the set of (relevant)¹³ properties P such that in the story H we have that α is P.

For instance, the Combray of the *Recherche* can be characterized as follows:

(23) $\text{Combray}_R = \lambda P[P(\text{Combray})]_R$.

Notice that, in a definition such as (23), the proper name *Combray* occurs in the definiens *within* the scope of the index R (referring to the *Recherche*), which can be assimilated to an intensional operator. In other terms, the proper name is used to define the character in a purely *de dicto* way. Once more, the idea is that the Combray of the *Recherche*, which can be an object of discourse in our everyday language, is a type: i. e. the set of (relevant) properties and relations which, *in the text*, are associated to this proper name (seen, as suggested by Frege’s analysis, as a mere placeholder). *Within* the story, of course, we do not have characters but persons (like Vinteuil), towns (like Combray), rivers (like the Vivonne), and so on: in short, we have ordinary individuals of familiar types (i. e. persons, towns, rivers, and so on). But assuming

¹²The index H will be omitted when the context is clear enough.

¹³I will not discuss here the problem whether a character α is defined by all the properties ascribed to it by the story H or by a subset of relevant properties.

that in a story H there is a person x with such and such properties is quite different, of course, from assuming that there is a person x which in the story H has such and such properties. *Outside* the story, there is no individual of any familiar type (like a person or a town) we can refer to, but only a character, that is a *type* of individual. In a sense, a character, seen as a set of properties, is what we are left with when we try to bring a fictional individual out from its fictional milieu.

This kind of analysis, based on the idea that only general or (as I will say) generic statements are possible in the case of fictional entities like characters, can shed light on the problems raised by a sentence such as the one about Charlus and Sancho Panza, repeated here as (24):

(24) Charlus is taller than Sancho Panza.

As I suggested, the difficulty is that on the one hand we seem to speak of characters as persons (see the analogy with a sentence like *Gerard Depardieu is taller than Danny DeVito*), but on the other hand Charlus and Sancho Panza are not persons, and there is no story H such that both of them are persons in H (whilst there is a story in which, for instance, both Charlus and Bergotte are persons: this is why a paratextual sentence like *Charlus is taller than Bergotte* states something true of this two persons *with respect to the world of the Recherche*).

Fortunately, treating characters as types allows for a natural solution to the problem. Let us say that an individual x *instantiates* a character α (defined as before) if it satisfies all the salient properties in α . So, the meaning of a sentence such as (24) can be reconstructed in terms of generic sentences about types. More exactly, if we assume that the generic operator ranges over individuals and that it applies to a restrictive clause and a matrix,¹⁴ what we get is something like:

(25) $\text{Gen}_{x,y}$ [Inst(x,Charlus) & Inst(y,Sancho Panza)] [Taller(x,y)]

or, if the generic operator ranges over situations too:

(26) $\text{Gen}_{s,x,y}$ [in s: Inst(x,Charlus) & Inst(y,Sancho Panza)] [in s: Taller(x,y)].

The intuitive idea is that the type “Charlus” and the type “Sancho Panza” are such that, in general, anyone who has the characteristics associated with the former type is taller than anyone who has the characteristics associated with the latter type. In other terms, a sentence

¹⁴Roughly speaking, ‘ $\text{Gen}_x [A(x)] [B(x)]$ ’ means something like ‘In general it is true that if x satisfies A, it also satisfies B’. See Carlson and Pelletier (1995) for the semantics of the generic operator.

like (24) is assimilated to traditional generic sentences like *Rabbits are taller than rats* or *A Ferrari is faster than a Maserati*.

5 The principle of importation

We can go back to function g that, as we have seen, allows us to characterize the relation which in some cases holds between individuals (like persons or towns in the actual world) and those particular cultural artifacts that we have called characters (in a broad sense of the term). Of course, not every character is the relatum of this kind of relation. Take, for instance, Sherlock Holmes or Lilliput. As far as we know, it is reasonable to think that there is no real person α such that $g(\alpha, D, X) = \text{Sherlock Holmes}$, no real town β such that $g(\beta, S, Y) = \text{Lilliput}$, where D and S are the relevant stories and X and Y are the sets of relevant properties. But in other cases such an entity does exist. For instance, the relation between Combray and its real counterpart, Illiers, is so strong that the latter was officially renamed Illiers-Combray in virtue of a legislative decree signed by the President of the French Republic. There are also situations in which, if two different sets X and Y of relevant properties are selected, two different individuals can be associated to the same character. This is the case, for instance, of *The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Priest*: as Rousseau himself reveals in the *Confessions*,¹⁵ the Savoyard Priest, as a fictional character, can be seen as the counterpart of two different people on the basis of different sets of characterizing properties. Such a situation might be described in terms of a “double” identity:

$$(27) \quad g(\text{Gâtier}, D, X) = \text{The Savoyard Priest}$$

$$(28) \quad g(\text{Gaime}, D, Y) = \text{The Savoyard Priest}.$$

But it is time to give some conceptual substance to function g , which we refer to in order to express this kind of relation. To do this I will resort to a more accurate version of the principle of importation:

(IMP) Let X be the set of salient properties which are assumed to characterize α in the background information, and let Y be a particular subset of X . Then:

(a) $g(\alpha, H, Y) = \beta$ iff, for every property P in Y , $P\alpha \rightarrow (P\beta)_H$

(b) for every property P in X , $P\alpha \Rightarrow (P\beta)_H$

where ‘ $(A)_H$ ’ means, as before, that in the context of the story H we have that A , whilst the double arrow denotes a default entailment.

¹⁵Book III: ‘By putting together Monsieur Gâtier and Monsieur Gaime I made the original of the Savoyard Priest out of these two respectable priests.’

