Deriving the paradoxical effects of temporal metalepsis[*]

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Abstract This paper explores a phenomenon, metalepsis, that hasn't been discussed in linguistics until only recently, but is important because it sheds new light on the semantics of fiction and paradoxical statements. We focus on a particular instance of metalepsis, namely the following sentence from *Sylvie* by Gérard de Nerval: 'While the coach is making its way up to the hills, let us piece together the memories of the days when I often visited these parts.' This sentence exemplifies a temporal paradox since the narrator asks the narratee to join him in doing something that had already happened. Previous analyses of metalepsis have focused on third-person examples, leading to incorrect predictions for such first-person examples. We propose a novel analysis that accounts for both first- and third-person uses, while also accounting for a potential difference in aesthetic import between the two cases.

Keywords: metalepsis, semantics of fiction, temporal paradox, DRT, dyamaic semantics

1 Introduction

The Neverending Story by Michael Ende features a bookworm protagonist, Bastian, who intrudes into the world of the book that he reads and loves. In turn, the fictional characters in the book read by Bastian intrude into his world. These narrative transgressions are central to the depiction of the immersive reader-book interaction in *The Neverending Story* (Bhadury 2013). In narratology research, they are called *metalepsis*, defined by Genette (1980: 234-235) as:

> any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...], produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical [...] or fantastic

An oft-cited example of metalepsis comes from Balzac's *Illusions perdues*, which involves an impersonal (omniscient, third person or extradiegetic) narrator, who – by definition – is an unintrusive abstract entity surveying the events occurring in the story world, including the protagonists' innermost thoughts and feelings, and presenting them to the reader. Therefore, when the reader encounters (1), the narrator's intrusion into the story world is obvious, leading the reader to wonder: For whom is it "not useless to explain"? Who explains?

(1)   Pendant que le   vénérable ecclésiastique monte   les rampes d'
        while   that the venerable churchman   climb.PRS the ramps of
        Angoulême, il n' est pas inutile d' expliquer ...
        Angoulême it not is   not useless to explain
        'While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not
        useless to explain...'

Balzac's works often contain statements such as (1), which have been used in narratology and literary studies to show how the world of the told may collide with the world of the telling. Such statements differ from *The Neverending Story* in being a case of *minimal* (Fludernik 2003) or *rhetorical* (Ryan 2006: 207) metalepsis:

> ...[it] opens a small window that allows a quick glance across levels,
> but the window closes after a few sentences, and the operation ends
> up reasserting the existence of the boundaries.

Moreover, as noted by Bücking (2023), (1) is exemplifies a temporal paradox: How can something that already happened in the narrated story (the climbing event by the churchman), be the temporal frame for the current claim that it is not useless to explain? This is a paradoxical identification of narration time and story time, leading Bücking to call (1) a case of *temporal metalepsis* – a term that we adopt here.

Our point of departure are cases of temporal metalepsis that involve a first person (homodiegetic) narrator. We know of only two examples of this, and we don't know of any discussion of such examples in research on metalepsis. The first example comes from *Sylvie* by Gérard de Nerval (see (2)) and the second example comes from *À la recherche du temps perdu, La Prisonnière* by Marcel Proust (see (3)).[1]

(2)   (The narrator is going from Paris to Loisy on a coach. The coach is starting
        to go uphill.)

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1 The context of the Proust example is interesting. It comes at the end of a digression where the narrator is almost absent and the perspective is more or less heterodiegetic, serving to reintroduce the main line of the narrative, where the perspective is clearly homodiegetic. Thanks to Gerald Prince (p.c.) for directing us to this example.

> Pendant que la voiture monte.PRS les côtes, recomposons.IMPER les
> while that the coach go up the hills, let us recompose the
> souvenirs du temps où j' y venais si souvent.
> memories of times when I there visited.IMPF so often
> 'While the coach is making its way up to the hills, let us piece together
> the memories of the days when I often visited these parts.'

(3) Mais il est temps de rattraper le baron qui s'avance, avec Brichot et
     But it is time to catch up the baron who advances with Brichot and
     moi, vers la porte des Verdurin.
     myself towards the gate of Verdurin
     'But it is time to rejoin the Baron as he advances with Brichot and myself
     towards the Verdurins.'

