FICTION, NON-FACTUALS, AND THE PRINCIPLE OF MINIMAL DEPARTURE *

MARIE-LAURE RYAN

Fiction is commonly viewed as imaginative discourse, or as discourse concerning an alternate possible world. The problem with such definitions is that they cannot distinguish fiction from counterfactual statements, or from the reports of dreams, wishes and fantasies which occur in the context of natural discourse. This paper attempts to capture the difference, as well as the similarities, between fiction and other language uses involving statements about non-existing worlds by comparing their respective behavior in the light of an interpretive principle which will be referred to as the "principle of minimal departure". This principle states that whenever we interpret a message concerning an alternate world, we reconstrue this world as being the closest possible to the reality we know. In the non-factuals of natural discourse the referents of the pronouns *I* and *you* are reconstrued as retaining the personality of the actual speaker as fully as possible, but in fiction they are immune to the principle of minimal departure.

Most of us would probably agree that a statement like (1a), when uttered by a story-teller, belongs to the category fiction, while a statement like (1b), when uttered by a historian, does not:

(1a) Once upon a time there was a king with three daughters.
(1b) George Washington was born in 1732.

In these two cases the distinction is clear, but there is a whole range of discourse phenomena which seem to fall halfway between fiction and non-fiction. Consider these examples:

(1c) Imagine that I have a race with a tortoise (a philosopher trying to make a point).
(1d) Last night I dreamed that I had caught a wild horse and named it 'Hurricane'.
(1e) If I had been Richard Nixon, I would have burned the tapes.

(1f) I'm the fuzzy green monster, and I'm gonna eat you (a father playing with a child).

(1g) I am convinced that the soul is immortal (Socrates, in one of Plato's dialogues).

(1h) Stupid weed, are you going to die on me? (A plant lover to his philodendron.)

Defining the similarities and differences between these examples, and elaborating criteria for their classification, will be the purpose of the present paper.

Most literary theorists view fiction as imaginative discourse, concerning a non-existent, *i.e.* alternate world [1], and lacking a referent in the actual world. Typical of this position is the definition given by Gray (1975 : 117): "A fiction is a statement that refers to a made up event, an event that has been invented or feigned rather than having actually happened". This sort of definition is inadequate for two reasons. First, if we view fiction as discourse concerning invented events, we will be unable to account for the presence in fictional works of statements describing accurately real world states of affairs, for instance "On the twenty-ninth of May [1812] Napoleon left Dresden", a sentence which appears in Tolstoy's historical novel *War and Peace*. And second, the above definition fails to make a distinction between fiction on one hand, and other types of utterances concerning alternate worlds [2], such as reports of dreams ((1d) above), philosophical examples (1c), and counterfactuals (1e). (From now on, I shall refer globally to the class comprising (1c), (1d) and (1e) as *non-factuals*.) If uttering fictional discourse were the same communicative act as making non-factual statements, it would be impossible to explain the difference between a non-factual uttered in the context of a natural conversation, and a non-factual appearing in the context of a novel. An adequate theory of fiction should account for the possibility of combining fictionality with non-factuality, and it should therefore provide systematic criteria for distinguishing these two categories.

I

In order to capture both the differences and similarities between fiction and non-factuals. I propose to compare their respective behavior in the light of an interpre-

[1] This world may be called an alternate *possible* world, if by this one understands mentally, and not materially possible. The worlds created by the human imagination may break the laws of nature, and it remains to be seen to which extent they may also break the laws of logic. (Can the members of some imaginary world 'square the circle'? Can imaginary worlds contain contradictions?) If one accepts the principle of unlimited imagination, everything imaginable and expressible by a well-formed proposition will be true of at least one world, and false of at least one other. Since it does not allow propositions to be true of all worlds, nor to be false of them all, this concept of possible world cannot be used to define the modal operators of necessity and possibility. It differs in this respect from the related notion used in modal logic.

[2] Throughout this paper, I shall assume that a world is an alternate to the real world when at least one proposition receives a different truth value in this world and in reality. (See, however, the following discussion of Plato's dialogues for a possible restriction of this assumption.)

tive principle to which I shall refer as "the principle of minimal departure". This principle derives from the work of David Lewis on truth conditions for counterfactuals and for descriptive or interpretive statements concerning fictional discourse. The logical characteristic of counterfactuals is that their global truth value cannot be computed on the basis of the individual truth value of their antecedent and consequent. A counterfactual with a false antecedent and a false consequent may be false, like (2a), or true, like (2b). And conversely, a counterfactual with a false antecedent and a true consequent (what Reichenbach (1976) calls a counterfactual of non-interference) may be false, like (2c), or true, like (2d). (The truth value of the antecedent and consequent is of course assessed for the actual world. By virtue of the principle mentioned in footnote 1, these proposition are automatically true in the alternate world which the statement creates.)

(2) If Nixon had not tried to cover up the Watergate break-in (F)
   (a) He would still be President today (F)   F
   (b) He would not have resigned (F)   T
   (c) He would have resigned anyway (T)   F
   (d) He would not be President today anyway (T)   T

To determine the truth value of counterfactuals, Lewis proposes to take into consideration the notion of relative similarity between possible worlds. His analysis (outlined in Lewis 1973) can be presented as follows:

There is a world *a* where the antecedent holds and the consequent holds.
There is a world *b* where the antecedent holds, but the consequent does not.
If world a differs less than world b from the real world, the counterfactual is true. If world b differs less, the counterfactual is false.