So, (a) says that β is the character, in H, corresponding to α if and only if β satisfies, in H, a set Y of salient properties which are *selected* among the properties characterizing α . In other words, (a) defines the correspondence, for instance, between a (real) person and a character in terms of the salient properties that we are willing to transfer from the former to the latter.¹⁶

Moreover, as stated by (b), when P is known as a salient property which characterizes α , P is also one of the properties of β in H, *unless otherwise stated in H*. The intuitive role of function g and its “converse”¹⁷ g^* can be illustrated by an example. After reading Painter’s book on Proust, I can say:¹⁸

(29) Illiers, in the *Recherche*, is Combray

or, more explicitly,

(30) The Illiers of the *Recherche* is Combray.

Similarly, I can say:

(31) Combray, in the real world, is Illiers

or, in the more complex situation described above:

(32) The Savoyard Priest, in the real world, is Gâtier. But, from a different point of view, he is also Gaime.

In the present framework identities of this kind, which are intuitively true, can be accounted for by means of function g (and its converse), as characterized in (IMP). In fact, this approach allows us to explain the

¹⁶The nature of this kind of information can obviously vary according to the context. In many cases it can involve a *causal* relation between the “model” (Illiers) and the author (Proust); it can also involve some stereotypical properties, or the *author’s intentions*, and so on. I will not address this problem here. It should also be noticed that this kind of information is sometimes restricted to a small circle of experts. For instance, in the case of the *Recherche* the common reader may not be aware of the relation between Illiers and Combray, which is well-known in the circle of Proustian scholars.

¹⁷By the converse of a function g such that $g(\alpha, H, X) = \beta$ I mean the function g^* such that $g^*(\beta, H, X) = \alpha$.

¹⁸Fauconnier (1985) discusses some similar sentences. For example:

In the picture, Lisa is the girl with the blue eyes.

What is peculiar to our examples is that the apparent identity statement involves two proper names. (In this connection, Fauconnier presents other interesting examples, but of a different type with respect to (29). For instance: In the movie, Liz Taylor is Cleopatra.)

nature of the relation between the individual denoted by the proper name *Illiers* (which is a little town near Chartres) and a character associated with the *Recherche*. The relevant identity sentence is:

$$(33) \quad g(\text{Illiers}) = \text{Combray},$$

or, more explicitly:

$$(34) \quad g(\text{Illiers}, R, X) = \text{Combray}_R$$

where g is the function which, on the basis of the story R (the *Recherche*) and considering the set of relevant properties X provided by the background information, maps individuals, like Illiers, to characters, like Combray, generated by the text. To simplify things, if the situation is clear enough, this kind of identity will be expressed by sentences like (33) rather than by more explicit sentences like (34).

So, thanks to the principle of importation the meaning of (29) is expressed by a metatextual sentence like (33), whilst the meaning of (31) is expressed by this other sentence:

$$(35) \quad g^*(\text{Combray}, R, X) = \text{Illiers}.$$

Notice that, thanks to g , it is also possible to explain why proper names like Combray, in their use *outside* Proust's text, can have a double reading. Consider, for instance, the following sentences:

(36) In the real world Combray does not exist

(37) In the real world Combray exists (and it is Illiers).

Both of them can be true. In fact, the former can mean that there is no real town whose name is *Combray*. This reading can be accounted for by the following formula:

$$(36') \quad \neg \exists x(\text{town}(x) \ \& \ x = \text{Combray}).$$

The latter can mean: there is a real town whose counterpart in the *Recherche* is Combray (and this town is Illiers). This reading can be represented as follows:

$$(37') \quad \exists x(\text{town}(x) \ \& \ g(x) = \text{Combray}).$$

6 Ordinary proper names

Function g , as we have just seen, associates a character (if any) to an individual (like Illiers, for instance). So, in the case of sentences such as (29) it would be inappropriate to speak of an identity in the logical

sense of the term. The idea is that (29) is to be accounted for by means of a formula like (33), where, strictly speaking, what is stated is not the existence of an identity relation between the Illiers of the real world and the Combray of the *Recherche*, but the existence of a correspondence between these two entities, as expressed by function g . This is quite intuitive, for Illiers is a real town and Combray a character generated by a text, and it would be absurd to maintain that they are the same thing. In fact, (29) can also be paraphrased as follows:

(38) In the *Recherche* Illiers becomes Combray

where the *is* of the apparent identity has disappeared. In short, in such cases the value of function g (which is a character) does not coincide with its argument (which is a town).

This means that sentences such as (29) must be distinguished from ordinary identity statements like:

(39) The evening star is the morning star

(40) Hesperus is Phosphorus

where only one entity is involved (i. e. Venus). In fact, unlike identity, g does not coincide with its converse - i.e. the function which maps characters to individuals - which is referred to in sentences like (31), repeated here:

(31) Combray, in the real world, is Illiers

or, more explicitly,

(41) The Combray of the real world is Illiers.

In this case it is quite evident that to exchange the designators *Combray* and *Illiers* (as we can safely do in genuine identity statements like (40)) would give rise to an odd statement or, in any case, to a sentence whose meaning is not equivalent to the meaning of (31) (as suggested by the different roles that the phrase 'of the real world' would play in the two sentences):

(42) ?The Illiers of the real world is Combray.

This is why, in the cases we have taken into consideration so far, it is reasonable to maintain that sentences like (29) or (30) do not state the identity between the referents of the designators (e.g. *Illiers* and *Combray*) involved in those sentences, but only a correspondence between a town and a character. And this is correctly mirrored by g , which is

not the identity function.

