Happiness is Like This.
Fiction as a Repertoire of Indexical Predicates

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RESUMEN

En este artículo se defiende que lo que aprendemos de la ficción consiste en un repertorio de predicados indéxicos. En primer lugar, presento la noción de pensamiento singular y la de predicación indéxica. Argumento en segundo lugar que las obras de ficción soportan un tipo peculiar de pensamiento singular que deja espacio para la predicación indéxica En tercer, se muestra que las obras de ficción pueden ampliar significativamente nuestro repertorio de predicados indéxicos. Finalmente, sostengo en cuarto lugar que los predicados indéxicos nos permiten abordar con eficacia el problema de la paráfrasis que, según algunos estudiosos, afecta a la relación entre la ficción y el conocimiento.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *predicados indéxicos, pensamiento singular, archivos mentales, metáfora.*

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that what we primarily learn from fiction consists in a repertoire of indexical predicates. Firstly, I introduce the notion of singular thought and indexical predication. Secondly, I argue that works of fiction support a peculiar kind of singular thought that makes room for indexical predication. Thirdly, I show that works of fiction can significantly widen our repertoire of indexical predicates. Fourthly, I contend that an account of fiction in terms of indexical predicates allows us to address the problem of paraphrase, which according to some scholars afflicts the relation between fiction and knowledge.

KEYWORDS: *Indexical Predicates, Singular Thought, Mental Files, Paraphrase.*

I. INDEXICAL PREDICATION

Indexicals, as for instance 'I' or 'this', are expressions whose contribution to the meaning of a sentence depends upon the context in which the sentence is uttered. John Perry (1979) criticizes the claim that indexicals are nothing but convenient (though dispensable) linguistic devices for picking out items for which we accidentally lack context-independent expressions. He highlights cases in which substituting an

indexical in a sentence changes the thought expressed even if the item picked out remains the same. Noticing a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor and thinking 'a shopper is making a mess' is not the same as acknowledging that *I* am that shopper and thinking '*I am making a mess*'. Perry calls this phenomenon "the essential indexical" [Perry (1979), p. 3] and uses it to show that indexicals play an essential role in thought.

In the wake of Perry, Jane Heal shows that indexical thought involves not only referring expressions such as 'I' or 'this' but also "indexical predicates" [Heal (1997), p. 619] such as 'like this', 'thus' or 'in this way'. Such predicates allow us to discover and appreciate the richness and subtlety of the world, and its variety of aspects and features, in a manner that is precluded to thought that only resorts to non-indexical predicates.[1]

Consider the paradigmatic case of color. In order to buy curtains of a certain shade of red, we can show a sample of this color to the seller while saying: "The curtains that I want should have a color like this". In so doing, we designate a peculiar shade of red by referring to the sample.

Nelson Goodman characterizes a sample in general as a symbol that exemplifies a feature, i.e. a symbol that designates a feature by virtue of possessing it [cf. Goodman (1968), pp. 52-56]. John McDowell points out that samples allow us to designate features that could not be conceptualized otherwise, for instance when a speaker "exploits the presence of the sample" [McDowell (1994), p. 57] to designate a certain shade of color. In a similar vein, Heal observes, "As long as the shade is perceptually present and available for indexical identification then actions and judgements concerned with matching, harmonious contrast and so forth clearly can occur. They can occur even if the thinker lacks an accurate and individuating non-indexical representation of the colour, even if she has no name for it, and poor ability to recognise and match it in its absence. Her abilities with the colour when it is present are the result of a constant sensitive interplay between her and the object in which the colour is exhibited; there will be a kind of constant experimenting with the colour, through which its nature and connections will reveal themselves" [Heal (1997), p. 637].

In general, an indexical predicate designates a feature by pointing at a particular individual that exhibits that feature. In this sense, an indexical predicate is like a wand that points at an individual ('this') turning it into a predicate ('like this'). Indexical predication, so understood, requires a kind of thought that points at single individuals, namely singular thought. By pointing at singular individuals, we can construct not only indexical predicates concerning colors, but also a variety of other indexical predicates

concerning for instance moral and aesthetic features, or "ways of engaging in actions" [Stanley and Williamson (2001), p. 427].