We may then say that counterfactuals yield different, though related messages in the real and in their own alternate world. In the world it creates, a counterfactual like (2b) means "Nixon has not tried to cover up the Watergate break-in, and Nixon has not resigned". In our world it means: "The world where Nixon does not try to cover up the Watergate break-in and does not resign in closer to reality than the world where Nixon does not try to cover up the Watergate break-in and resigns anyway".

Let us now turn to the case of the truth value of statements describing or interpreting fictional discourse. Neither the proposition "Sherlock Holmes was a ladies' man" nor "Sherlock Holmes did not care for women" is asserted in the Sherlock Holmes stories, but most readers will agree that the second is accurate while the first one is not. To assess the truth value of this type of statement, Lewis (1978) proposes an analysis which comes very close to his treatment of counterfactuals. In order to stress its similarity with the truth condition relating to counterfactuals, I will reformulate it in the following way:

There is a possible world *a* where the facts told in fiction *f* hold, and where the
interpretive/descriptive statement *p* is true.
There is a possible world *b* where the same facts are true, but where *p* is false.
If world *a* comes closer to the real world than world *b*, *p* is true. Otherwise, *p* is
false.

(Lewis would then say that *p* is respectively true or false *in the real world*, but in
order to be true or false in the real world, *p* must have the same truth value in the
fictional world. More precisely, the proposition 'in fiction *f*, *p*' is true in reality if
and only if its component *p* is true in the world of fiction *f*.)

According to this analysis, we can say that the proposition "Sherlock Holmes
does (did?) not care for women" is true of the Sherlock Holmes stories, and with
the proper operator, of the real world, because it would take a greater revision of
our ideas of human psychology to say that he loves women than to say that he does
not.

The similarity of the two analyses suggests that both counterfactuals and fiction
are subject to what I have called above the "principle of minimal departure". This
principle states that we reconstrue the world of a fiction and of a counterfactual as
being the closest possible to the reality we know. This means that we will project
upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world, and that
we will make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid. For instance, if some-
body says: "If horses had wings they would be able to fly", we reconstrue an
animal presenting all the properties of real horses, but which, in addition, has wings
and is able to fly. We perform the same operation when we read in a fairy tale
about a flying horse, when a child tells us "Last night I dreamed about a flying
horse", and when a poet writes a sonnet about riding the flying horse of imagina-
tion. The principle of minimal departure even extends to propositions embedded
under what linguists call 'non-factive predicates', *i.e.* predicates of mental opera-
tions which do not presuppose the factual existence of the objects of these opera-
tions. (In this category are *believe, think,* and *say,* as opposed to *realize, know,* and
be aware of.) A sentence such as "John believes that horses have wings and are able
to fly" normally means to the hearer that the object of John's belief resembles real
world horses on all counts, except for the properties of having wings and being able
to fly.

It is by virtue of the principle of minimal departure that hearers are able to form
reasonably comprehensive representations of the foreign worlds created through
discourse, even though the verbal description of these worlds is always incomplete.
Without the principle, interpretation of verbal messages referring to private mental
or non-existent worlds would be limited to the extraction of semantic entailments.
The reader of a novel containing the sentence "Three hours after the snake bit her,
Anthony's mistress was dead" would be allowed to reconstrue the proposition 'a
woman died' but not to draw the pragmatic inference 'the snake's bite caused the
woman to die'.

The principle of minimal departure applies to all statements concerning alternate possible words, but its scope differs in the case of fiction and of non-factuals. The difference appears whenever first or second person pronouns are involved in a proposition. If somebody says: "If I had been Richard Nixon I would have burned the tapes", the referent of the pronoun *I* is reconstrued by the hearer as retaining the personality of the speaker as fully as possible. The hearer will imagine an individual with the speaker's fundamental identity, and most of his accidental properties, but who happens to be placed in the same situation as Nixon was during the Watergate affair. If the referent of the pronoun *I* were reconstrued as presenting the complete identity and personality of Richard Nixon, this *I* would have no choice but to act like the real Richard Nixon did during the Watergate affair, and the statement would be nonsense. The same procedure applies to the referents of second person pronouns. When somebody says: "If you were Richard Nixon", he speaks about a world where the hearer retains his basic identity, but acquires some different non-essential properties [3]. The pronouns *I* and *you* are treated in the

[3] To account for the possibility of using non-factuals with proper names, or with first and second person pronouns, we must accept the idea that every individual possesses counterparts in alternate possible worlds. This counterpart relation has been viewed in two ways by modal logicians. Some (Carnap, Kripke, Hintikka) "have proposed interpretations of quantified modal logic in which one thing is allowed to be in several worlds" (Lewis 1968: 115). Adherents to this positions would say that "[individuals are] in several works in which [they have] somewhat different properties, and somewhat different things happen to [them]" (1968: 114). The other position, defended by Lewis, is that individuals are members of only one world, but that they are linked by counterpart relations to individuals in other possible worlds. Lewis conceives this relation as a "substitute for identity between things in different worlds" (1968: 114). The first position can be represented graphically by fig. A, and the second by fig. B. Whether we con-

