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Article

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THE IDENTITY OF FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

SUMMARY: Fictional characters elicit *prima facie* conflicting intuitions. On the one hand, a fictional character seems linked to the particular work of fiction (a novel, a poem, a movie, etc.) in which it appears: Ulysses is described in one way in Homer's epic poems, in another way in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and in a still different way in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It is natural to distinguish Homer's Ulysses from Virgil's and Dante's ones, since each of them has specific properties. On the other hand, we have the strong temptation to think that Ulysses is the same fictional character that persists in the passage from one poem to another, despite the change of features. The article tackles this kind of problems by focusing on the cognitive side. By adopting the theory of mental files, I will argue that all issues on the identity of literary characters here presented can be addressed without assuming the existence of fictional objects. Presumption of co-reference between multiple depictions of a given literary character is represented in our mind by means of a network of files, each one indexed to a work of fiction in which the character appears. Indexed files have a meta-representational function, so they do not need acquaintance with real objects. Linked indexed files do not refer, but still a unique reference is presuppose. They would have the same referent, if there was one.

KEYWORDS: mental files, indexed files, fictional characters, identity, co-reference.

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1. Introduction

Consider the following sentences:

1) Ulysses spent ten years by sea to return home.
2) Ulysses is Penelope's husband.

Following the terminology provided by Voltolini and Kroon (2016), I will call (1) and (2) *fictional sentences*, namely sentences that could easily occur in the body of a narrative. Such sentences say something about the fiction from an inner perspective and have merely fictional truth-conditions.[1]

Consider now the following sentences:

3) Ulysses is a fictional character.
4) Ulysses is famous all over the world.

What is interesting about (3) and (4) is that they predicate something about Ulysses from a perspective that is external to the Greek myth Ulysses belongs to and, for this reason, they seem to have genuine truth values, regardless of any specific practice of pretense or make-believe.[2] Following Voltolini and Kroon (2016), I will call (3) and (4) *metafictional sentences*.[3]

The distinction between fictional and metafictional sentences is useful when we talk about the identity of fictional characters. As an example, let us take Stevenson's novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In the book, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are represented in very different ways as two distinct characters and, nonetheless, at the end of the story the author reveals that they are the same person. Thus, we are tempted to think as true the following fictional sentence, since it states an identity that is stipulated by Stevenson inside his novel:

5) Jekyll is Mr. Hyde.

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[1] Many philosophers think that (1) and (2) do not express any genuine truth or falsehood about real events in the world, since they contains empty names—"Ulysses" and "Penelope"—names that, if one is not realist about fictional entities, have no reference. According to Everett (2003), we may say that (1) and (2) express a "gappy" or "incomplete proposition". Or we may say, following Walton (1990) and Curire (1990), that (1) and (2) are true (or false) only within a context of pretense and making believe.

[2] Contrary to fictional sentences, these later sentences seem to carry ontological commitment to literary and mythological entities (Kripke, 2013).

[3] We could push the analysis even further, by distinguishing between internal metafictional sentences and external metafictional sentences (Voltolini, 2010, pp. 100, 107; Voltolini, Kroon, 2016). An alternative, but equivalent, terminology is proposed by Bonomi (2008): fictive, parafictive, metafictive sentences. For the purpose of this work, I will limit my attention only to external metafictional sentences.

We can also wonder about the identity of a literary character from a metafictional perspective. It is not unusual, especially when a certain literary character is widely known, to find several versions of it: the same character can move from one work to another, by appearing in very different stories (sequels, remakes or parodies), and even migrate from one media to another (from a book to a comic or a movie, from a text to a picture to a sculpture). Ulysses is a good case. Many poets and writers were inspired by this character. In Greek epic poems, under the name of Odysseus, he is one of the heroes who fight in the Trojan War and the unlucky traveller who tries to come back to his homeland Ithaca. Also Virgil mentions him in *Aeneid*. After centuries, he appears as a damned soul that Dante meets on his journey to *Hell*. Even in recent time, his fame does not decrease. James Joyce suggests us to see in his Leopold Bloom a new, modern, Ulysses. Given that it presupposes the comparison between (at least) two separate fictions, the following identity statements must be consider as a metafictional sentence:

6) Homer's Odysseus and Dante's Ulysses are the same fictional character.

However, it is not easy to evaluate a sentence like (6). There is not a thing like the authority of a writer to which one can appeal. Nevertheless, it seems that we have the intuition that we still deal with the same character, although multiple stories in which it appears assign to it different properties, sometimes in contrast to each other or even contradictory. But at the same time, we have another equally strong intuition: that, in a certain way, there is one Ulysses belonging to *Iliad* and another one belonging to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Now let us focus on a more complex example: the famous dispute between Cervantes and Avellaneda. The fist part of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* was published in 1605. The success of the novel was such that an anonymous author, under the pseudonym of Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, released a sequel in 1614. Cervantes then decided to write another adventure of Don Quixote, published in 1615. In the *Preface* that introduces this second part of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes criticizes the spurious sequel and promises to conclude all hidalgo adventures until his death and burial, therefore discrediting Avellaneda's work. Therefore, how must be consider the following sentence?

7) Avellaneda's Don Quixote and Cervantes's Don Quixote are not the same fictional character.

Contrary to the previous example, is (7) a fictional or a metafictional sentence? It presupposes the comparison between two different texts on Don Quixote, but at the same time it is a sentence that claims something internal to Cervantes's story.

The examples presented above can be addressed from either a semantic or a cognitive point of view. As regards the semantic approach, we can ask which is the meaning of sentences from (1) to (7), which kind of proposition they express and under which conditions they are true. Then, we can explore metaphysical

implications, by wondering whether fictional characters really exist and, if so, which kind of entities they are. The cognitive approach deals with different questions: what kind of intuitions do all these cases elicit? How can we account for them? And, above all, which mental representations are at state?