Still, an indexical predicate can function only if we can point at the individual exhibiting the property expressed by the predicate. We can use the predicate 'like this' only if 'this' picks out an individual in thought. In fact, there are different sorts of relations that a subject can exploit in order to pick out individuals in thought, i.e. to refer to them. More specifically, one can exploit direct perceptual relations on the one hand, and mediated relations based on memory, testimony, communicative chains on the other hand. What matters for indexical predication is that the relation at work provides us with an access both to the individual ('this') and to its relevant features supporting the indexical predicate ('like this'). Shared memories, chronicles, historical narratives, portraits, photographs, audio and video recordings are all devices that allow us to exploit indexical predication ('like this') even if the individual ('this') which the predication relies on is not perceptually present to us in our immediate surroundings.

That being the case, we can wonder whether we might exploit also fictional individuals in order to construct indexical predicates. Still, in the case of fiction, there is a significant complication. The problem is not just that the individuals supporting indexical predication are not perceptually present to us in our immediate surroundings. The main problem is that such individuals are fictional, and therefore they do not exist. If we want to use fictional individuals as the constituents of indexical predicates, we should find a way to point at individuals that do not exist.

II. MENTAL FILES

Recent philosophical works on singular thought [cf. Jeshion (2010), Taylor (2010), Recanati (2012), Crane (2013)] have argued that we can entertain singular thoughts even about non-existing objects by virtue of the distinctive functioning of our minds. The idea is that singular thought requires instantiating a mental device, namely a mental file, which allows us to store information about a certain individual. Instantiating a mental file elicits the impression of picking out an individual in thought independently of the existence of this individual. If this individual really exists, then the singular thought is "referentially successful" or "objective" [Taylor (2010), p. 79]. In other words, the mental file picks out a real individual in the actual world. Yet, even if there is no individual to be

picked out in the actual world, the mental file keeps functioning thereby clustering information about a fictional individual.

A mental file of the latter kind is not objective but is "objectual" or "referentially fit" [Taylor (2010), p. 79]. It has a "form" that fits with reference, and therefore it can elicit a phenomenology of reference, though it lacks a proper "content" that ensures the success of the act of reference [Taylor (2010), p. 80]. In short, a mental file about a fictional individual does not successfully refer, and yet it purports to refer and provides us with an experience as of reference.

Interestingly, in practices of fiction appreciation the information stored in a mental file concerning a certain fictional individual is not arbitrarily established by the thinker, but depends on a real object. This object is not, of course, the fictional individual itself, but the work of fiction in which this fictional individual has its place (or, if you want to avoid ontological commitment to works of fiction, a particular replica of that work of fiction). Thus, mental files about fictional individuals store information that is determined by public objective sources, rather than arbitrarily established by the subjects of thought.

In this sense, mental files about fictional individuals, though not "successful" or "objective", are however "public or shared files – files shared by distinct individuals in a community" [Recanati (2012), p. 205]. A public mental file is not just a figment of the imagination. Rather, a public mental file involves what Geach calls "intentional identity": "we have intentional identity when a number of people [...] have attitudes with a common focus, whether or not there actually is something at that focus" [Geach (1967), p. 627]. The common focus of a public file is such that it commits all the members of a certain community to storing the same basic information into their files.

In the case we are interested in, the community is that of the recipients of a certain work of fiction. Each recipient, while enjoying this work, opens its own files about fictional individuals appearing in this work, and is committed to store in these files the same core information that is stored by the other recipients. Thus, we can share singular thoughts about fictional individuals, in spite of the fact that such individuals do not exist. We can all purport to refer to the same fictional individuals, and we can exploit such a public purported reference to carry out indexical predication.