A   B
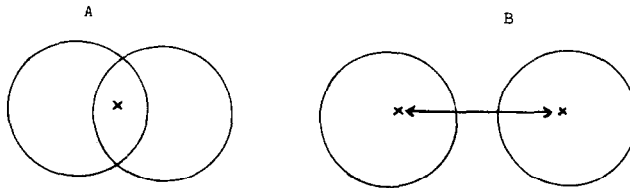
ceive transworld relations on model A or B, individuals inhabiting different worlds will be considered to be counterparts of each other if the already known member of the pair is used as model for the reconstruction of the other. Both approaches seem to presuppose a distinction between essential and accidental properties. A dog called Napoleon in a novel or a non-factual statement could not count as a counterpart of the emperor, because it lacks the essential property of being human. We can hardly complete the expression "If Napoleon had been a dog" in a meaningful way, and a novelist could hardly convince his readers that in the world of his novel, the emperor is a dog. But if only accidental properties are altered, the lines of transworld identity (or, for Lewis, the counterpart relation) will not be affected. We may complete the expression "If Napoleon" with any proposition that can be made of a human being (even with ". . . had been a woman"), as long as it does not entail "If Napoleon had not been himself", which is a contradiction.

same way in reports of dreams, of acts of imagination, of wishes, fantasies, and in philosophical examples. This extension of the principles of minimal departure to the referents of first and second person pronouns explains why we can express our personal opinion by means of non-factual statements. We may indeed say that, with the possible exception of reports of dreams and fantasies, non-factual statements only create alternate possible worlds in order to express propositions concerning the real world.

Let us now consider what would happen if the referents of first and second person pronouns fell under the scope of the principle of minimal departure in the case of fiction. If a certain John Smith wrote a tale narrated by a gnome, the reader would imagine a gnome corresponding as much as possible to the real John Smith, as he does when John Smith says: "If I were a gnome". Or to take a real example: in the novel *Jane Eyre,* which is narrated in the first person, Charlotte Brontë would project herself in the role of a governess, and through her novel, she would be telling us how she would have felt and behaved if she had met a Mr. Rochester. Such an identification of an author with its fictional speaker is of course possible, at least indirectly, but one should keep in mind that authors can project themselves into any character, not just into the referents of first-person pronouns. Even when an author identifies himself with a first-person narrator, the bounds between author and narrator are very different from those linking the speaker of a non-factual to the referent of first-person pronouns. If the pronouns *I* and *you* fell under the scope of the principle of minimal departure in the case of fiction, narrators would be the direct spokesmen of the author, and narratees would always be the counterparts of the reader. We would then have a foolproof procedure at our disposal for determining the author's personal position, and fiction would lose most of the uncertainty that makes its reading such a challenging activity.

That individuals inhabiting different worlds and possessing somewhat different properties can be referred to by means of the same name, has important implication for the theory of names. If we want to account for this fact, we must reject the thesis that proper names stand for clusters of descriptions (a position defended by Frege and Wittgenstein, and refined by Searle), and we must endorse instead what is known in the literature as the "causal theory of names" (proposed in Kripke 1972; see Pavel 1979 for its application to the problems of fiction). According to this theory, names are "rigid designators" attached to certain objects and referring to them regardless of the changes in properties these objects might undergo. The case of first and second person pronouns in non-factuals can be assimilated to that of proper names if we view them as the names through which speakers must refer to themselves and to their addressee. The causal theory of names encounters a slight difficulty, however, in the case of propositions of the type "If I had been Richard Nixon". To avoid the paraphrase "If I had been the person referred to as Richard Nixon", which entails the contradiction "If I had not been myself", we must interpret this expression non-literally, as an idiom standing for "If I had had some of the accidental properties which describe the individual referred to as Richard Nixon".

II

The difference in the behavior of fiction and non-factuals with respect to the referents of first and second person pronouns suggests that fiction is the product of a radically distinct mental activity [4]. I will define this activity as *impersonating* or *pretending to be somebody else.* There is a fundamental difference between projecting oneself in an imaginary situation in which one takes over some different properties, as is the case in non-factuals, and adopting a radically foreign identity, as is the case in fiction. If I project myself in a world where I acquire some of the properties describing the real-world Richard Nixon, I take responsibility for what I say and do in this situation. I am implicitly committing myself to acting in the same way if the imaginary situation becomes reality. But if I impersonate Richard Nixon on a stage, as part of a game, or through the act of writing a pastiche of the Watergate tapes, I will completely relinquish my former personality, and I will take no responsibility for what I say and do during the act of impersonation.

There are two ways to tell whether or not an utterance involves an act of impersonation. First, impersonation is taking place when the text asserts or entails "I am so-and-so", or "I have such-and-such property", and these statements do not describe the actual speaker. (The hearer must be aware of this fact, since impersonation is a game involving no attempt to deceive the audience.) This first test applies to the case of personal fiction, *i.e.* to the so-called 'first-person narration', where the identity of the impersonated or substitute speaker is specified through a proper name and/or a cluster of descriptions. When, on the other hand, the speaker remains anonymous — as is the case in what literary critic commonly call 'third-person narration' — the clue that the textual utterance act involves an act of impersonation is that it asserts or entails propositions which the actual speaker does not hold to be true, and does not want to be taken as such. Consider for instance the case of Kafka's novel *The Trial.* In this fiction, the real author simply pretends to be somebody who tells as fact the story of Joseph K. We know only one thing of this substitute speaker: that he is not Kafka himself. The reason he cannot be Kafka, is that he uses sentences with presuppose the real world existence of Joseph K., for instance the opening sentence: "Someone must have traduced Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning". Since Kafka does not believe that K. is a member of the actual world, this utterance must be attributed to an impersonated speaker.