In general, as we saw in the last section, the identity

$$(43) \quad g(\alpha, H, X) = \beta$$

expresses a relation between an individual α and a character β generated by H (the story, or the text): in our example, since the proper name at issue is *Combray* and the story is the *Recherche*, this character can be referred to by the complex term *The Combray of the Recherche*. (Other examples of terms denoting characters are: *The Buck Mulligan of Ulysses*, *The aggressive red-haired woman of Resurrection*, *The Savoyard Priest of the Confessions*, and so on.)

So far, so good. We can easily admit that, as shown in the above examples, there is a clear sense in which a character (like the Combray of the *Recherche*) is distinguishable from an ordinary individual (like Illiers), even though there is a very close relation between that character and that individual. Notice, however, that in the examples we have discussed so far *two* names are involved: one for the character (e. g. Combray) and one for the corresponding individual (e. g. Illiers). But what about proper names such as *Paris*? In this case we have a *single* name which occurs both in factual sentences of our everyday life and in fictional sentences, for instance in the *Recherche*. And in both cases the name is supposed to refer to the same thing, that is Paris. As a consequence we can wonder whether the distinction between the city (Paris) and the character (the Paris of the *Recherche*) still makes sense. A negative answer might be based on the following argument.

When we find an occurrence of a common noun like *dog* or *tree* in the *Recherche*, it would be quite absurd to assume that Proust uses these words in some “special” sense. Whatever the meaning of a common noun may be, *dog* refers to dogs and *tree* refers to trees, and there is no reason to question such truisms when we read the *Recherche* or any other novel. The same holds of proper names: whatever the meaning of the name *Paris* may be, this name refers to Paris, and that’s all. Whilst Combray does not exist (so that it is reasonable to keep this “character” distinct from Illiers, which does exist), Paris exists: this is why one might conclude that there is no need, this time, to keep the character (the Paris of the *Recherche*) distinct from the real town. Exactly as the words *dog* and *tree* preserve, in the text, their usual meaning, the word *Paris* preserves its usual reference, that is Paris itself, and to speak of two entities (the city and the character) is misleading.

In spite of its apparent cogency, this argument is based on a double misunderstanding. First of all, it should be noticed that speaking

of characters in connection with proper names like *Vinteuil*, *Combray* or *Paris* does not entail that such names are intended to denote (or refer to) characters when they occur in the *Recherche*, i. e. in *textual* sentences. Characters, as theoretical entities, are introduced to account for the occurrence of singular terms in statements that *we* can make *about* a story and its characters (that is metatextual statements, in the terminology adopted here). But this has nothing to do with the truism that a name such as *Paris*, when it occurs in the *Recherche*, has no special meaning, no special reference. Indeed, it can easily be granted that this name preserves, in the *Recherche*, its usual reference. This truism, however, is perfectly consistent with the idea that, in our talks about fiction, we can speak of a character associated to a proper name like *Paris*. Moreover, once we have admitted that in fictional contexts ordinary proper names preserve their usual referents, it is still possible to observe something very peculiar in this fictional use of ordinary proper names (with their usual referents). This peculiarity concerns the relationship between the name and the logical space in which it is located.

In ordinary contexts, e. g. in sentences reporting factual events, the use of an ordinary proper name like *Paris* or *Kutùsov* entails a particular rearrangement of the logical space in which their referents (a town and a person, respectively) are represented. But this is not what happens when such names are used, for instance, in a novel. Consider the name *Dreyfus*, which also occurs in the *Recherche*. If we read in a history book that Dreyfus received a sympathetic letter from C. Debussy, the description of this event allows us to update the set of properties and relations which are to be considered as characterizing Dreyfus. This description is stored as part of the information concerning the intended individual. On the contrary, if we read in the *Recherche* that Dreyfus received a sympathetic letter from Vinteuil, such an updating would not be justified: the event at issue is not stored as part of the information concerning Dreyfus that should be added to the common ground and, in this connection, the fact that the name *Dreyfus*, in the *Recherche*, denotes Dreyfus is not relevant. What counts is that, in terms of logical spaces, the use of such a name in fictional contexts cannot be identified with its “ordinary” uses. Let us see why.

7 Logical spaces

What characterizes the sentences occurring in a fictional text is the possibility of canceling assumptions that are part of the relevant background information, i. e. a body of information that is presumed to

be available to the participants in the communicative exchange. In the second clause of principle (IMP) this peculiarity is accounted for by the type of entailment used to qualify the relationship between what an agent assumes to be the common ground and the part of it that, according to this agent, should be imported in the story. The idea is that this entailment relation is not the classical one (which would mean that any assumption in the relevant background information should be imported in the story) but a *default* entailment relation: any assumption in the given background information holds in the story *unless otherwise specified by the story itself*. For example, suppose that nowhere, in the *Recherche*, is it explicitly stated that Paris is the capital of France. Well, there is no problem in attributing such a property to the Paris of the *Recherche* in virtue of the general assumptions concerning that city, provided that nothing in the text suggests that Paris is not the capital of France.

The defeasibility, in a fictional story, of the assumptions in the given background information (as suggested by the default entailment) is crucial to understand the reason why one often says that, unlike ordinary declarative sentences, textual sentences do *not* give rise to genuine assertions. Let us address this problem.

Let \mathbf{X} be the information that the agent presumes to be the common ground, that is the set of propositions whose truth is taken for granted (in relation to a given object of discourse). From a formal point of view, \mathbf{X} can be seen as a *logical space* \mathbf{B} , i. e. the set of situations or possible worlds which are compatible with those propositions. More precisely, if a proposition is considered as a set of situations (that is, the set of situations in which the proposition is true), the logical space \mathbf{B} can be defined as follows:

$$(44) \quad \mathbf{B} = \{w \in W : w \in p \text{ for every proposition } p \text{ in the (presumed) common ground } \mathbf{X}\}.$$

That is, the logical space associated to the presumed common ground \mathbf{X} consists of the situations where all the propositions in \mathbf{X} are true.