This paper adopts a cognitive perspective: it aims to provide an analysis of the cognitive tools we use to represent literary characters in our mind. I think that this perspective should not only be separated, but it is also preliminary to the semantic and ontological one. The nature of fictional objects, as well as their very existence, is controversial. Equally debated is the semantic analysis of sentences. But one thing is safe to say: fictional objects are closely connected with what we think about them. Literary characters are something which lives in our imagination, which influences our acts of pretense, and that probably would not exist if we had not depicted them in some literary works or in other types of media. For all these reasons, I think we need to understand, first of all, how we conceive of a fictional character in our mind. Only after addressing this preliminary task, we can offer some answer to the semantic and metaphisical debate. I think that our intuitions may be explained, from a cognitive point of view, within the framework of the theory of mental files.

2. Mental Files

The theory of mental files has been elaborated by several philosophers in different ways. The term "mental file" has been firstly introduced by Perry (1980) and, since then, it has been widely used, even if forerunners notions may be found in Grice's (1969), which uses the word "dossier", in Strawson's (1974) and Evans' (1973). One of the most influential account has been provided by Recanati (2012).

According to Recanati, the notion of mental file translates, at the cognitive level, the Fregean idea of the sense of a proper name or a singular term (see also Pagin, 2013). He distinguishes between regular and indexed files. As regards the former, their main function is to store information, in the form of a list of predicates, that we take to be about a single object of the outside world. It is a cognitive structure that we use to create a mental representation of that particular object. Reference of a regular file is determined in a non-descriptive way through the relations of acquaintance that the subject has with the object of the mental representation.[4] The paradigmatic case of relation is perceptual acquaintance. We have perceptual acquaintance when we perceive an object directly with our senses (sight, hearing, touch). But acquaintance can also be "mediated" through the existence of a communicative chain, as is the case of people that we do not know directly or that lived in the past, or by means of contextual relations, as in the

[4] "What they refer to is not determined by properties which the subject takes the referent to have (i.e., by information—or misinformation—in the file), but through the relations on which the files are based. The referent is the entity we are acquainted with (in the appropriate way), not the entity that best 'fits' information in the file" (Recanati, 2012, p. 33).

case of indexicals (2012, pp. 33–34; see also Recanati, 2014; and, with regard to the notion of mediated acquaintance, Recanati, 2013a; for a deeper discussion about indexicals, see Recanati, 2013b). To sum up, the function of a regular file is to store information about an external object and to ensure that our mental representation has that object as its referent, since the existence of a mental file depends on the existence of a relation of acquaintance, direct or mediated.

Indexed file, as name suggests, are characterized by an indexed structure, since they have a meta-representational function (Recanati, 2012, pp. 145–148; 2013b, pp. 4–9). They are used to represent thoughts of other people:

> An indexed file is a file that stands, in the subject's mind, for another subject's file about an object. An indexed file consists of a file and an index, where the index refers to the other subject whose own file the indexed file stands for or simulates. (Recanati, 2012, p. 146)

An indexed file, $<f, S_2>$, is thus a file that a subject S_1 uses to represent a files f that stands in the mind of another subject S_2 (or in the mind of S_1 in a past time; for a discussion on indexed files, see Stojanovic, Fernandez, 2015). Its structure is virtually recursive: "the file component of an indexed file may itself be an indexed file. Thus S_1 may think about S_2's way of thinking some entity, and to that effect may entertain the indexed file $<<f, S_3>, S_2>$" (Recanati, 2012, p. 147). Unlike regular files, they do not presuppose any norm of acquaintance, since they are mere simulative devices that do not guarantee reference to objects of the real world (Recanati, 2012, p. 200).

Files may be linked to each other. *Horizontal linking* operates between regular files: it occurs when we discover that two files refer to a single object, as in the case of Hesperus and Phosphorus. This connection enables information to flow freely between files and it can ultimately culminate in a merging of the files (Recanati, 2014, p. 475; for the notion of linking, see also Perry, 2002). On the contrary, *vertical linking* takes place between regular files and indexed files, or between indexed files of different degrees of embedding. The type of connection is such that it preserves data encapsulated in each single file. In fact, since indexed files are used to stand for some other subject's body of information about an object, this function could not be served if, through linking between the subject's regular files, the indexed files were contaminated by the subject's own information about that object (Recanati, 2012, p. 184).

Thus, there are two possibilities for a given indexed file:

> Either the indexed file, which represents some other way of thinking about some entity, is linked to some regular file in the subject's mind referring to the same entity (and corresponding to the subject's own way of thinking of that entity); or it is not. If it is not, the subject only access to entity in question is via the filing system of other subjects. (Recanati, 2012, p. 184)

An indexed file is *loaded* when it is vertically linked with a regular file: it inherits the referent of the regular file, allowing us to figure out how other subjects think about objects of the world. Instead, when the indexed file is not linked to any regular file, we have what Recanati calls a *free-wheeling*, or *unloaded*, use of indexed file. In this situation, the subject can think about an object only through the filing system of other subjects: all information at her disposal is the one stored in the indexed file.

According to Recanati, we can think about a non-existing object by using an indexed file with meta-representational function. This is what happens when we consider a sentence like:

8) Leverrier believed that the discovery of Vulcan would make him famous.

The sentence ascribe, with success, a pseudo-belief to Leverrier (for an in-depth analysis of the notion of pseudo-singular belief, see Recanati, 2000, p. 226; 2012, pp. 63–64; 2013c): we attribute to Leverrier a thought that has a singular form, but that does not express any proposition at all.[5] We are thinking about the representation of someone else and not about the referent of that representation. As regards mental files applied to non-existing and fictional objects, Recanati does not push his analysis further (for later development of the theory, see Recanati, 2016; 2018). Many questions remains unanswered, especially with regard to the connection between the level of thought and semantics (for some critiques to Recanti's notion of pseudo-singular thought, see Crane, 2013, pp. 158–162; Lo Guercio, 2015; Ninan, 2015; Stojanovic, Fernandez, 2015).