But how do we know that the sentence "Someone must have traduced Joseph K." entails the actual existence of K.? Because it contains no explicit formal marker of irreality. By explicit formal marker I mean something like the predicates *dream*

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[4] Another type of statements involving no lines of identity between the referents of first and second person pronouns, and the actual speaker and hearer, are metalinguistic statements, *i.e.* statements whose semantic representation includes the element '*x* . . . is a linguistic unit'. This class of statements includes direct quotations and linguistic examples.

and *imagine*, or the conjuction *if* with the conditional mode. These explicit formal markers of irreality should be contrasted with implicit ones, such as the formula *once upon a time*. Fiction may contain implicit markers of irreality, but no explicit ones.

When the impersonated speaker of a fiction describes what is for the reader an alternate possible world, he uses linguistic forms which real world members could use when describing a real situation. This means that fictional speakers, whether anonymous or personal, *are themselves members* of the world they describe. This situation contrasts with that of non-factuals, since in non-factuals, the speaker describes an alternate possible world by means of sentences containing explicit formal markers of irreality, and representing consequently the point of view of a member of the actual world.

With a definition of fiction as the result of an act of impersonation, the difference between factual, non-factual, and fictional statements can be represented as shown by the figures below. In factual statements (fig. 1a), the speaker describes the real world from the viewpoint of a member of the real world, *i.e.* from an inside point of view. In non-factual (fig. 1b), he decribes an alternate world from the viewpoint of the real world, *i.e.* from an outside point of view. In factual fiction (fig. 1c), the speaker impersonates a member of a certain world who describes this world from an inside point of view. (See below for a discussion of the possible relationships between the worlds of the real and of the impersonated speaker.) By combining fig. 1b with fig. 1c, we can represent the case of fictional non-factuals (fig. 1d). An example would be Jane Eyre saying: "If Mr. Rochester had not married me we would have both been very lonesome". Fig. 1e, finally, represents the case of fiction within fiction, or of *recurrent impersonation*. In fiction within fiction, the real speaker impersonates a speaker who in turn tells a story as fiction, and therefore performs an act of impersonation. This case is illustrated by all framed narrations, *e.g. The Arabian Nights* and *The Decameron*.

If fiction is the result of an act of impersonation, the adjective fictional will apply to a particular way of speaking/writing, and not to a mode of existence inherent to certain entities [5]. The present analysis thus renders superfluous the notion of 'fictional object', which has been at the center of a number of recent investigations (see van Inwagen 1977; Howell 1979; Woods 1978; Routley 1979; *etc.*). As members of alternate worlds who lack a counterpart in the actual world, literary characters such as Sherlock Holmes and Emma Bovary are not intrinsically fictional entities, but simply unreal ones. (I call an object x unreal when the actual world is not a member of the set of worlds for which the proposition 'x exists' takes the value true. It should be remembered that real objects can be members of, or have counterparts in unreal worlds as well.) From the viewpoint of the actual world, Sherlock Holmes and Emma Bovary present the same mode of existence as

[5] The term 'fictional world', as used in this paper (see below) should be understood as "world spoken about through fictional discourse".
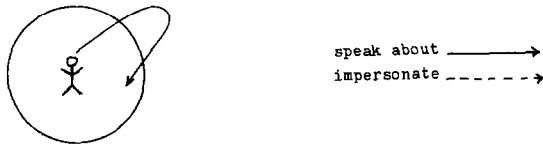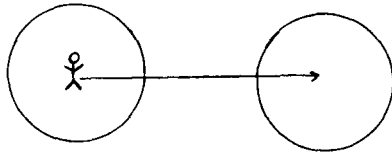
speak about ⎯⎯⎯⎯⟶
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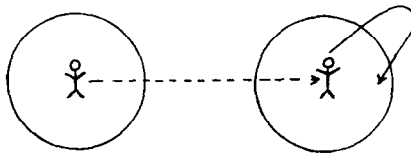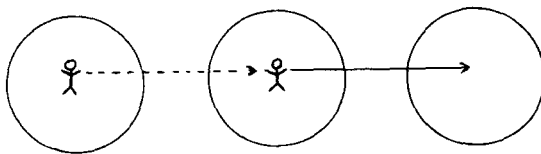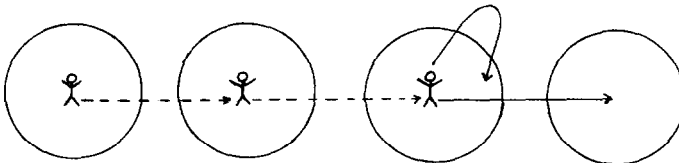
Fig. 1a.

Fig. 1b.

Fig. 1c.

Fig. 1d.

Fig. 1e.

the entity referred to as 'Hurricane' in the non-factual, non-fictional statement (1d).
My intent in saying that literary characters are not intrinsically fictional is not to
deny the fact that they came into being through fictional discourse, but simply to
point out that not all discourse referring to them satisfies the present definition of
fictional expression. When a literary critic writes: "Emma Bovary is a victim of
provincial bourgeois society", he does not perform an act of impersonation. While
it is true that the sentence contains no formal marker of irreality, and could there-
fore be part of Flaubert's novel, it is also true that the critic does not pretend to be
the narrator who tells as fact the life story of Emma Bovary. Once replaced in the
context of a critical essay, the above sentence does indeed fall under the scope of
an operator indicating the non-actuality of the world it refers to. This operator may
be present in the title, in a previous sentence, or it may be simply implied by the
genre of the text (that of a critical essay). Insofar as it is dominated by an implicit
or explicit operator of the type 'in the world created by Flaubert's novel', the
utterance of the critic is a non-factual, corresponding to the situation represented
in fig. 1b. If unreal creatures can be evoked by means of non-fictional discourse,
the example of Napoleon in *War and Peace* illustrates the opposite situation, that
of a real entity spoken about fictionally.