Intuitively speaking, \mathbf{B} is the set of “live options” selected by the background information¹⁹ and what we intend to do, when we make an

¹⁹This characterization of the background information is very close to the notion of context set defined in Stalnaker (1999). Perhaps a more appropriate theoretical framework would be a multi-agent analysis (see Arló-Costa’s paper in this volume), where what is crucial is not the body of shared assumptions as such, but the speaker’s (hearers’) beliefs about these assumptions. Yet, the problems I address in the present paper are independent of this issue. This is why I resorted to a familiar model like Stalnaker’s.

assertion, is to restrict the set of these options, not to destroy it (unless we want to question **B** itself: but in the present discussion we will ignore such situations). In particular, an obvious assumption concerning **B** is that: (i) **B** should contain w_0 (the actual world); (ii) the incoming information should allow us to eliminate from **B** only counterfactual worlds, not w_0 . In short, the idea is that, in principle, **B** is intended to contain only *true* information. It is in this sense that we say that **B** is w_0 -oriented.

When a sentence A is uttered in the context **B**, this utterance determines an updating of **B**, in the sense that all the situations which are not compatible with the proposition expressed by A (in that context) are eliminated. But let us consider what happens when a sentence such as:

(45) Leo, a stammering Afghan snake-charmer, moved to Rome

occurs in a fictional text. If, as before, **B** is the information, concerning Rome, that is presumed to be the relevant common ground, reading (45) in the novel does not lead us to restrict **B** by eliminating all the situations in which no Afghan snake-charmer moved to Rome. Such a modification of **B** is justified in the case of (20) (i. e. the sentence ‘Fellini moved to Rome about sixty years ago’), whose occurrence in a report about Rome determines the elimination, from **B**, of all the possible situations where Fellini did not move to Rome. But the occurrence of (45) in a novel does not determine a similar modification of **B**: that no stammering Afghan snake-charmer has ever moved to Rome is still a live option in **B**. Unlike the occurrence of the proper name *Rome* in (20), the occurrence of this name in (45) is *not* anchored to that logical space.

More intuitively, saying that a genuine assertion like (20) restricts the given logical space **B** is tantamount to saying that, thanks to (20), we assert something new *about* Rome. From this point of view it is possible to explain why, as one often says, textual sentences such as (45) are not used to make genuine assertions. The idea is that in this case there is no contraction of the relevant logical space, i. e. no real increase in the background information.

In general, what happens can be summed up as follows. When the utterance of a sentence A is used to make a genuine assertion, the relevant context **B** can be assimilated to a logical space which fixes the boundaries within which it is possible to identify the set of alternatives selected by this utterance. As regards the occurrence of A in a fictional text, the situation is different, since **B** must be replaced by a different

logical space \mathbf{B}_H and a suitable *revision* of \mathbf{B} is required to fix this new context. To be sure, the principle of importation tells us that, in virtue of a default entailment, \mathbf{B}_H will preserve several salient features characterizing \mathbf{B} , because \mathbf{B}_H is obtained by a “conservative” revision of \mathbf{B} . But the moral that we can draw from the discussion of (45) is that the appropriate interpretation of such a textual sentence is crucially based on this kind of context shift.²⁰

8 Occurrence vs scene-setting

We have just seen that in textual sentences a proper name is not used to make genuine assertions (with respect to the presumed common ground). So we can ask ourselves whether such an approach can shed some light on our main problem, which concerns the relation of *scene-setting*. In fact, we have introduced this concept because, strictly speaking, a fictional event, described by a textual sentence or a concatenation of textual sentences, cannot have an occurrence relation with a real place or time in our world. The problem is that sentences like (46) or (47) seem to make sense:

(46) The events described by Gadda’s *Pasticciaccio* take place in Rome

(47) The murder of Mrs Balducci takes place in Rome

whilst in my analysis *only* real events or states can be in the occurrence relation with Rome. This is why whilst a sentence such as:

(48) The murder of Matteotti took place in Rome

can be associated to a logical form like:

(48’) $\text{Occ}(e, \text{Rome})$,

where ‘e’ denotes a real event (i. e. the murder of Matteotti), (47) cannot.

If this is so, I have to specify how sentences like (47) are accounted for in the theoretical framework under discussion. As anticipated at the outset, the idea is that the relation of occurrence should be replaced by the relation of *scene-setting*. Although it is true that the event at issue (that is the murder of Mrs Balducci) has a spatial extension in the world of the *Pasticciaccio*, according to the downward indeterminacy argument it has no extension in our world. As a consequence, it is

²⁰This point is discussed in the Appendix in connection with paratextual sentences.

impossible, in principle, to assign to this event an extension in the region of the physical space around us occupied by Rome. Yet, it is reasonable to maintain that Rome inspired Gadda when he had to build up the “scene-setting” for the events described in his novel, and in particular the murder of Mrs Balducci. So, if e is this event and G is Gadda’s text or story, we would have something like this:

$$(47') \quad \text{SSET}(e, \text{Rome}, G)$$

where SSET is a three-place relation between the event²¹ at issue, the city and the story. By referring to function g , in general this scene-setting relation can be characterized in the following terms:

$$(49) \quad \text{SSET}(x, y, H) \text{ iff, for some character } \alpha_H, g(y) = \alpha_H \ \& \ \lambda v[\text{Occ}(x, v)] \in \alpha_H.$$

In other words, the relation of scene-setting holds between an event x , a certain place (or time) y and a given story H if and only if in H there is a character α corresponding to y such that the property of being a place where x occurs belongs to α : that is, if and only if there is a character α corresponding to y such that in H x and α are in the relation of occurrence.