Notice in the use of first person pronouns in these examples (*j'* in (2) and *moi* in (3)). Their significance are paramount: they signify that the narrator is (and always has been) part of story world and thus it's less clear whether there is any transgression. Nevertheless, there is a temporal paradox just like in (1) since the narrator addresses the reader, or rather the fictionalized audience within the narration – called the *narratee* (Prince 2003; Barthes 1966) – in a way that is, strictly speaking, absurd. In (2), the narrator asks the narratee to join him in doing something while the carriage is mounting the hills. But, of course, this is not possible since at the time of the asking, the carriage has already mounted the hills. And in (3), the narrator tells the narratee that it's time to join the Baron and himself, who are advancing. And this too is not possible since the narrator cannot possibly rejoin himself.

The goal of this paper is to address the following two questions:

 i. What is the best way of representing in our semantics the temporal paradox that arises from metalepsis?

 ii. How can we account for potential differences in aesthetic import in third person vs. first person examples of temporal metalepsis (e.g., (1) vs. (2))?

We proceed as follows. In §2, we offer a semantic analysis of (2). The reason we choose to focus on this example is that *Sylvie* has been extensively analyzed by Eco (1994, 1999), including the particular passage in question.[2] In §2.2, we present Eco's analysis of (2) using formal semantic tools — which we introduce in §2.1 — from

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2 *Sylvie* has been analyzed by many literary scholars, including Marcel Proust (Proust 1958; see Bray 2006 and reference therein); see also Hobbs & Violi (1990) for a linguistic analysis of the novella. However, we are unaware of any discussion of (2) beyond Eco's and in our earlier work (Altshuler & Haug 2017).

Discourse Representation Theory (Kamp & Reyle 1993), along with Lewis (1978)'s modal operator used to interpret fiction. Key to Eco's analysis is the idea that fiction involves an empirical author who creates the world of the model author and reader who, in turn, jointly create the world of the narration. Temporal metalepsis in *Sylvie*, according to Eco, involves transgression from world of the narration to the world of the model author and reader. We argue that Eco's analysis, while insightful in many respects, falls short of capturing the use of the first person pronoun in (2). Subsequently, in §2.3, we offer our own analysis which is compatible with Eco's more general theory of how fiction is interpreted. Key to our analysis is that temporal metalepsis is interpreted at face value, but as uttered by the narrator (and not the model author) in the fictional world. One consequence of our analysis is that the semantic representation of first person temporal metalepsis, is paradoxical, but does not involve any transgression. We discuss how the paradox is resolved pragmatically to achieve cinematic effects.

Our analysis differs from Bücking (2023)'s recent proposal to treat third person, temporal metalepsis (e.g. (1)) as a species of copredication, involving transgression from the fictional world to the actual world. We consider this analysis in §3.2, after considering and rejecting a more intuitive version of the analysis in §3.1. We suggest some challenges for Bücking (2023)'s analysis of examples like (1), further arguing that it cannot be straightforwardly extended to account for examples like (2). Then, in §3.3, we show how we could extend our analysis offered in §2.3 to also account for examples like (1). Key to this extension is the pragmatic process of *narrator accommodation* (Altshuler & Maier 2018, 2022), which we propose is a crucial ingredient to explaining the potential differences in aesthetic import in third- vs. first-person temporal metalepsis.

Finally, we conclude in §4, summarizing the key aspects of our proposed analysis.

2 Analysis of first person temporal metalepsis

In this section we consider how first-person temporal metalepsis can be analysed within formal semantics. In what follows, we develop our analysis within Discourse Representation Theory (DRT, Kamp & Reyle 1993) because we believe dynamic frameworks are well suited for modelling literature, where it is crucial to capture cross-sentential effects and other discourse phenomena.[3]
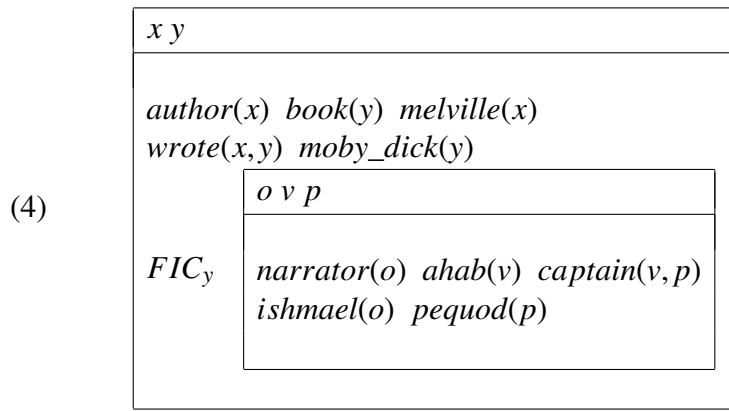
2.1 DRT and Fiction