III

The preceding characterization of fictional discourse presents important similarities
with the account given by Searle (1975). Basically, Searle claims that fiction is the
product of pretending to be somebody else. But his account differs from mine in
the case of anonymous fiction. While my position is that the actual speaker
pretends to be a non-identified speaker, Searle does not resort to the notion of sub-
stitute speaker. In his analysis, the author of anonymous fiction does not pretend
to be somebody else, but simply to accomplish speech acts. This amounts to com-
paring personal fiction to the act of pretending to be Richard Nixon, and anony-
mous fiction to the act of pretending to be sick. But when an individual pretends
to be sick, he retains his basic identity for the witnesses of the act of impersona-
tiom. Unlike the present account, Searle's analysis thus replaces the implied speaker
of anonymous fiction under the scope of the principle of minimal departure.

Another crucial difference between Searle's position and the present proposal
concerns the status of sentences referring to members of the actual world in the
framework of a fiction. (*Cf.* the above example: "On the twenty-ninth of May
Napoleon left Dresden".) Searle would say that when an author speaks about
invented characters, he pretends to refer to them, but when he speaks about real
world entities, he performs the act of referring in a serious manner. If he reports
inaccurate facts about these entities, he will then be guilty of error. The Tolstoy of
War and Peace can say whatever he wants about Natasha, who is an invented
character, but he must respect the historical facts when he writes about Napoleon.

Consequently, the novel *War and Peace* is a patchwork of serious statements spoken by the author, and of fictional statements spoken by the substitute speaker (or in Searle's account of anonymous fiction, of fictional statements which the author simply pretends to utter). Searle's proposal runs into serious difficulties, however, in the case of personal fiction. Take for instance the case of the Sherlock Holmes stories. When the text refers to Sherlock Holmes, Searle would say that Conan Doyle pretends to be Dr. Watson, but when the text refers to London, he would say that Conan Doyle speaks directly as Conan Doyle. One wonders then what happens to Dr. Watson when the text refers to London. One wonders also who could be the speaker of the sentence "Sherlock Holmes lived in London". If we attribute the reference to London to Conan Doyle and the reference to Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson, the unity of the speech act will be broken up. But the postulate underlying Searle's speech act theory is precisely that speech are the most basic unit of communication. If the unity of the speech act of asserting that Holmes lived in London is to be preserved, we must attribute both references to the same speaker, namely to Dr. Watson. By analogy, we must assume that the anonymous speaker of *War and Peace* is able to refer to both Natasha and Napoleon. Contrary to Searle's claim, this speaker is under no strict obligation to report exclusively the historical truth about Napoleon. Just as we can imagine Napoleon as a member of an alternate world, for instance by building a counterfactual around his name, an author can write a fiction in which the experor does not die on St. Helen, but escapes to New Orleans [6]. (This has actually been done by the German playwright Georg Kaiser.)

The reason for Searle's difficulties when he deals with fictional statements concerning members of the actual world is that he does not use the notion of alternate world. For him, either an author speaks about non-real entities, and he pretends to refer to them, or he speaks about the real world, and he refers seriously. By combining the notion of impersonation with the notion of alternate world, and by assuming that alternate worlds may present various degrees of overlap with the real world, we can avoid the difficulties of Searle's analysis. The substitute speaker of *War and Peace* can refer to both Napoleon and Natasha, because both are members of the same fictional world. The world of *War and Peace* resembles the real world

[6] At most one could invoke a kind of 'rule of sportmanship', through which the authors of fictions would be morally required to respect the historical truth on little known subject matters. The reason for this moral committment is that many readers, inverting the principle of minimal departure, construe their representation or reality for these domains in which they lack information as being the closest possible to the world of a certain fiction. Don Quixote and Emma Bovary are famous examples of this tendency to invert the principle. Nobody will be misled by a novel describing Napoleon's escape to New Orleans, since the fact of his death on St. Helen belongs to general knowledge, but if a fiction described the emperor as admiring a certain writer who in fact he never read, many people would integrate this proposition into their representation of the real Napoleon.

insofar as it has Napoleon as a member, and it differs from the real world insofar as it has Natasha as a member [7].

IV

Let us explore deeper this idea that fictional worlds may present various degrees of similarity with the actual world. It should first be noted that of all possible worlds, only one can be thought of as actual by a given person. The reference of the label 'actual world' is a relative one: for any individual, it picks the world to which this individual belongs. On the basis of these remarks, we can define the notion of "fictional world" as the set of facts defined by the propositions which take the value true in the world of the impersonated speaker. This definition raises a problem which cannot be adequately treated in the framework of the present paper, the problem of deciding for whom a proposition must take the value true in order to be constitutive of a fictional world. In the great majority of cases, the impersonated speaker has sufficient authority to guarantee the truth of his discourse. (See Doležel 1979 on this question of narrative authority.) What he asserts, consequently, defines a factual domain. But when the fictional speaker blatantly contradicts himself, or when there are reasons to suspect his sincerity, the reader must look for another source of authentification. One of the most crucial tasks facing the reader of fiction is thus to ascertain what is real and what is not in the world described by the impersonated speaker. That 'non-facts' ought to be distinguished from 'facts' does not mean, however, that they are not worthy of the reader's consideration. The factual world of a given fiction stands against the background of all the alternate possible words to which its members have access through dreams, predictions, stories, and counterfactual thinking. In contrast to the fictional world, this background may be called the fictional horizon. A novel such as Don Quixote illustrates the importance of the accessibility relations between the factual world of a fiction,