Appendix: A note on the semantics of indices

The role of the prefix. I have spoken of indices as a useful device, in logical forms, to account for the reference to the intended context of discourse, such as a novel or a film. All this is quite generic, of course, and some qualifications are in order.

First of all, it should be specified that a context, in the present reconstruction, is not a simple package of relevant parameters such as the time (the place, the agent, etc.) of an utterance. For the reasons that I discussed in a previous section in connection with paratextual sentences, a context should be assimilated here to a body of information that is presumed to be available to the participants in the communicative exchange, and the assumptions about the time (the place, the agent, etc.) of the utterance are part of this presumed common ground. In this sense, a context can be seen as a set of propositions or, in a suitable framework, as a set of situations: the situations compatible with the information which is presumed to be shared by the agents (including the information concerning the current utterance). This is why, in what follows, a “prefix” such as *In the novel N* or *In the movie*

²¹It would be more appropriate to speak of a *type* of event, but I will not address this problem here.

M should be considered as a context shifter, that is an operator which makes a particular context relevant to fixing the content of the sentence to which the prefix is applied and to evaluating it as true or false.

To see why we should speak of a *context shifter* and not simply of a world shifter (as in most of the classical approaches) some new examples are in order.

Consider for instance the following sentences:

- (1) Napoleon Bonaparte is an arrogant person
- (2) John told me that Mary is pregnant
- (3) In *War and Peace* Napoleon Bonaparte is an arrogant person.

Interestingly enough, the use of the present tense sounds quite natural in the case of (3), whilst using a past tense (namely *was* instead of *is*) would sound odd. By contrast, in the case of (1) the opposite is true: normally, the use of a past tense is much more natural. Moreover, the use of the present tense in (3), unlike its use in (2), does *not* entail that the eventuality at issue (i. e. Napoleon's being an arrogant person) is a present eventuality. Whilst (2), in its natural interpretation, entails that the utterance time is included in the time interval corresponding to Mary's pregnancy, a similar entailment is not allowed in the case of (3). This is tantamount to saying that the present tense, in (3), is not to be interpreted with reference to the utterance time. In general, since tenses are indexical elements whose denotations depend on the context, a plausible explanation of the peculiarity of (3) is that one of the effects of a prefix such as *In War and Peace* is to determine, among other things, a new context for the interpretation of the present tense. (See Zucchi (2001) for a formal treatment of this phenomenon.)

As for space, consider the opposition between expressions such as *to come/to go* or *to be behind/to be in front* which are often mentioned as indexical expressions (e. g. in Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1992)). Take, for instance, sentence (4). If I am in Milan, only the first option is acceptable (in normal situations), whilst the second would sound very odd:

- (4) Yesterday, Leo came (? went) to Milan to deliver a letter.

On the contrary, *both* options are available in the case of paratextual sentences, as witnessed by the acceptability of both variants (even if the speaker is in Milan):

- (5a) In the *Promessi Sposi*, Lorenzo Tramaglino comes to Milan to deliver a letter

- (5b) In the *Promessi Sposi*, Lorenzo Tramaglino goes to Milan to deliver a letter.

Since a similar argument holds for the opposition *to be behind/to be in front*, a natural explanation of this phenomenon is that sentences such as (5b) are acceptable because, in general, the prefix *In fiction F* makes a new point of view relevant: a point of view which is determined by a context shift, for the location of the actual speaker is no longer relevant.

Finally, consider this other sentence:

- (6) ?John is always a very erudite person.

In most cases, a sentence of this kind would sound very odd. But there are situations in which it is perfectly acceptable. If, for instance, we are speaking of the different versions of the Faust legend, a sentence like:

- (7) Faust is always a very erudite person

is not problematic in the interpretation which can be paraphrased by the conjunction: In Marlowe's tragedy Faust is a very erudite person and in Goethe's tragedy Faust is a very erudite person and . . . So, a possible explanation of the acceptability of (7) is that the variable bound by the adverb of quantification *always* is a variable over contexts: what we are considering is the set of different backgrounds of information against which this character appears. If C is the set of relevant contexts we are referring to (i. e. Marlowe's version of the tragedy, Goethe's version, and so on), (7) can be associated with a quantificational structure like:

- (8) For every c in C , in c Faust is a very erudite person.

(It should be noticed that taking C as a set of more familiar entities such as possible worlds would be problematic here. Indeed, we cannot refer to the set of possible worlds which are compatible with the story (as is usual in such cases) for the simple reason that there is no single story here, but a set of stories which are inconsistent with each other. The least we can say, if we want to preserve the possible world machinery, and if contexts are formalized as sets of possible worlds, is that C is a set of sets of possible worlds.)

Indices, worlds and contexts. Once we have recognized, for independent reasons, the need for variables ranging over contexts, there are two points that deserve a more detailed discussion.

Indices, as I have characterized them in the present paper, can be

seen as variables over contexts which occur in logical forms. These variables are introduced to account for prefixes of the type *In the novel N* in paratextual sentences such as:

(9) In the *Recherche*, Vinteuil's daughter likes dancing with girls.

Yet, it should be noticed that, in many circumstances, if we want to express the same content we do not use "prefixed" sentences like (9), but a simpler sentence like:

(10) Vinteuil's daughter likes dancing with girls.