More specifically, we can construct and use the predicate 'like this' in our communication practices even if 'this' is a fictional individual. We can do so inasmuch as we are all recipients of the same work of fiction, and

therefore, in enjoying that work, we all share our mental files about the fictional individuals that appear in it.[2]

In sum, we can distinguish two kinds of reference: successful reference, or 's-reference', on the one hand, and publicly shared purported reference, or 'p-reference', on the other hand. My point is that p-reference is sufficient for indexical predication. If we all deploy a mental file that purports to refer to the same individual, we can use this public file to construct an indexical predicate even if the individual to whom we purportedly refer does not exist.

Even in the basic cases of indexical predication through s-reference, it is the mental file, not the object referred to, that matters for the 'like this' predication. We could exploit the act of pointing at a red sample in order to designate a certain shade of red even in a "matrix scenario" in which the subjects of experience have a cognitive system that receives its inputs from and sends its outputs to an artificially-designed computer simulation of a world [see Chalmers (2005), p. 132]. On the one hand, in such a scenario, the act of pointing at a sample does not pick up a real sample and thus reveals itself to be nothing but a shared purported reference to a non-existing sample. On the other hand, in this very scenario, the subjects undergoing the simulation can still share the indexical predicate 'like this' since they share the same purported reference.

Likewise, we can exploit the act of pointing at a fictional individual in order to construct and share a certain indexical predicate. What ultimately grounds indexical predication is a shared mental file, regardless of the existence of the individuals to whom it aims at referring.

III. The Shades of a Concept

I argue that a crucial aspect of learning from fiction consists in learning new indexical predicates. In this sense, learning from fiction resembles more learning from a dictionary than learning from an encyclopedia. What we learn from dictionaries are not warranted beliefs but rather new terms that will possibly allow us to understand or to express new warranted beliefs. Likewise, what we learn from fiction is, in the first instance, a repertoire of indexical predicates, which will possibly allow us to characterize more effectively the world and our experience of the world.[3]

In fact, we can learn indexical predicates both by having ordinary experiences and by enjoying works of fiction. Yet indexical predicates

based on fictional individuals (henceforth: 'f-predicates') have, in principle, three advantages with respect to indexical predicates based on real individuals (henceforth: 'r-predicates'). First, f-predicates are more stable than r-predicates, since the features of fictional individuals are fixed, once and for all, by the works of fiction whereas real individuals undergo continuous changes, and their past states often are no longer accessible to us. Second, f-predicates cover a wider domain than r-predicates since they are not limited to what we can currently observe in the physical world; f-predicates allow us to characterize not only actual situations, but also possible scenarios. Third, f-predicates, unlike r-predicates, allow us to point at individuals and their features without any interaction with these individuals. This avoids interference that might alter the feature we aim at highlighting through indexical predication. For instance, pointing at a lonely real person in order to highlight its loneliness might alter this very loneliness, whereas this cannot happen if we point at a lonely fictional character. Fiction involves an absolute spatiotemporal detachment of the recipient from the fictional characters that can improve indexical predication. Karen Hanson points out the cognitive advantages of such a detachment in the case of film: "we view the subjects of film but are not viewed by them, and thus we are empowered in judgment. Persons with whom we live will openly contest our interpretations of them, but we have no social interaction with the persons we see on the screen. […] The perspective *we* have in viewing them is, as it were, the *only* perspective on them and on the events in which they are implicated. It is no wonder we feel assured in our judgments about them" [Hanson (1987), p. 395].

Fiction, so understood, becomes a laboratory of thought in which we can experiment with new indexical predicates. We can do so by purporting to refer to a fictional individual (a 'this') thereby considering the feature expressed by a predicate having the form 'like this'. It is worth noting that a fictional individual can be not only a person, but also an object, an event, a process, or even a "situation" understood as "some part of reality" [Recanati (1996), p. 459]. Indeed, by 'individual' I mean – following Peter Strawson – something that has its particular place in an (either actual or fictional) "unitary spatio-temporal framework, of one temporal and three spatial dimensions" [Strawson (1959), p. 38].