3. Identity at the Fictional Level

I think that we can use some tools from Recanati's theory to answer the question: how do our mental representations of literary characters relate to each other?

I take for granted the distinction between regular and indexed files, but I think that the latter are much more useful for our purposes. Indeed, all the problems on the identity of fictional characters that we have mentioned in the first part of the article can be addressed by adopting an antirealist perspective: there are not fictional characters, but representations of them. If we do not assume the existence of fictional objects, we only have indexed files, for regular files can be generated only in the presence of a relation of acquaintance, and we cannot have acquaintance with non-existent objects.[6]

[5] Or, at most, a "gappy proposition" (Everett, 2003).

[6] However, it is worth noting that the cognitive account proposed here is also compatible with a realistic perspective. If we admit the existence of fictional objects, then we must have some sort of acquaintance relation allowing for the creation of regular files. With regular files we refer to literary characters as fictional entities (either meinongian objects or abstract artefacts), while with the indexed files we refer to their multiple representations deriving from the stories in which they appear. The idea is developed in Grosso's (2019).

Contrary to Recanati, I think that we should distinguish fictional characters from other types of non-existent objects, such as those originating from errors.[7] When we deal with fictions, we think or talk about things that we know do not exist, at least in the same sense as ordinary objects do. The situation is different when we deal with errors: things which have been genuinely supposed to exist, but do not (Crane, 2013, p. 15). Errors do not presuppose pretense: in talking about the alleged planet Vulcan, Leverrier truly aimed to describe an actual states of the world, even if he was mistaken. Instead, a fictional object is always linked to a specific world of fiction, that is, to a specific story. It does not matter if the story has been created by an author or it belongs to myths and folk traditions, as in the case of Ulysses or Santa Claus. Furthermore, while errors are always related to individual subjects, as in Leverrier's case, fictional characters are not.[8] A character may initially appear in the work of a single author, then be taken up by other authors in more or less canonical stories (sequels, remakes or parodies), and even migrate from a media to another (from a book to a comic or a film, and so on), to the point of becoming a collective production to which anyone can contribute. It is sufficient to think of the various literary versions and movies on Sherlock Holmes, not to mention the countless fan stories. For these reasons, as long as we deal with fictional characters, I suggest that we do not need to index mental files to any individual subject, since we can index them directly to the fiction itself. One may object that, according to the theory of mental files, indexed files are tools that we have at disposal for representing, in our mind, the point of view of other people. An indexed file simulates the mental state of the indexed subject, so it does not make sense to index files to fictions, for fictions are not that sort of things having a mental life. However, I see no theoretical obstacle in stretching the notion of indexed file so to include also such kind of cases.[9] When we take part in a game of make-believe, we are urged to imagine a specific situation and to adopt specific mental attitudes, for instance, by accepting the told story as unquestionably true,[10] no matter whether it involves non-existent people and events that are bizarre and unrealistic. In the files we store information that we associate to the world of the story, as participants of that game. More precisely, we could say that, by indexing the file to a fiction, we mean to participate to a certain practice of make-believe, in which we put our-

[7] I thank an anonymous reviewer who prompted me to clarify this point.

[8] It could be argued that some errors also have a collective dimension, in the sense that they belong to specific cultural or scientific traditions. Examples are the philosopher's stone, the fire-like element called phlogiston, or the epicycles postulated by Ptolemaic astronomers to explain the apparent motion of the planets. I think these errors should be treated in the same way as folkloric or mythological beliefs like ghosts, elves or Olympic gods. Although there is no conscious world of fictions, collective errors are still tied to particular world-views, such as outdated scientific or alchemical theories.

[9] In a recent work, Recanati adopts a similar conception of indexed files in order to account for parafictional utterances (2018).

[10] With the exception of unreliable narratives.

selves in the mind of someone that is not pretending, but truly believes in the facts depicted by the story. Similarly, in standard, non-fictional, situations, we put ourselves in the mind of an external subject to represent her mental states. It is just the same act of simulation (for a discussion on this topic, see Grosso, 2019).

I will begin the analysis by considering the identity of the literary characters inside a single work of fiction. When the author introduces new characters, we open new files storing information that the story tells us: their physical appearance, sex, age, actions and any other kind of properties. All our files on literary characters created by reading a novel are indexed to that world of fiction. We label the file with the name of the character it aims to refer to. So, for instance, we come to have in our minds the files <SHERLOCK HOLMES, *A Study in Scarlet*>, <RASKOLNIKOV, *Crime and Punishment*>, and so on.

So far, so good. But things are not always simple. Sometimes we do not know how a certain character is called. The name may remain unknown because the author wishes to leave a mystery about one individual and the absence of proper name is an integral part of the story. A famous example is the *Innominato* in Manzoni's *The Betrothed*. This case is fairly straightforward. We can open a mental file and use some definite descriptions as a label to identify the character,[11] such as <THE UNNAMED, *The Betrothed*>. Often a character does not have a name because its role in the plot of the story is not important enough. It is, so to say, a mere background actor. Let us consider this situation: we are walking down the street and meet several strangers passing by: we do not know their names but nonetheless we may identify people around us by using indexicals or demonstratives, like "that guy in front of me", or definite description like "the tall man with the hat". Similarly, we can use indexicals, demonstrative or definite description to individuate secondary characters in novels, for instance: "the man the protagonist was talking with in the first chapter of the book".