[7] About the only non-fictional statements which may appear in the framework of a fiction are metanarrative comments asserting or implying that the rest of the text is a piece of fiction. An example is this passage from Fowles (1969: 17): "I do not know. This story I am telling is all imagination. Those characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed the vocabulary and the "voice of") a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God". When Fowles tells us that his characters are products of his imagination, he looks at the fictional world from the viewpoint of a member of the actual world. When the presuppositions of metanarrative comments conflict with the presuppositions of the narrative statements telling the story of the characters, these two types of statements must be attributed to different speakers, usually to the author and to the narrator respectively.
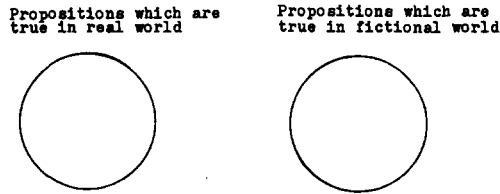
Propositions which are
true in real world

Propositions which are
true in fictional world

Fig. 2a.

and its horizon of alternate possible worlds [8]. (*Cf.* Doležel 1976; Pavel 1979.)

The possible types of relationships between the real and the fictional world are sketched in the figures below [9]. As the proposed examples suggest, the relationship between the two worlds is constitutive of genre: to know that a text is a fairy tale or a legend, a science fiction story or a historical romance, is to know, at least approximately, which aspects of the real world will be shared by the fictional world. But since the decoding process is regulated by the principle of minimal departure, which prescribes a model to the reader and forbids gratuitous alterations of that model, the reader approaching a fiction without advance knowledge of its genre remains perfectly able to reconstrue the world created by the text.

The first diagram (fig. 2a) illustrates the case of total lack of overlap between the real and the fictional world. In this situation, no proposition is true of both worlds at the same time. An example of this situation is found in Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem (from *Through the Looking-Glass*):

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogroves
And the mome rath outgrabe.

[8] From the viewpoint of a fictional world, the real world may be described as an alternate possible world. This is why the counterfactual "If horses had no wings they would be unable to fly" is pointless when spoken by a member of the real world, but becomes meaningful when uttered by the hero of a Russian fairy tale. It is by virtue of this relativity that a German writer could recently title a text "If Adolf Hitler had not won the war" (Heissenbüttel 1979).
[9] These diagrams correspond to the first of the two view of transworld relations outlined in footnote 3. But all could be redrawn according to the second model. For instance, fig. 2b will look like the figure below:
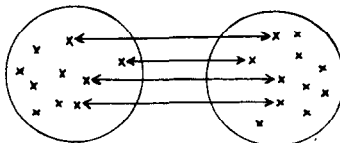
(The dots represent propositions. The arrow means that the two propositions are copies of each other, and have the same truth value in their respective world.)

Although the language of the poem is English – as the syntax and the phonology tell us – none of the entities referred to is a member of the actual world. While the actual world is defined over propositions such as 'people exist', 'trees are green', *etc.,* the fictional world is described by 'toves exist', 'being slithy is a possible property if toves', *etc.* Since a proposition cannot be true of a world in which it lacks a referent, there is not propositional overlap between the world of the poem and the actual world. For the poem to illustrate the situation represented by fig. 2a, however, we must assume that the principle of minimal departure does not operate automatically on existential propositions (*i.e.* on propositions stating nothing beyond the mere existence of a certain object). If it did, everything that exists in the real world would also exist in the fictional world – unless otherwise specified. This inference can be avoided through a requirement to the effect that existential propositions can only be integrated in a fictional world when the text makes explicit reference to their subject. Since neither trees nor people are mentioned in Carroll's poem, the fictional world is not described by the propositions 'trees exist' and 'people exist'. A problem with this restriction, however, is that it limits too severely the inventory of certain fictional worlds. If a realistic novel contained no reference to horses and trees, the reader would be wrongly led to the conclusion that the fictional world does not contain such entities. A way to avoid this counter-intuitive consequence is to assume that, in the case of existential propositions, the principle of minimal departure operates on entire classes, not on isolated objects. If the text refers to a member of a certain class, the propositions stating the existence of the other members of the same class will all be integrated in the fictional world. Reference to the color yellow in a fiction thus entails the existence or the whole color spectrum in the world of that fiction – unless of course the absence of a color is explicitly specified in the text. (This is the case in a children's story where two kittens try to invent the color green by mixing all other colors.) Similarly, the presence of the sky in a fiction entails the presence of the earth. The principle of minimal departure also works from parts to wholes and from wholes to parts: if a fictional world has people, it also has legs; if it has trees, it also has forests.

The second diagram illustrates the case of substantial overlap between the real and the fictional world. Some propositions are only true in the real world, some are only true in the fictional world, and some are true in both (see fig. 2b). This situation is exemplified by fairy tales. The world of a fairy tale includes all types of objects found in the real world, or at least in some pre-industrial state of the world.
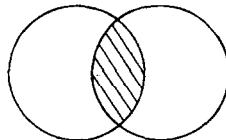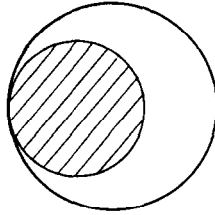

Fig. 2b.