To sum up, what we primarily learn from fiction are not warranted beliefs but rather new predicates that we can use in our attempts to acquire warranted beliefs. Indeed, many predicates that we use in language are too coarse-grained for grasping the relevant features of certain phenomena. Consider for example terms such as 'love', 'friendship', 'happiness', 'virtue',

'justice', 'beauty', 'elegance', 'funniness', 'fear', 'joy', 'misery'. More generally, the linguistic terms that we usually employ to speak of domains such as ethics, aesthetics, or psychology are expressively limited, just as the linguistic terms we usually employ to speak of colors. As the mere word 'red' cannot grasp the peculiarity of a certain shade of red, so the mere word 'happiness' cannot grasp the peculiarity of a certain shade of happiness.

In the case of colors, we can address this issue by showing a certain sample while saying: "the shade of red I mean is like this". Likewise, in the case of happiness, we can point at a certain fictional individual while saying: "the shade of happiness I mean is like this". For instance, in his book *Pursuits of Happiness*, Stanley Cavell explores a peculiar shade of happiness, which he calls "remarriage" [Cavell (1959), p. 1], and he does so by pointing at certain fictional individuals and situations in Hollywood comedies while implicitly making this sort of claim: 'the shade of happiness I mean is like this'.

Noël Carroll explicitly exploits the analogy between shades of colors and shades of moral concepts. He does so when he argues that some works of fiction provide us with "a wheel of virtue" which allows us to explore a variety of shades or nuances of a certain virtue or vice, as well as the wheel of color allows us to explore the variety of shades or nuances of a certain color. For example, Dickens' *Great Expectations* allows us to explore certain shades of "the virtues of parenthood" and Forster's *Howard Ends* does the same for "the virtues of the imagination and of practicality" [Carroll (1973), p. 12].

My point is that such an exploration of shades or nuances of moral concepts is carried out by means of indexical predication. We can explore a certain shade or nuance of a given concept by pointing at a certain fictional individual thereby constructing the predicate 'like this'. As we can explore some chromatic shades by pointing at areas in the wheel of color, so we can explore some shades of a certain moral concept by pointing at certain characters in the "wheel of virtue" which is supplied by some works of fiction. As long as the shades of a concept are available for indexical identification through the purported reference to fictional individuals, there will be a constant experimenting with the concept, through which its nature and connections will reveal themselves.

It is worth noting that we can construct and use an indexical predicate only if we already possess the concept whose shades or nuances we aim to explore. Such a concept is needed in order to specify the relevant *likeness* that constitutes the indexical predicate expressed by the '*like* this'

formula. In fact, this requirement holds also in the paradigmatic case of colors. A piece of cloth can function as a sample of a certain shade of color only if, while pointing at this thing, we acknowledge that color – instead of, say, length – is the relevant feature on which to focus in looking at it. Likewise, a fictional individual allows us to construct an indexical predicate only if we acknowledge the relevant concept (for instance, happiness) on which to focus in order to grasp the likeness conveyed by the formula 'like this fictional individual'.[4]

In sum, works of fiction widen our capacity to describe and characterize the world by supplementing our dictionary with a variety of indexical predicates that significantly refine our ordinary terms and concepts. Still, we can effectively employ such predicates only if the fictional individuals that underlie them are part of a common ground in our community. A discourse containing the indexical predicate 'like this fictional individual' can be properly understood only if the hearers can deploy a mental file concerning this individual. Fictional individuals should be shared in order to function as constituents of indexical predicates. In fact, some of the most famous fictional characters in our culture are often used as constituents of indexical predicates. Ulysses allows us to express a certain shade of intelligence, Othello a certain shade of jealousy, Don Quixote a certain shade of naivety, Raskolnikov a certain shade of nihilism. That is because, in enjoying the works of fiction created by Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, or Dostoevsky, we have implicitly learned indexical predicates such as 'like Ulysses', 'like Don Quixote', 'like Othello', 'like Raskolnikov', and from then on we can use such predicates to effectively describe and characterize some relevant features of our actual world.