An interesting case of unnamed character is presented in the novel *In Search of Lost Time*. Here, the protagonist of the story and the narrator overlap: the book is a sort of autobiography, in which a first-person voice tells us the protagonist's recollections of experiences from childhood to adulthood. Suppose that, in the whole *narration*, his name is never told. This does not represent a problem: for our purposes, it is sufficient to open a file like <THE NARRATOR, *In Search of Lost Time*>. Such case, once again, helps us to clarify the usefulness of having indexed files, since the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time* must not be confused with its author. Even if a few details in the book are directly inspired by Marcel Proust's real life, *In Search of Lost Time* is a fictional novel, not a trustworthy biography: many events, characters and places are invented or freely gathered from reality. The use of the first person does not allow to overlap

[11] The description is used referentially, and not attributively. We have a referential description when it is used only to pick out an object, but the referent is determined by a relation of acquaintance that already exists, as in Donnellan's example "the man drinking a martini" (1966).

the real Marcel Proust with the fictional storyteller of the novel (at this regard, see Bonomi, 1994, pp. 14–16).

As we have seen, in the vast majority of novels it is easy to individuate fictional characters, regardless of whether we know their names or not, just as in ordinary life it is easy to recognize objects around us. But, just as in real life there are exceptional cases that originate misunderstandings, so there are in fictions. A subject, without any astronomical background, may open two separate files HESPERUS and PHOSPHORUS for planet Venus. Once the mistake is recognized, i.e., that names "Hesperus" and "Phosphorus" refer to a single celestial body observed in two different moments, the subject links the two files. Situations like this have already been widely commented by philosophers. Let us now analyse a literary variant of the Hesperus/Phosphorus case: the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In the novel, a character is depicted as two distinct ones: sometimes he appears as the gentle and kind Dr. Jekyll, sometimes as the violent and brutal Mr. Hyde. Only at the end of the reading we learn that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are alternative personalities of the same fictional character. Misled by the narration of the events, we open, at first, two files, one for Dr. Jekyll and one for Mr. Hyde. Later, we link the two files, even if the characters of the novel seem very distant from each other. But which kind of connection are we using? According to Recanati (2013, p. 155), in addition to the two forms of linking that we have already presented—horizontal and vertical linkings—indexed files require the introduction of some other forms of linking. The one that matters for our case is *internal linking*, that represents a connection existing only in the mind of another subject, or in the speaker's mind at a certain time in the past:

> Internal linking reflects *the subject's belief in some identity*, whether the subject is the speaker/thinker or some other subject whose point of view the speaker/thinker is representing. It is only in the case of internal linking that is it possible to represent linking by entering identity information into the linked file. (Recanati, 2012, p. 191, emphasis in the original)

To illustrate this point, Recanati proposes the following example. Mistakenly, Paul used to believe that there were two distinct people, Bert and Tom, while in fact there is one single person. Now he has discovered the truth, so he believes that Bert is Tom. But we, who are skeptical about the identity, report his doxastic state by saying:

9) Paul believes that Bert is Tom.

The two files respectively associated with the names "Bert" and "Tom" are indexed to Paul, since it is Paul who accepts the identity "Bert = Tom". They are represented as linked in Paul's mind, not in ours. We cannot use horizontal linking, because it is a connection that works only for regular files, and our regular

files are not linked. Nor vertical linking can be useful for this task, for we are not connecting an indexed file with a regular one.[12] The case posed by Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is similar. We, as readers, do not know the identity between the two characters until we get to the end of the story, in which it is told that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person. After discovering this revelation, we can use internal link to represent identity within the story, in the same way as we represent a connection that occurs in the mind of another subject.

We can conclude that even when we know the names of all the characters, we may doubt about how many characters there are.[13] In the reality, empirical investigations determine whether two names refer to the same object. On the contrary, within the fiction we completely defer to the author's choices. It happens as if we come to believe that "Bert" and "Tom" refer to a single individual just because Paul thinks they do. The situation is not so bizarre, at a closer insight. In fact, we really do not have regular files on Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: the only files in our mind are those indexed to the story.[14] Therefore, I agree with Tim Crane:

> But there is a very important additional fact about the fiction: the author's stipulation that they are nonetheless identical. This is itself a representation with a very special role of trumping all these differences in representations […]. Representing things as identical is the ultimate way of representing them as similar, despite other dissimilarities. But this has to be something claimed in the story. No sense can be made of the idea that two characters in a story might "really" be one, if the author of the story does not say so. (Crane, 2013, p. 167)

Thus, sentence:

5) Jekyll is Mr. Hyde

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[12] Nor we are linking indexed files with a different degree of embedding. We will see how to use the vertical link in relation to identity issues at the metafictional level.

[13] Other interesting literary cases are twin, look-alike, double or doppelganger characters. Here the mechanism is the opposite: we start with the belief that there is a single character and then we discover that they are two or more.

[14] It could be argued that internal linking is used to represent co-reference between files in another subject's mind, when we do not accept such co-reference with regard to our regular files, which remain separate, as in Tom and Bert's example. But when the author establishes an identity between two characters, there is no point in denying it: we accept the author's authority and take for granted that, for instance, Jeckyll and Hyde are the same character. Then, this is not a case of internal linking. However, it must be noted that in the case of fictional characters no regular file is involved. We only have files indexed to the story and so, through internal links, we represent co-reference according to a specific world of fiction. We do not merge Jekyll's and Hyde's files, for there may be alternative stories in which the two characters are distinct individuals. Another objection may concern unreliable narratives. In that case, even if the narrator identifies two characters, we would not link the files as in the previous case. Unreliable narratives are particular cases that deserve a separate analysis. As for the present article, I leave aside this topic. I thank an anonymous reviewer for helping me focus on these points.

is true in the world of the fiction: despite the fact that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are described as two distinct people, with different and almost opposite features, they are one single individual because of the author's stipulation. Once we link files, information can be shared. So file <DR. JEKYLL, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*> contains information "being Mr. Hyde", and file <MR. HYDE, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*> contains information "being Jekyll", as it is explicitly stated in the story. Precisely because it is claimed inside the novel, the identity between Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, expressed by (5), is a fact concerning the fiction, that we must accept as true.