Formal semantic frameworks, including dynamic ones like DRT, focus on truth. What does it mean for a sentence to be true in a fiction? This becomes a particularly

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3 See, e.g. Maier & Semeijn (2021); Altshuler & Maier (2022); Maier (2023) for discussion.

important question when we are dealing with metalepsis which, as we have seen, potentially involves transgression of narrative levels by mixing statements that are true *in* the fiction with statements that are true *about* the fiction. Although we will, in the end, argue for an analysis that does *not* involve this kind of transgression, it is important to be precise here to keep track of the analytical options.
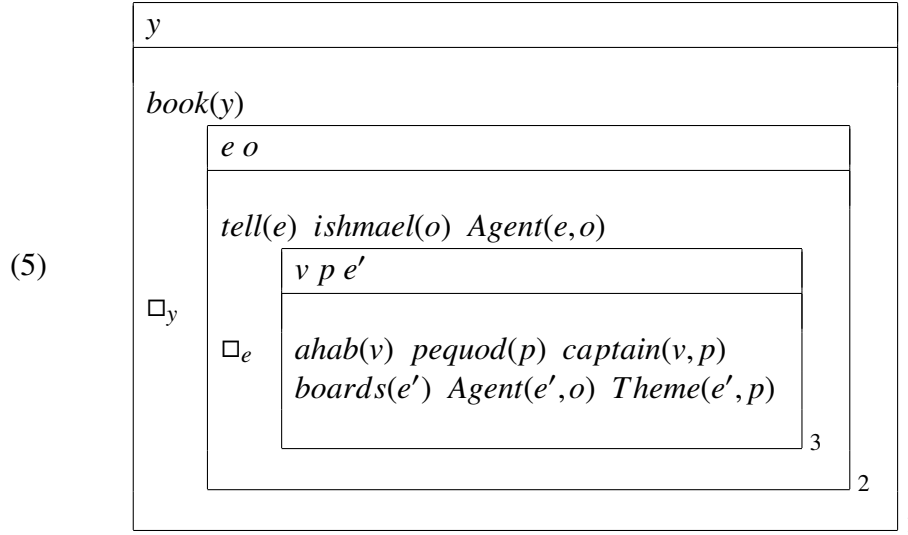
We follow Lewis (1978) and others in assuming that interpretation of fiction involves a modal operator.[4] (4) shows what a Discourse Representation Structure (DRS) looks like in the case of first person narration, such as found in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.

(4)

$$
\boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
x\ y \\
\hline
author(x)\ \ book(y)\ \ melville(x) \\
wrote(x,y)\ \ moby\_dick(y) \\[4pt]
FIC_y\ \ \boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
o\ v\ p \\
\hline
narrator(o)\ \ ahab(v)\ \ captain(v,p) \\
ishmael(o)\ \ pequod(p)
\end{array}}
\end{array}}
$$

We see that the fiction operator, FIC_y, is indexed to a particular fiction, the book *Moby Dick*, and achieves a clear separation of statements in that fiction (that there is an Ishmael, a Captain Ahab, and so on) from statements about that fiction (that Melville wrote the book *Moby Dick*, and so on). The latter, of course, are statements that can be evaluated in the actual world.

How the fictional statements are evaluated depends on how we spell out the meaning of $FIC_y\ K$ (K is a DRS). One starting point is Lewis' own definition, that $FIC_y\ K$ is true iff K is true in every world where the fiction y is *told as known fact*. While we do not want to commit to this specific definition, one aspect is crucial: FIC_y implies an event of narrating (telling) in the worlds compatible with the fiction. That is, what we, following Lewis, represent with a single embedding operator FIC_y, in reality conceals a doubly embedded structure, with a 'fictional periphery' (Predelli 2020) where a narrator tells the story that is the content of the fiction.

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4 For an overview of approaches to the interpretation of fiction, see Kroon & Voltolini (2024: §2) and references there.