It is worth noting that proper names of fictional characters play the same role as indexicals inasmuch as they function as linguistic devices for singling out individuals in thought. Ever since a work of fiction implicitly or explicitly declares that the name of *this* individual is Othello, 'Othello' can be used as a linguistic device that purports to refer to that individual just as the indexical 'this' would have done. To borrow Putnam's expression, a proper name such as Othello possesses "an unnoticed indexical component" [Putnam (1973), p. 710]. In other words, we can conceive of the name 'Othello' as a label that is attached to a public mental file thereby allowing us to effectively recall this file. Thus, a predicate such as 'like Othello' functions as an indexical predicate inasmuch as it can be paraphrased in the following way: 'like this individual to whom the public mental file labeled 'Othello' purports to refer'.

IV. The Dilemma of Paraphrase

Recipients of works of fiction carry out tasks of identification and recognition of individuals that emulate the corresponding tasks which our ordinary experience relies on. For example, the task carried out by the spectator of a movie emulates her ordinary task of perceptual identification and recognition of individuals, and the task carried out by the reader of a novel emulates her ordinary task of identification and recognition of individuals referred to in oral or written communication. Recipients of works of fiction can effectively carry out such tasks because files deployed in engaging with fiction have a phenomenology of reference that is similar to that of files deployed in ordinary experience. Fiction provides us with frameworks in which to play the same sort of games of identification and recognition that we are used to play in our everyday experience. Thus, fiction offers us a repertoire of indexical predicates, which we can exploit by purporting to refer to a fictional individual ('this') and using it to express a predicate ('like this').

My point is that what we learn from fiction consists, in the first instance, in the capacity to understand and use such predicates. Then, works of fiction might also exploit such predicates to provide us with additional knowledge.[5] Indeed, some works of fiction seem to aim at providing us with knowledge by making claims about the actual world, more or less explicitly. Yet, also in these cases, indexical predication plays a key role, since such claims normally have indexical predicates among their basic constituents. More specifically, the main sort of claim that can be made by a work of fiction has the following structure: "in the *actual* world, something is like this", where 'this' purports to refer to some *fictional* individual or situation.

Highlighting the role of indexical predication as a bridge between fiction and knowledge provides us with a way of addressing a problem that seems to afflict the connection between fiction and knowledge, namely the problem that Cleanth Brooks calls the "heresy of paraphrase" [Brooks (1968), p. 172; see also Smith (2006), p. 40]. This expression emphasizes the impossibility to make explicit and share with other people what we allegedly learn from fiction: "When we consider the statement immersed in the poem, it presents itself to us, like the stick immersed in the pool of water, warped and bent. Indeed, whatever the statement, it will always show itself as deflected away from a positive, straightforward formulation" [Brooks (1968), p. 172]. The statement made by a work of fiction cannot be made explicit and communicated; in this sense, it

resembles a stick that cannot be extracted from the pool of water in which it is immersed.

Given the heresy of paraphrase, if we assume that a work of fiction can provide us with some knowledge about the actual world, then we seem forced to face the two horns of a dilemma. The heresy of paraphrase leads us to the "an insoluble dilemma of paraphrase" [Livingston (2006), p. 15]. This dilemma can be stated as follows. On the first horn, the knowledge supplied by a work of fiction can be paraphrased by some claims about the actual world, and therefore attending to the work of fiction is just a thorny way to acquire knowledge that can be more effectively acquired by simply focusing on these claims. On the second horn, if a work of fiction provides us with some insights about the actual world that cannot be paraphrased, then it is questionable whether such insights can aspire to the condition of knowledge, given that we seem to lack a way of assessing them by sharing them with other subjects. Going back to Brooks' metaphor, either we try to extract the stick from the pool with poor results (first horn of the dilemma) or we leave the stick in the pool thereby giving up benefiting from it (second horn of the dilemma).[6]