4. Identity at the Metafictional Level

Problems of identity arise not only within a single story but also in the comparison between two (or more) works of fiction. These cases are much harder to treat, since there is not a thing like the authority of one single writer to which we can appeal. Consider the sentence:

6) Homer's Odysseus and Dante's Ulysses are the same fictional character.

As we said, (6) generates conflicting, if not even opposed, intuitions. On one hand, we have the idea that there are two Ulysses, one belonging to the *Odyssey*, the other to the *Divine Comedy*. On the other hand, we are tempted to say that a unique fictional character persists in the transition from one work to another. I will analyse the case of a hypothetical subject who believes in the identity between the two Ulysses, despite differences in the representations. I am not claiming that everyone would evaluate (6) in the same way and for the same reasons. Differences of opinion may arise according to the type of person involved. An inattentive or inexperienced reader may agree with (6) simply because she has not sufficient data to distinguish between the two versions of Ulysses. A competent reader may disagree with (6) because she judges that Odysseus is the product of a well-defined and homogeneous tradition, which finds expression in the Homeric poems of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and consider Dante's Ulysses as a new character belonging to a different historical and cultural context. The point in question is not how real individuals would judge sentence (6), but what happens in the mind of someone expressing this thought.

When we believe in the identity between Homer's Odysseus and Dante's Ulysses, we are claiming that one and the same character appears in two different works of fiction, thus generating alternative versions of itself. I call migration[15] the idea that a character can move through multiple stories. Migration presup-

[15] This notion is derived from Thomasson's (1999; see also Voltolini, 2010; Voltolini, Kroon, 2016). Often the term "importation", and the related verb "to import", is used instead of "migration". However, this can give rise to misunderstandings, as the word "importation" is also used to talk about Walton's *Reality Principle* (Walton, 1990).

poses a causal connection between the two stories, i.e., the intention of an author to pick up a character from a pre-existing story and use it in a new one.[16] Are there other conditions, besides the author's intention, for migration to take place? Probably yes, but it is hard to determine which they are.

Resemblance is a good candidate. In fact, an author may not succeed in importing a fictional character into a new work of fiction because the features of the character in the new story are too far from the original one. For instance, even if Gregory House, the main character of the TV series *Dr. House*, is clearly is inspired by the figure of Sherlock Holmes, we do not say that Gregory House and Sherlock Holmes are the same fictional character, for there is not a sufficient similarity between the two characters. At most, we can say that the latter character is inspired by the former one, and that is all. However, many objections can be raised against the similarity criterion. First of all, it is not clear what criteria this resemblance should be based on, nor how many properties should be shared between the two versions of the character. Moreover, resemblance is not transitive, in the sense that if we compared all literary versions of a character like Ulysses, we would probably not find any property in common. For the sake of argument, suppose that there are similarities between Ulysses so as depicted in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, as well as Ulysses so as depicted in the *Odyssey* and in the *Divine Comedy*, but no shared property between all these representations taken together. Thus, how do we justify the idea that Ulysses migrated from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey* to the *Divine Comedy*?[17]

Perhaps, the strongest objection against the similarity criterion is represented by the following case: suppose the a man, that we can call Pierre Menard,[18] wrote a novel which is, word by word, identical with Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Note that Menard knows nothing about Cervantes's life, nor is he aware of the existence of his masterpiece: it is not plagiarism, but a case of simple, however absurd, coincidence. Even if we have two stories depicting a fictional character with exactly the same properties, we can distinguish between Cervantes's and Menard's Don Quixote because, ultimately, there are two independent acts of authorial generation.

Another option to consider is a criterion of legitimacy. Legitimacy may be intended either in a legal sense, namely who owns the copyright of a character, or in a more general sense according to which a certain audience may accept as canonical a new story about a character. For instance, we accept that Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* is the very same fictional characters that appears in *The Sign of the Four* because both novels were written by Conan Doyle, and he

[16] According to Thomasson: "*x* and *y* are the same fictional object *F* only if the author of the second work *W'* is competently acquainted with *x* of the previous work *W*, and intends to import *x* into *W'* as *y*" (1999, pp. 67–68).

[17] A similar objection can be moved against the idea that there is an Ulysses *in general*, not linked to any specific work of fiction (Section 6 of the current paper).

[18] The example is derived by the famous J. L. Borges' novel *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* and it was originally proposed by Voltolini (2003; 2006).

is certainly qualified to write multiple stories about this character, for being Sherlock Holmes' creator. But criteria of legitimacy changes from time to time. Ariosto did not invented the figure of Roland, yet he wrote an entire work of fiction about this character, and no one questioned his legitimacy in doing so. The same goes for Dante and his Ulysses.

Further investigations on this matter are needed. For the present work, it is not important to precisely determine when and on what basis migrations of a fictional character take place. I will take for granted that, sometimes, people believe migrations to occur and, when it happens, people recognize the existence of a causal connection between the stories. i.e, the author's intention to take a character from a pre-existing story and put it in a new one (although further conditions may be added).

Migration gives rise to a presumption of co-reference: if we believe that a given character appears in multiple works, despite different associated properties, we are assuming that the related representations, deriving from the various stories, concern the very same individual. At a cognitive level, we can translate the idea by saying that indexed files gather together into a network. We need a clear criterion to determine whether a file belongs to a network or not:

> Two indexed files, *A* and *B*, belong to the same network when they presume the same referent, i.e., when they are used by the subject with the intention to refer to the same fictional character.