So, a first question is:

(i) what is the exact relation between sentences like (9) and (10)?

In the present discussion, when speaking generically of contexts, different interpretations are possible, because in some cases we mean by context what is relevant in order to determine the content of a sentence, whilst in other cases we mean by context what is relevant to evaluate this content. This time, then, the question is:

(ii) are indices, that is variables over contexts, relevant to accounting for both notions of context?

To answer question (i) we can start from a very intuitive remark: when the reference to the story in question can be taken for granted (when, for instance, I am speaking with a friend of mine who has a copy of the *Recherche* in her hands and who is asking me about Miss Vinteuil's habits), using a sentence like (10) is quite natural; on the contrary, (9) would sound pedantic (because it conveys redundant information) and, as such, unnatural. The idea is that the story is, here, the relevant context of discourse in the sense that *it provides us with the information we need* to perform two essential tasks: (A) to determine the content of the sentence at issue; (B) to evaluate this sentence as true or false. With respect to (A), the *Recherche*, in the above example, can be seen as the source of the background information we presuppose. Without this kind of information we would be unable to grasp the content of a sentence such as (10): for example, we would be unable to assign a reasonable interpretation to the name *Vinteuil*, to the definite description *Vinteuil's daughter*, or to the use of tenses and other indexical expressions. Yet, this is just half the story, for the information provided by the *Recherche* is relevant in another crucial aspect: it selects the world²²

²²To simplify things, in what follows I will often speak of a single world, instead

with respect to which the sentence is to be evaluated. It is in this sense that we say, intuitively, that a sentence such as (10) is true “in the world” of the *Recherche*.

We have just considered a case in which a “prefixed” sentence like (9) sounds unnatural, whilst its “unprefixed” counterpart sounds quite appropriate. As we have remarked, the oddity of the former type of sentence is due to the fact that, since the suitable reference to the relevant information is contextually *given*, using the prefix *In the Recherche* would be redundant. For symmetrical reasons we must expect that, when the context of the discourse (or, more exactly, the background information which determines the content of the sentence and the world of evaluation) is *shifted*, this fact should be *signaled*, and the prefix is the appropriate tool to do that. Indeed, this is what happens in the following examples:

- (11) The word *Rosebud* is the name of a friend of mine. It is the name of a sled, too
- (12) The word *Rosebud* is the name of a friend of mine. In *Citizen Kane* it is the name of a sled, too.

Using an unprefixed sentence such as (11) might be misleading in normal circumstances, because, *ceteris paribus*, a hearer (or a reader) who does not know Welles’ movie might be led to think that, since in the first part of the discourse we are speaking of real individuals, there is some real sled whose name is *Rosebud*. So, to avoid this misunderstanding, the prefixed sentence is, this time, quite appropriate, as shown by (12): the presence of the prefix *In Citizen Kane* signals the shift of the relevant background information, which is no longer what we assume to be known with respect to the world around us, but what we assume to be known with respect to a particular story.

As a conclusion, a first answer to question (i) might be condensed in the following remark: in the situations we have considered above, what makes either a prefixed sentence or an unprefixed one appropriate is just a pragmatic factor. Where the reference to the relevant background information (originated by a story) is taken for granted, the prefix is redundant and using it would be pedantic, but if such a reference is not obvious, or if it is shifted, the prefix is quite appropriate.

There is something vague, of course, in this way of speaking about the role of context in making prefixed or unprefixed sentences more appropriate, but, in a sense, this vagueness is a necessary characteristic

of a plurality of worlds, associated with a given story intended as a context.

of such an analysis, due to the variety of the situations we have to deal with. For instance, I have just said that in many circumstances (12) is more appropriate than (11) to express, among other things, a crucial fact in Welles' movie. But if the sentence should be uttered during a conversation between two movie critics, the prefix might be redundant and it might be cancelled (or even replaced by a phrase like *As everybody knows...*). In other words, in such a situation it is probable that (11), rather than (12), would turn out to be more appropriate.

To consider another example, take the following pair of sentences:

- (13) The Sultan of Congo likes jokes
 (14) In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, the Sultan of Congo likes jokes.

If uttered *ex abrupto* or during a conversation about sovereigns who are known to like jokes, (13), unlike (14), would be quite inappropriate; but, once more, it would sound perfectly natural in other circumstances: for example during an explicit discussion about the characters created by Diderot.

From a formal point of view, indices, as variables over contexts, are a useful tool to account for both types of paratextual sentences (i. e. prefixed and unprefixed sentences). I will not go into the details of the formalism and I will content myself with a sketchy presentation. As I have just recalled, indices can be seen as variables over contexts.²³ They are unpronounced items which have no observable counterpart in surface structures and can occupy different positions in logical forms. To simplify things, let us assume that such silent variables can be associated, respectively, with the Noun Phrase and the Verb Phrase (or, more exactly, with the clausal structure projected by the verb),²⁴ so that we get structures like:

- (15) $[\dots[\dots \text{NP } \dots]_c \dots \text{VP } \dots]_c$

²³The need for variables over worlds or situations has been motivated by several authors in connection with other issues. See Bonomi (1998) for the use of indices, as variables over situations, as an alternative, and more flexible, way of accounting for the "transparent" reading of intensional sentences: a reading which is usually accounted for by the "exportation" of the relevant material made possible by the lambda operator. A systematic treatment of variables over situations is presented in Percus (2002). The reader can refer to this paper for the technical details and the bibliography. In a sense, resorting to variables over *contexts* (rather than worlds) can be seen as a generalization of this kind of approach.

²⁴Such a presentation is far from being accurate, but it is sufficient for the present purposes.

i. e., in our example

(13') [[The Sultan of Congo]_c likes jokes]_c.