Fig. 2c.

This means that propositions such as 'trees exist' and 'people walk on their feet' are common to both worlds. The propositions restricted to the fictional world fall in two categories: those which are false in the real world (*e.g.*, 'Horses can fly'), and those which are indeterminate in the real world. This second type includes all the propositions concerning the imaginary characters of the tale ('Cinderella exists', 'Cinderella is beautiful', *etc.*). Conversely, we can say that the real world includes both propositions which are false in the fictional world, and propositions which are indeterminate in the fairy tale. The first are the negations of the propositions restricted to the fictional world ('Horses cannot fly'), and the second relate to particular members of the real world, such as Paris and Joan of Arc. The world of fairy tales may be the closest possible to a pre-industrial state of the real world, but not to the point of including the same individuals. This latter principle, it will be noted, is not true of the genre legend, which relates supernatural events about historical characters.

The third diagram illustrates the case of total inclusion of the real world within the fictiona world (see fig. 2c). This situation is found in some realistic novels with an identifiable historical and geographic setting. (If the properties of some of the historical characters are altered, however, the text will belong to the preceding class.) In this type of fiction, everything that is true of the real world is also true of the fictional world. Insofar as the action of a novel takes place in a real-world location, one must assume that the geography of the fictional world is similar to that of the real world. If the novel refers to Paris, its world must contain London as well, since all real-world cities are members of the same class. The same is true of historical characters: even though *War and Peace* does not refer to Napoleon's brothers, the principle of minimal departure invites the reader to assume that the Napoleon of *War and Peace* has the same number of brothers as the real Napoleon. Interpretations of the novel based on the inference that Napoleon was an only child are automatically false — while interpretations based on his having a specific number of brothers are simply irrelevant, given the fact that Napoleon's brothers play no role in *War and Peace*. In a realistic novel, the only difference between the real and the fictional world is that the latter includes additional members, namely the imaginary characters of the novel. The propositions relating to these characters are true in the fictional world, but indeterminate in the actual world, since in this
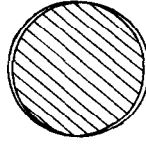
Fig. 2d.

world they lack a referent. If any propositions are true in the fictional world and false in the real world, these will be the existential propositions relating to the invented characters (*e.g.* 'Natasha exists').

The last diagram (fig. 2d) illustrates the case of total, or near total overlap between the real and the fictional world. An example of this situation is found in the dialogues of Plato [10]. Socrates is an impersonated speaker with respect to Plato, but he is a member of the same world, and everything he says is to be taken as true, or as potentially true, in the actual world. This analysis does not commit us to the view that Plato endorses every propositions that is expressed in the dialogues. The partners of Socrates often assert obviously false propositions. But there is an important difference between these declarations, and the false statements of other fictional genres, for instance of fairy tales. In the case of the fairy tale, the reader is asked to reconstrue a world in which the propositions asserted in the text can be integrated, but in the case of Plato's dialogues, he is supposed to take false propositions as example of faulty judgment, and to eliminate them from his own representation of the actual world. In this type of fiction, everything asserted or implied is to be valued in the real world, except for the implied proposition relating to the speech act itself. When Socrates says in the dialogues that the soul is immortal, Plato is not proposing the implicature "The individual named Socrates uttered the worlds "The soul is immortal"" as an accurate description of a real event.

In the above examples, the principle of minimal departure picks the *real* world as model for the reconstruction of the fictional world. But the principle also permits the choice of another fictional world as interpretive model. This occurs whenever an author expands, rewrites or parodies a pre-existing fiction, or whenever a work presents not only its own world, but also that of another fiction as the actual world. In these cases, the fictional world serving as model is assumed to be already known to the reader, *i.e.* to have been already reconstrued as coming as

[10] Other examples of this type of relation are found in some of Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (those in which the impersonated speakers describe Parisian life without referring to their own private life); in Rousseau's 'Prosopopée de Fabricius' (part of the *Discours sur les lettres et les arts*), where Rousseau chooses the Roman figure as spokesman for his own philosophy; and in the television program 'Meeting of the Minds', where famous characters from the past debate current problems (*e.g.* Joan of Arc on women's rights, Plato on contemporary education, *etc.*).

close as possible to the actual world. The relationship between the model and the world to be reconstrued is either one of inclusion or of overlap. Examples of inclusion are the modern sequels to *Wuthering Heights,* which relate the life of the characters after (or before) the events told in Emily Brontë's novel, and the Sherlock Holmes stories recently written by the son of Conan Doyle. The world created by these texts comprises all the elements of the original fiction, plus additional characters or events. For overlap to occur, some of the facts of the original fiction must be altered in the new text. An example of this situation (discussed in Pavel 1979) is a play by the 18th century English author Nahum Tate, which ascribes a different fate to the Cordelia of Shakespeare's King Lear: instead of dying she survives and marries Edgar. The relationship of Tate's Cordelia to Shakespeare's character is the same as that of Georg Kaiser's Napoleon to the historical individual: they are counterparts of the same being, possessing the same basic identity, but inhabiting different possible worlds.