So, for instance, in the mind of a subject who believes (6), a file *A* and a file *B* are part of a unique network because both files aims to refer to Ulysses, but one, file *A*, refer to Ulysses as presented by Homer in the Greek poem *Odysseus*, while file *B* refer to Ulysses as presented by Dante in his *Divine Comedy*.

According to mental files theory, co-reference between files is expressed by means of linking: we link files when we recognize that they refer to the same object. But there is an important difference between regular and indexed files: while regular files require actual reference, as they are based on relations of acquaintance, indexed files do not have this constraint, as they have a meta-representational function. Now, the main type of connection that operates between indexed files is vertical linking. I claim that a linked indexed file inherits the referent of the other file, *as long as reference is possible*. When an indexed file is loaded, i.e., linked to a regular one, it acquire its referent. But in the case of literary characters we have no regular file,[19] so indexed files are unloaded and

[19] We have no regular file, unless we take a realistic position on objects of fiction. See note 6. In case fictional characters exist, it follows that the networks of files not only presume, but actually refer to these objects: we just have to add a regular files at the top of the network. With the regular file we refer to the literary character as a fictional entity (either meinongian object or abstract artefact), while with the indexed files we refer to its various representations, each based on the story in which characters appears. In any case,

they do not refer, but still a unique reference is presupposed. *They would have the same referent, if there was one.* Moreover, due to the vertical form of the link, the content of each file is preserved. We do not mix information deriving from separate fictions. In Homer's poem, Ulysses, after a journey lasted ten years, comes back to Ithaca and restores his reign, whereas, in the *Hell*, Ulysses tells Dante that he set out with his men from Circe's island for a journey of exploration beyond the Pillars of Hercules and then he died after a shipwreck. We are not surprised by these inconsistencies, because we look at the two stories as two alternative versions of the myth of Ulysses. Although we can import some pieces of information from the Greek poems into the *Divine Comedy*, in order to enrich our comprehension and appreciation of Dante's work, importation is not automatic: it only takes place as long as the *Divine Comedy* allows us to do so.

I suggest that vertical linking between files can be represented by means of their indexed and recursive structure. For the sake of argument, suppose that Dante was inspired for his Ulysses solely by the *Odyssey*. The original file is <ULYSSES, *Odyssey*>. Now, the *Divine Comedy* depicts a personal interpretation of Homer's Ulysses. Thus, according to Dante's fiction, we are provided with an alternative way of imagining the hypothetical referent of the file <ULYSSES, *Odyssey*>. We obtain a recursive file <<ULYSSES, *Odyssey*> *Divine Comedy*>.[20]

I maintain that, in virtue of their linking, indexed files gather into networks, whose each individual knot is given by a file indexed to a fiction in which the character in question appears. Other authors have already used the notion of network, but with different meanings and purposes. Perry (2001), Everett (2013) and Friend (2011; 2014), in fact, use the term "network" to explain the phenomenon of co-identification in the case of empty names and to give an account of how more people can share the same mental representation. These issues are beyond the scope of the paper. It should be emphasized, however, that these authors conceive networks as sets of relations between regular files. Instead, in my perspective, there are no regular files associated with empty names, but only files indexed to fictions. Networks develop at the level of indexed files.

By relying on the notion of network, we can justify all the different intuitions on the identity of fictional characters that we exposed above. On one side, we provide an account for the idea that there is a Ulysses belonging to the *Iliad*, one Ulysses to the *Odyssey*, another one to the *Divine Comedy*, and so on, by saying that each version of Ulysses corresponds, in our mind, to a specific file indexed to the relevant fiction. On the other side, we can also explain the intuition that the same fictional character persists in the transition from one work to another, a character that is Ulysses and not just "the Ulysses of some fiction". The continui-

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the structure of the network, i.e., the configuration of indexed files, remains unchanged. Networks only develop at the level of indexed files.

[20] The original file tells us how to represent Ulysses according to the *Odyssey*, the second one how to represent, according to the *Divine Comedy*, the very same Ulysses previously presented in the Odyssey.

ty between the various literary characters is given by the presence of a single network that links all the files together. All these files, vertically linked to each other, aim to refer to the same individual and they would do so, if such individual existed.

By means of the recursive structure of indexed files we can also explain in which ways network develops. Consider the example of paladin Roland. His epic adventures and death are told for the first time in *The Song of Roland*. By this old French poem of the 11th century was later inspired Boiardo, an Italian poet of the Renaissance. Boiardo wrote the *Orlando Innamorato*, whose Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* is a further continuation. The network of mental files has here a linear expansion from *The Song of Roland* to the *Orlando Furioso*:

a) <ROLAND, *The Song of Roland*>

b) <<ROLAND, *The Song of Roland*> *Orlando Innamorato*>

c) <<<ROLAND, *The Song of Roland*> *Orlando Innamorato*> *Orlando Furioso*>

This network describes how an experienced reader may organize files in her mind. Still other files can be added to the network, in case we consider other literary works, for instance Pulci's *Morgante*. But a subject does not need to have all these files in his mind. An inattentive or limited reader may recognize only a vague connection between the French ballad and Ariosto's poems, by having just two files vertically linked. Or she may mistakenly believe that *Orlando Innamorato* is inspired by *Orlando Furioso*, and thus link the files incorrectly. At the same way, instead of creating different indexed files for each Sherlock Holmes novel, one may have just one file, vaguely indexed to the fictional world created by Conan Doyle. Everyone has their own mental representations. However, the more it increase our knowledge about a character and the various literary works, the more precise and articulated it becomes the network in our mind.[21]

We can now consider the more complicated case of Ulysses. Let us say, even if we simplify the story, that the character appeared for the first time in the *Iliad*, then in the *Odyssey*, and finally in the Latin *Aeneid* by Virgil. After centuries Dante, who could not read the Greek poems, took inspiration from Virgil and from other Latin sources[22] for the damned soul appearing in the *Divine Comedy*. Finally, James Joyce wrote his *Ulysses*, but taking as a model for Leopold Bloom not the figure of Ulysses of the *Divine Comedy*, but the one of the *Odyssey*. The network has, at first, a linear development:

[21] I thank an anonymous reviewer who helped me to develop this point.