It should be noticed that (13') contains free occurrences of the variable *c*. Therefore, the problem is: how can we obtain a suitable value for these occurrences of the variable? The idea is that in the case of (14) what is responsible for the binding of the variable over contexts is the prefix itself, which is conceived of as an operator:

(14') (In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, *c*) [[The Sultan of Congo]_c likes jokes]_c.

The effect of applying this operator to a structure of the type of (13') is to select the background information provided by the story. Since the context at issue is Diderot's novel, (14') is true iff the person who is the Sultan of Congo in this context has, in this context, the property of liking jokes.

So far, so good. But what about a sentence such as (13), which, unlike (14), is not characterized by the presence of the prefix? The answer is that if the reference to the story in question can be taken for granted (as in the original example), the context which must be selected as the value of the variable is easily found: it is the story itself. In other terms, what we have here is a sort of "indexical" binding of the silent variable, whose value is identified with the relevant context, that is the background information associated with the story. A little more exactly, such a situation is expressed by the following formula:

(13'') (In *X*, *c*) [[The Sultan of Congo]_c likes jokes]_c

where *X* is contextually anchored to the story (*Les bijoux indiscrets*, in our example). The role of this indexical operator is to bind the context variable: that is, from an intuitive point of view, to specify what kind of context is relevant here. So, (13'') provides us with the intended interpretation of (13') by fixing the relevant context: as in the case of (14'), (13'') is true iff the person who is the Sultan of Congo in the context of *Les bijoux indiscrets* has, in this context, the property of liking jokes.

Opaque and transparent readings. Before investigating more closely the interaction of a prefix such as *In the story S* with other intensional operators, let us reflect for a while on the nature of the silent variables I have just introduced to account for paratextual sentences. We have seen that, even in logical forms that correspond to simple sentences like

(9) or (13) there are *two* places where indices can occur: one associated with the VP and the other with the NP.²⁵ In the above examples both positions are occupied by the same index. But they might be occupied by different indices. To see why this option is needed consider the following sentences:

- (16) In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, the Capital of Congo is inhabited by many gossipy persons
- (17) In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, the Capital of France is inhabited by many gossipy persons.

From an intuitive point of view, the main difference between (16) and (17) is that in the natural interpretation of the former sentence the NP *The Capital of Congo* has an “opaque” reading, whilst in the natural interpretation of the latter sentence the NP *The Capital of France* has a “transparent” reading. This is so because (16) is appropriate in a situation where we are speaking of the city which is the Capital of Congo *in* the context of Diderot’s novel, i. e. from a point of view which is internal to the story. To do that we use the same definite description which is used in the novel. On the contrary, in (17) the way we refer to this city (which actually is Paris) mirrors *our* point of view, which is external to the story. (In Diderot’s novel the proper names of the characters corresponding to Paris and France are, respectively, *Banza* and *Congo*). To see another illustration of the transparent reading consider the following example:

- (18) In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, some enemies of Diderot say ridiculous things.

Needless to say, the term *enemy of Diderot* does not occur in the novel, but it can be used, *by us*, to identify from outside some characters in the story. More exactly, in (18) the property of being an enemy of Diderot identifies some persons *in the context of empirical facts concerning our world*, and what this sentence means (in its natural interpretation) is that *these* persons say ridiculous things *in the context of the novel*. The opposition between the opaque reading and the transparent one can be reconstructed, in the present framework, in terms of different indexing patterns:

- (16') (In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, c) [[The Capital of Congo]_c is inhabited ...]_c

²⁵See Percus (2002) for the details (in particular, for the constraints that govern these variables).

(17') (In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, c) [[The Capital of France]_r is inhabited ...]_c.

Here *r* is the index which is anchored to the background information presumed to be true by the speaker, whilst *c* is bound by the operator corresponding to the prefix. As desired, (16') means that the city which, in the context of Diderot's novel, is the Capital of Congo is inhabited, in that context, by many gossipy persons (opaque reading), whilst (17') means that the city which, in the context of empirical facts concerning our world, is the Capital of France, is inhabited, in the context of Diderot's novel, by many gossipy persons (transparent reading). In a similar way, the only natural interpretation of (18) is the one where the NP *Some enemies of Diderot* has the transparent reading, captured by a structure like:

(18') (In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, c) [[Some enemies of Diderot]_r say ridiculous things]_c.

Notice that using this kind of structure to account for the opposition between the opaque reading and the transparent one provides us with an implicit answer to question (ii), that is the question about the different roles that indices can play. Indeed, indices have a double role here, for *c* is intended to select the context of evaluation, i. e. the (type of) situation in which the sentence following the prefix is to be evaluated as true or false, but *r* is intended to refer to a context (distinct from the context of evaluation) which fixes the reference of the noun phrase.

In the above analysis the prefix is treated as an intensional operator. To see how it interacts with other intensional operators and how the double role of indices I have just illustrated can explain some interesting structural ambiguities, consider this new example. Suppose that I am speaking with a friend about the cities where I would like to live and that I say:

(19) I wish I lived in the Capital of Congo.

Consider these three possible interpretations of (19): (i) the context *c* of my desires is such that in the scenario determined by *c* I live in the city which, in this scenario, is the Capital of Congo; (ii) the context *c* of my desires is such that in the scenario determined by *c* I live in the city which, in the context *u* of Diderot's novel, is the Capital of Congo; (iii) the context *c* of my desires is such that in the scenario determined by *c* I live in the city which, in the context *r* of empirical facts concerning our world, is the Capital of Congo. A little more exactly, three different

propositions (as sets of possible contexts) can be associated with my desires, respectively:

- (i) $\lambda c[\text{I live in [the Capital of Congo]}_c]_c$
- (ii) $\lambda c[\text{I live in [the Capital of Congo]}_u]_c$
- (iii) $\lambda c[\text{I live in [the Capital of Congo]}_r]_c$.