An interesting consequence of apprehending fictional universes in the light of the principle of minimal departure, is that it solves the problem of the ontological status of their members. One of the most debated questions concerning the imaginary referents of fictional discourse whether they are complete or incomplete objects. In order to be complete, an object must satisfy the formula $f(x)V - f(x)$. This formula — which is supposed to hold for all members of the actual world — means that every conceivable proposition is either true or false of x. The proponents of the thesis of fictional incompleteness hold that since the text of Conan Doyle never refers to the number of hairs on the head of Sherlock Holmes, the famous detective neither satisfies the proposition "Sherlock Holmes has 1,234,567,890 hairs", nor the negation of this proposition. (For a detailed analysis and a critique of this position, which is known to logicians as Meinongian, see Woods 1974 and 1978.) If we approach the world of the Conan Doyle stories through the principle of minimal departure, however, we are committed to the assumption that the ontological status of Sherlock Holmes, *within the world of the stories,* is the same as that of any normal human being within the real world. If he were an incomplete object, Sherlock Holmes would differ from real human beings in a way neither explicitly specified nor implied by the text. It would then be just as permissible to assume that Sherlock Holmes has a green tail and purple horns. By inviting the reader to use his knowledge of real human beings to reconstrue the figure of Sherlock Holmes, the principle of minimal departure makes every proposition either true or false of the hero of Conan Doyle. The reader's inability to tell whether or not Sherlock Holmes has 1,234,567,890 hairs on this head is related to his inability to assess the truth value of the corresponding proposition concerning Richard Nixon: in both cases he lacks the necessary information to make the decision. The only difference is that the information is hopelessly lost in the case of Sherlock Holmes, while it could conceivably become available some day in the case of Nixon.

V

In conclusion to this paper, I would like to return to the problem of the classification of examples (1a)–(1h). The preceding discussion has established that impersonation does not necessarily entail reference to, or creation of an alternate possible world. The independence of these two categories enables us to cross-classify the dichotomies "+/— reference to an alternate possible world" and "+/— impersonation". The resulting model is given in fig. 3. On the basis of this model, we can give both a broad and a narrow definition of fictional discourse. The broad definition says that fiction is discourse involving an act of impersonation, while the narrow definition requires of fiction that it fulfill two requirements: impersonation, as well as creation of an alternate possible world. This latter definition seems to correspond to the intuition of the majority. It will be noted that the play of the father, "I'm the fuzzy green monster", is classified in the same category as examples of literary fiction such as the sentence from the fairy tale, "Once upon a time . . .". Both the utterance of the father and of the story-teller involve an act of impersonation, both create an alternate possible world, and whatever differences they may present, these have nothing to do with the distinction fiction *vs.* non-fiction. The utterance of the father is largely spontaneous behavior, and could be compared to a wild species of plant, while the utterance of the story-teller is a cultivar, belonging to an institutionalized genre. What holds in the world of plants also seems to be true in the world of discourse: a cultivar can only be developed from a species which exists in the wild.

  If it weren't for the last example, (1h), the above table could be proposed as definitive. But the utterance of the plant-lover, "Stupid weed, are you going to die

Utterance concerns an alternate possible world

	—	+
Utterance involves impersonation —	George Washinton was born in 1732	Imagine that I have a race... Last night I dreamed that I had caught... If I had been Richard Nixon...
+	Socrates: The soul is immortal	Once upon a time.... I'm the fuzzy green monster...

Fig. 3.

on me?" does not really fit in any of the four categories. This use of language combines the act of projecting oneself in an alternate world, with an act of impersonation. When somebody speaks to a plant, he pretends to be in a world where plants are able to understand language, but the *I* and *you* of this world retain the identity of the real world *I* and *you*. Through this type of utterance, the speaker expresses directly his actual feelings for an actual plant. The referents of first and second person pronouns thus fall under the scope of the principle of minimal departure. But unlike other statements involving a projection of the speaker's person in an alternate world, this sentence contains no formal marker of irreality. It entails a belief which cannot be attributed to the real speaker, namely that plants are intelligent beings. A member of a world where plants could understand language would use exactly the same sentence. The only possible conclusion is that the speaker is performing an act of impersonation by which he pretends to be himself, facing an intelligent counterpart of the plant. While the speaker of counterfactual with a first person pronoun distanciates himself from his other-world alter-ego, the speaker of (1h) plays directly the role of his own counterpart. The utterance of the plant-lover thus offers an example of the situation which Searle relates, I think erroneously, to anonymous fiction: performing an act of pretending, without adopting a foreign identity. Pretending to speak to an intelligent plant is indeed much closer to pretending to be sick than to pretending to be Richard Nixon. To distinguish (1h) from both non-factual and fictional statements, we need to split the category 'impersonation' into 'impersonating oneself' *vs.* 'impersonating somebody else'. First and second person pronouns will fall under the scope of the principle of minimal departure in the first sub-category, but not in the second. The resulting table will look as shown in fig. 4.

	Utterance concerns real world	Utterance concerns alternate world
No impersonation	George Washington was born in 1732	Non-factuals 1 c, 1 d, 1 e
Impersonating oneself	———————	Stupid weed, are you going to die on me ?
Impersonating somebody else	Socrates: The soul is immortal	Once upon a time... I'm the fuzzy green monster...

Fig. 4.

Notice that one of the possibilities remains unrealized. There is no point in impersonating oneself as a member of the real world, since this attitude would amount to pretending that everything remains exactly the way it is. To account for the cases of fiction within fiction, of fictional non-factuals, of fictional self-impersonation (*e.g.* the narrator of a novel talking to a plant), or even of non-factual self-impersonation (saying: "Stupid weed, if it weren't for my tender loving care you would be dead and gone"), all we need to do is to reapply the same group of distinctive features within the two subcategories of impersonation.

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