[22] Another important source of information for Dante was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but I leave Ovid aside from the analysis.

a) <ULYSSES, *Iliad*>

b) <<ULYSSES, *Iliad*> *Odyssey*>

c) <<<ULYSSES, *Iliad*> *Odyssey*> *Aeneid*>

At this point, it splits into two branches: in one branch we have Dante's Ulysses, linked to Virgil's poem:

d) <<<<ULYSSES, *Iliad*> *Odyssey*> *Aeneid*> *Divine Comedy*>

In the other branch, we have Joyce's novel, which is inspired by the *Odyssey*.[23] Leopold Bloom is at the same level as Virgil's Ulysses, for both are vertically linked to the same file:

c') <<<ULYSSES, *Iliad*> *Odyssey*> *Ulysses* $_{\text{Joyce}}$>[24]

It is now time to move on to the case in which a file cannot be part of a pre-existing network, therefore giving rise to a new fictional character. We can recall the example of Pierre Menard that we have already presented: as a result of Cervantes's and Menard's works, we have two different fictional characters, independently created, sharing the same set of properties. The puzzle is usually presented as an objection to Meinongian and neo-Meinongian theories (see also Voltolini, 2006, pp. 32–35; Voltolini, Kroon, 2016). In fact, given that Cervantes's and Menard's Don Quixote share the same properties, according to (neo)Meinongian theories there should be a single character, whereas the goal is precisely to distinguish them in some way. My view does not suffer from this objection. Under the assumption that Pierre Menard does not mean to refer to any other work, we cannot qualify his character as a new version of Don Quixote, no matter how many properties they have in common. Menard's Don Quixote is not linked to the network of files that is originated by <DON QUIXOTE, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*>. It is, indeed, an entirely new Don Quixote, which at best will produce an alternative network of indexed mental files.

[23] Of course, I am here describing the case of a subject who believes that Leopold Bloom is Ulysses. If we reject this identity, we simply do not connect the file on Leopold Bloom to the network. It is like the example of Gregory House and Sherlock Holmes that we discussed above. At most, we can say that the latter character is inspiered to the former, and that is all.

[24] One might wonder whether Dante's and Joyce's characters should be considered as two versions of the same character, since the related files are not directly linked to each other. The notion of networking is useful precisely because it allows us to account for a character appearing in several works, even if there is not a direct causal relationship between each single work. What matters is that the files are part of the same network, namely that, going up through the chain of vertical linkings, there is a file in common.

5. Mixed Cases: Fictional and Metafictional Perspectives Compared

We discussed about literary characters both at the fictional and at the metafictional level. As for the fictional level, we defer to the author's authority to determine the identity of literary characters. We said that two indexed files are internally linked when they refer to the same character according to a certain work of fiction. As regards the metafictional level, we proposed the notion of network between indexed files to account for identity problems in the passage from one text to another. We can now recall the dispute between Cervantes and Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda and see how to address this ambiguous case. Coherently with the position I have expressed, I argue that, at a metafictional level, Avellaneda's Don Quixote is as legitimate as Cervantes's one, since both the authors took as a model the story of 1605, in which the character of Don Quixote appeared for the first time. In terms of mental files, we have:

a) <DON QUIXOTE, *Don Quixote* $_{1605}$>

b) <<DON QUIXOTE, *Don Quixote* $_{1605}$> Avellaneda's *Second Part* $_{1614}$>
<<DON QUIXOTE, *Don Quixote* $_{1605}$> Cervantes's *Second Part* $_{1615}$>

The latter two files are vertically linked to <DON QUIXOTE, *Don Quixote* $_{1605}$> and are part of the same network of mental files. Therefore, it is not a case like Pierre Menard's. But this fact does not clash with what Cervantes claims in the *Preface* of 1615. Here, Evans's[25] distinction between conniving and non-conniving uses plays a crucial role. In fact, sentence:

7) Avellaneda's Don Quixote and Cervantes's Don Quixote are not the same fictional character.

may be either true or false. In its conniving use, as a fictional sentence uttered inside the fiction created by Cervantes, (7) is true because the author himself states it. But (7) is false, according to my perspective, if we interpret it in a non-conniving way, as a metafictional sentence.

These considerations allow me to say that identity (or non-identity) between two characters, as established by an author within a novel, does not necessarily reflect the situation at the level of network of indexed files. Let us recall our previous analysis on Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde:

[25] According to Evans (1982, pp. 365–366), the utterance of a sentence is conniving when the utterer is engaged in a practice of make-believe and the truth-values of the sentence are merely fictional. A non-conniving use is when the sentence is uttered with the intention to tell genuine truths that transcend the context of pretense. As Voltolini observes, non-conniving uses "are intended to enable people to speak about the fiction rather than within the fiction" (2006, p. 118).

5) Jekyll is Mr. Hyde.

Even if (5) is true inside the story, it does not guarantee that the relevant indexed files are actually vertically linked.[26] There may be a discrepancy between the identity of characters in the novel and the network of files at a cognitive level. We can say that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are two different characters that correspond to two distinct representations or indexed files. The figure of Hyde, after all, is more fascinating than Jekyll and certainly had more success than its good "twin". Why should we take them as a single character, when we can claim that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are two distinct characters that in the novel coincide with one?[27] Moreover, the identity of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, precisely because it is claimed inside the novel, appears to involve a fact concerning the fiction, and not a metafictional truth. As in Don Quixote's example, sentence expressed by (5) with a conniving use is not the same sentence expressed by (5) with a non-conniving use: in the first case, one utters a fictional sentence, in the second a metafictional one, and these sentences have different truth conditions since the context of evaluation changes.