I argue that an account of fiction as a repertoire of indexical predicates may provide us with a way out of the dilemma of paraphrase. We can accept that the insights supplied by the work of fiction should be paraphrased in order to aspire to the condition of knowledge, and yet this paraphrase should include indexical predicates that purport to refer to a fictional individual or situation. Therefore, even if we resort to a paraphrase, the fiction is not dispensable, since this very paraphrase resorts to indexical predicates that are rooted in the fiction. Finally, we are not forced to choose one of the two horns of the dilemma of paraphrase, which reveals itself to be a false dilemma. Even if we refuse to choose the first horn, which would force us to give up the peculiarity of fiction, we are not forced to choose the second horn, which would force us to give up the possibility of a paraphrase. Indexical predication allows us to let Brooks' stick immersed in the pool of water and nevertheless benefit from it.

The point is that, in order to paraphrase the peculiar knowledge that we can acquire from fiction, we should resort to indexical predicates that depend on fiction, and therefore the paraphrase itself essentially depends on fiction. Consider, for instance, Robert Bresson's film *Au hazard Balthazar*. One might try to paraphrase the claim implicitly made by the film. Surely, this paraphrase requires an interpretation of the work, but this happens also in the case of many philosophical works that we nevertheless treat as proper candidates to the condition of knowledge. Thus, the need

for an interpretation does not seem to rule out the possibility that a work of fiction may count as a source of knowledge.

Thus, let us consider the following paraphrase of the claim supposedly made by *Au hazard Balthazar*: 'life is nothing but to be born, to have a sensitive body, to experience pleasurable or painful feelings, to pass through a series of random events and encounters, and finally to die'. This paraphrase falls prey to the first horn of the dilemma, since there is no need to watch a film lasting one hour and a half in order to grasp a view of life that we can equally grasp by reading a few lines sentence. Yet, I argue, the proper paraphrase for this film is not the one above, but rather the following: 'life is nothing but to be born like Balthazar is, to have a sensitive body like Balthazar has, to experience pleasurable and painful feelings like Balthazar does, to go through a series of random events and encounters like Balthazar does, and finally to die like Balthazar does'. The cognitive relevance of *Au hazard Balthazar* is not to be found in a general sentence on what life is. Instead, this relevance consists in pointing at a fictional living being, a donkey called 'Balthazar', thereby highlighting what the components of a life are and therefore what life as a whole is. Removing the 'like Balthazar' clauses from the paraphrase amounts to depriving the film's claim about life of its perspicacity and subtlety.

In sum, we should not content ourselves with individuating the claim of a work of fiction such as *Au hazard Balthazar* by means of a sentence that avoids indexical expressions, namely a sentence such as 'life is nothing but a series of accidental meaningless events'. We should rather focus on a sentence such as: 'life is like this, life is Balthazaresque'. Understanding the latter sentence, unlike understanding the former, requires being (or at least having been) in touch with the work of fiction. This is analogous to understanding the sentence 'my favorite shade of red is like this', which requires being in touch with the sample to which the speaker refers.

The paraphrase 'life is like this, life is Balthazaresque', by virtue of its containing an indexical predicate, may be further explained and clarified by drawing attention to particular features or parts of the work of fiction, and their relations to each other in that work. Here we come to the more sophisticated paraphrase 'life is nothing but to be born like Balthazar is, to have a sensitive body like Balthazar has, to experience pleasurable and painful feelings like Balthazar does, to go through a series of random events and encounters like Balthazar does, and finally to die like Balthazar does'. In this paraphrase, the indexical predicate 'Balthazaresque' is clarified by drawing attention to particular features of Balthazar's fictional life in order to clarify the notion of life in general. For instance, the

expression 'to be born like Balthazar is' does not simply mean the platitude that life begins with birth. Instead, this expression points at a peculiar way of being born, a Balthazaresque birth surrounded by a festive flock in an atmosphere of hope and endearment, thereby highlighting the peculiar contribution of birth to the shape of a whole life.