Is the interpretation suggested in (ii) possible? To my intuition it is (provided that the reference to Diderot's novel is clear from the context): what we mean, on this reading, is that we would like to live in the city described by the novel. Such an interpretation is expressed by (ii), where the context u (i. e. *Les bijoux indiscrets*) is not the context with respect to which the embedded sentence should be true (for the simple reason that the context with respect to which it is true that I live in the Capital of Congo is not the context u of the story but the context c of my desires). On the contrary, u is here the context we refer to in order to get the intended interpretation of the NP *The Capital of Congo*, i. e. in order to interpret the definite description. This is tantamount to saying, once more, that the context associated with a story can intervene as an essential factor in the interpretation of a subpart of a sentence.

Context shift. In the present framework (whose full formalization will be the object of another paper) a context $c \in C$ is a set of propositions that are assumed to be the common background in a communicative exchange. As specified above, this set can also be identified with a set of possible situations: the set of situations in which these propositions are true.

For every expression α , context c and situation w in c , $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_{c,w}$ is the content of α in w with respect to c . In particular, if φ is a sentence, $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket_{c,w}$ is a function from c to $0, 1$ such that, for any $w' \in c$, $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket_{c,w}(w') = 1$ iff $w' \in I(\varphi)$ (where $I(\varphi)$ is the set of situations in which φ is true).

Crucially, besides variables, we must have names for contexts. For example, *War and Peace* (or some suitable constant) is such a name. Semantically, a possible solution is to treat these terms as rigid designators which denote the same content with respect to every context c (and every situation in c), that is:

if S is a term denoting a context (e. g. a story like *War and Peace*), for every c and $c' \in C$, for every $w \in c$ and for every $w' \in c'$, $\llbracket S \rrbracket_{c,w} = \llbracket S \rrbracket_{c',w'}$.

Under this assumption, which is independent of the present theoretical framework, S is seen, ideally, as a fixed content:²⁶ i.e. an invariant set of constraints over the admissible representations of the world in which the events in question take place, of the time (or place) at which they occur, of the teller who narrates them, and so on. Needless to say, this kind of content (which is determined by the literal meaning of the text) is not sufficient to account for the meaning of paratextual sentences such as *In S*, φ . The problem is that the interpretation of these sentences depends not only upon the literal content of S , but also upon additional assumptions about what is left implicit in S . These assumptions, concerning the suitable background against which the story should be interpreted, are part of the presumed common ground c , the current context of evaluation. So, an idealized (and simplified) account of this process is the following:

- (i) When a sentence of type *In S*, φ is evaluated with respect to a context c (which can be inconsistent with S), let us make, in c , the minimal changes required to circumscribe that part of c which is consistent with S . Let c^* be this contraction of c .
- (ii) The information provided by S is added to c^* . The result is the revised context c^*S .

There are several ways²⁷ of formalizing such a process of revision of c with respect to S , but I will not address this problem here and I will simply assume that one of these solutions is adopted and that c^*S is the intended revision of c with respect to S .

If S is a term denoting a context in the sense defined above and φ is a sentence, in the present theoretical framework the expression *In S*, in a sentence of type *In S* φ , is treated as a context-shifter. This means that, semantically, it can be interpreted as a revision function f whose argument is the current context c (i. e. the context in which the prefixed sentence is evaluated) and whose value is c^*S . As a consequence, ignoring the internal structure of the sentence φ , the truth-conditions associated with an operator such as *In S* are the following:

²⁶Or, more exactly, as the fixed content which is associated with a *particular* version of the text. This specification might be necessary to avoid the objection that, for example, the first critical edition of the *Recherche* is different from the second one or that the text might have been slightly different if Proust had changed something before delivering the manuscript to the publisher. From this point of view, the idea is that the reference of a term such as *War and Peace* is contextually fixed and that, as such, it denotes the same (version of the) story in every situation.

²⁷A proposal based on Lewis's system of spheres is presented in Grove (1988).

$\llbracket \text{In } S(\varphi) \rrbracket_{c,w}(w) = 1$ iff $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket_{f(c),w'}(w') = 1$ for every $w' \in f(c)$,
 where $f(c) = c * S$.

In other words, for any context c and for any situation w in c , the sentence *In S* φ is true in w with respect to c iff φ is true, with respect to the revised context $c * S$, in every situation in $c * S$. Thus, the effect of the operator *In S* is a context shift from c (the current context) to $f(c)$, i. e. the context $c * S$ that we obtain if the information provided by the story S is added to the (relevant) part of the current context c which is maximally consistent with that story.

As I have just recalled, intuitively speaking a story S , in its literal meaning, is a fixed set of propositions which can be expanded in a number of ways, depending on the context (the parameter c in the above definition). The idea is that this literal meaning is a set of *constraints* over the possible interpretations of S : more exactly, it is what remains unchanged across the different interpretations of S that we get when passing from a given background of assumptions to another one. For example, whilst a sentence like *In the Recherche, Bergotte is a famous novelist* is true in any context c with respect to which we evaluate it, the truth (or falsity) of a sentence like *In the Recherche, Combray is closer to Paris than Balbec* depends on the nature of c , that is on the assumptions we might make on the “geography” of the *Recherche* (e. g. by associating Combray to Illiers and Balbec to Cabourg: an assumption which is not forced by the story itself, of course, but by independent information).

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