6. Reply to Possible Objections

I want now to consider some objections that can be moved. One might ask: why do not we consider the idea that, beyond the various fictional works, there is a sort of essence that determines a particular character? For example, some nuclear properties that remain stable and make the character recognizable?

I think that the main reason to refuse such questions is the example of Pierre Menard mentioned above. However, there are still other considerations that can be done. As Voltolini points out (Voltolini, 2010, pp. 77–78), characters from different literary works never share the whole set of properties, no matter how many similarities they have. In this respect, Homer's Odysseus and Dante's Ulysses are not identical. One may propose that there is a sort of general character that subsists beyond all the single representations on Ulysses. So here is the question: is there a *general* character, i.e, a character not related to any particular story but which it is, so to say, the Ulysses in general? And if the answer is yes, how can we qualify this general character?

For me, the question has a negative answer if we understand it as a request to individuate a file with a label like "the Ulysses in general". Such file would be either too broad or too tight. It would be too broad if it should contain all pieces of information of all files on Ulysses, because much of this information would be

[26] Probably they are, but what I want to claim is that internal linking does not merge files. We still keep separate Jekyll's and Hyde's files.

[27] Suppose that there was a network for Jekyll and a network for Hyde, and then Stevenson decided to import the two characters as a single one in his novel. We would deal with a phenomenon of fusion. Superman and Clark Kent is a comparable example (Friend, 2014; Salis, 2013).

contradictory. It would be too tight if it should contain only the "essential" data of Ulysses, i.e., the information about a general Ulysses not belonging to any particular story. Since each author is free to interpret the characters of Ulysses as he or she likes, there are no properties that can truly be regarded as essential or nuclear. I can, for example, write a novel on Ulysses, taking inspiration from Homer's poems, in which the protagonist is not a Greek hero and has never travelled by sea (Joyce's book is indeed a proof of what I am saying). However, one can argue that, in order for my new Ulysses to be recognized as such, there must be some similarities between it and a pre-existent Ulysses.

The objection is sound, but which similarities must be considered relevant or essential? The set of properties that my Ulysses and Homer's Odysseus share is arbitrary, there is no essential property that I have to keep. The differences would be even greater if I would compare my character with all the other Ulysses in literature. I could arrive at the situation in which between my personal interpretation of Ulysses and that of another author there are no shared properties. And indeed, which properties are in common between, let us say, Joyce's Leopold Bloom and Homer's, Virgil's, Dante's, Tennyson's, Derek Walcott's characters, without considering Guido Gozzano's parody *Ulisse naufraga … a bordo d'un yacht* [Ulysses is shipwrecked … on board of a yacht]?

It could then be assumed that the *real* Ulysses must be individuated at the metafictional level, and precisely with the first mental file of the network, to which all other indexed files are directly or indirectly connected. This position does not seem so good. In fact, nothing guarantees that the first book in which a literary character appears is also the most culturally significant and cognitively relevant. For example, in the creation of *Dracula*, Bram Stoker was inspired by John Polidori's *The Vampire*. Our file about Stoker's character will then have the structure <<Vampire, *The Vampire*> *Dracula*>. Nevertheless, we do not refer to Polidori's novel, in most cases, when we talk or think about vampires, but to the one written by Bram Stoker. Our mental file <<Vampire, *The Vampire*> *Dracula*> has a more cognitive importance than <Vampire, *The Vampire*>, to which the first is vertically linked. Similarly, many people who never read the Greek poems will give a greater cognitive weight to Dante's Ulysses than to Homer's one. It makes little sense to wonder which is the *real* Ulysses, as it makes little sense to ask which is the *real* Roland, whether the one in *The Song of Roland*, or the one in *Orlando Innamorato*, or the one in *Orlando Furioso*. Each of us will grant his preference to a certain Roland, and maybe will have in mind, for instance, the specific figure described by Ariosto rather than the character in *Orlando Innamorato*, or in the *The Song of Roland*, but that does not mean that the file of Orlando Furioso has a general value, is the file of the real Orlando.

So, what does exist? There exists the continuity between a fiction on Ulysses to another, the chain of co-reference presumption that creates a network by means of which indexed files are embedded in our minds. From this network we should not expect to derive a single overall concept—an essence—of Ulysses.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I tackled the problem of identity of fictional characters from a cognitive point of view. Taking a cue from Recanati's work, I suggested that the presumption of co-reference is expressed through vertical linking between indexed files. Thus, when we use files with the intention to refer to a unique character, we link them within the same network. My idea of network differs from those already present in literature by the fact that networks arise not between regular files, but between files indexed to fictional stories. By means of this conceptual apparatus, we can put order among the various and *prima facie* conflicting intuitions we have about the identity of literary characters at the fictional as well as at the metafictional level. We account for the intuition that there are multiple manifestations of a literary character, each related to single story: in fact, there are as many indexed files as many representations of a character we know. We also address the intuition that there is a single fictional character that moves from one story to another: since files are embedded within the same network, all of them presuppose the same referent. And they would have, if there was one.

There still remain some issues that could not be addressed here and that are a stimulus to continue the research. For instance, the problem of how files can be shared inter-subjectively, a topic widely debated in the literature. Do networks of files only exist inside a subject's mind or they have a public dimension? Another topic concerns the notion of migration: the author's intention to import a character is certainly a condition for character identity across works, but, as said, other criteria may be taken into consideration. Finally, a more specific question concerning my work is how the notion of network can be used to address semantic issues. Now that we have a more complete account of how we represent fictional characters in our minds, we can move to further fields of investigation.

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