This suggests a way of approaching works of fiction in search of their cognitive value. The idea is to give up the arduous task of paraphrasing the work's claim by translating it into a sentence that makes no reference to the work itself. As Brooks would put it, we cannot extract the stick out of the pool of water in which it is immersed. Yet, this does not mean giving up the task of paraphrasing the work's claim. Indexical predication provides us with a different mean to the same end. We can still try to paraphrase the claim of a work of fiction by drawing attention to particular features or parts of it, in order to discover, explore, and clarify the indexical predicates that constitute its claim.

Ultimately, fiction is not just a funny and thorny way of acquiring knowledge that we might learn in more serious and effective ways. Inasmuch as the sharing of such knowledge requires a paraphrase that in turn requires indexical predicates grounded in fiction, the experience of fiction reveals itself as an indispensable component of the knowledge acquired. Fiction is something more than a ladder that we can throw away after climbing up on it.[7]

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NOTES

[1] A foreshadowing of the notion of indexical predication can be found in this passage of Wittgenstein's *Brown Book*: "'Words can't exactly describe it', one sometimes says. And yet one feels that what one calls the expression of the face is something that can be detached from the drawing of the face. It is as though we could say: 'This face has a particular expression: namely this' (pointing to something). But if I had to point to anything in this place it would have to be the drawing I am looking at" [Wittgenstein (1958), p. 162].
[2] I owe to an anonymous referee the observation that mental files concerning other nonexistent yet nonfictional individuals, namely mythical individuals (for example Vulcan), are also shared. Thus, in principle, also mythical

individuals such as Vulcan might support indexical predication. Yet, in fact, fictional characters are usually more apt than mythical individuals to support indexical predication since the former are usually much more detailed and rich of features than the latter.

³ John Gibson (2008) and Jukka Mikkonen (2015) call "neo-cognitivist" the approaches that treat the cognitive value of fiction in terms of "understanding" rather than in terms of warranted beliefs. Mikkonen mentions the works of Catherine Z. Elgin (1993) and Eileen John (1998) as forerunners of neo-cognitivist approaches. The approach I am proposing can be understood as a neo-cognitivist approach that exploits the notion of indexical predication in order to clarify the "understating" provided by works of fiction.

⁴ I owe to an anonymous referee the observation that indexical predication is affected by the same sort of "qua problem" that affects singular reference. Devitt (1981) calls "qua problem" the fact that to fix the reference of a term by an act of demonstration requires knowing *what kind of* object we are pointing at. As suggested by the anonymous referee, an anticipation of Devitt's point can be found in this passage from Bolzano: "pointing and saying or thinking 'this' does not suffice to fix the reference. I remedy this indeterminacy if I determine through a general noun the species of thing to which the intended object belongs, i.e. if I indicate that particular species, of which there are not several at the indicated location and time. Thus, instead of 'this thing' I say 'this leaf,' 'this colour,' etc. […] This method can be used to designate pure intuitions." [Bolzano (1837), § 75].

⁵ I owe the insight that fiction can provide us with knowledge involving indexicals to two talks which I have had the chance to attend. The first was 'The Cognitive Value of Literature', given by Gregory Currie and Anna Ichino at the University of Sheffield on July 18ᵗʰ 2013. The second was 'Littérature et connaissance pratique', given by Pascal Engel at the Collège de France on March 25ᵗʰ 2015. Currie and Ichino pointed out that fiction can provide us with statements such as "love is irrational in this way" (pointing to Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*) or "war is more probable in this way" (pointing to Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*). Likewise, Engel highlighted that fiction can provide us with statements such as "Here is a way of being slothful" (pointing to Goncharov's *Oblomov*) or "Here is a way of being stupid" (pointing to Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*).

⁶ The second horn of the dilemma exposes the alleged cognitive value of fiction to the allegations of ineffability that have been made, for instance, by Hilary Putnam (1978) and by Peter Lamarque (1997).

⁷ Thanks to Filippo Contesi and the two anonymous referees for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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