(5)

$$
\boxed{\begin{array}{l}
y \\ \hline
book(y) \\
\Box_y \quad \boxed{\begin{array}{l}
e\ o \\ \hline
tell(e)\ \ ishmael(o)\ \ Agent(e,o) \\
\Box_e \quad \boxed{\begin{array}{l}
v\ p\ e' \\ \hline
ahab(v)\ \ pequod(p)\ \ captain(v,p) \\
boards(e')\ \ Agent(e',o)\ \ Theme(e',p) \\
\end{array}}_{\ 3} \\
\end{array}}_{\ 2} \\
\end{array}}_{\ 1}
$$

Here we see that *narrator(o)* is spelled out as *Agent(e,o)* – Ishmael does the narrating, i.e., he is the agent of the telling event e.[5] We do not further explore here how $\Box_y$ and $\Box_e$ should be spelled out. But it is crucial to note that according to Lewis' definition Ishmael tells his story *as known fact*. This means that the embedding $\Box_e$ is to some extent "porous": the statements in DRS 3 are 'known facts' in DRS 2. Moreover, in the special case of first person narration as here, they are known facts about the narrator's own world. So we have three layers, but the two embedded layers are closely related.

2.2 Eco's analysis

Umberto Eco wrote extensively on *Sylvie* (Eco 1999, 1994) and offered a detailed analysis of the metaleptic passage that we saw in §1, repeated below.

(2) (The narrator is going from Paris to Loisy on a coach. The coach is starting to go uphill.)

> Pendant que la   voiture monte.PRS les côtes, recomposons.IMPER les
> while   that the coach   go up   the hills, let us recompose   the
> souvenirs du temps où   j' y   venais   si souvent.
> memories of times when I there visited.IMPF so often
> 'While the coach is making its way up to the hills, let us piece together the memories of the days when I often visited these parts.'

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5 Notice that the fictional narrating event may also involve a narratee. This will play a role later as we develop our own analysis.

Eco's analysis is couched in his theory of interpretation, which adds a fourth layer to the analysis of fiction, that of the *model author* and *model reader*. The empirical author lives in the actual world, but their text creates a world with a model author and reader, who in turn create the world of the narration, where the story is told. A schematic DRS for this analysis is shown in (6), along with Eco's original figure (Eco 1994: 22-23) illustrating his theory.

(6)
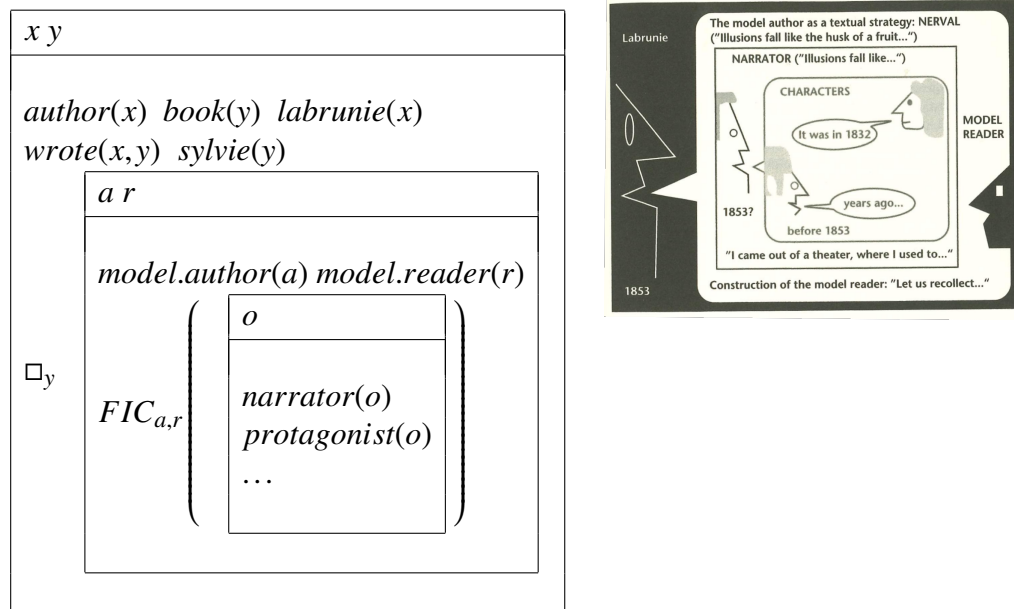
Spelling out the meaning of $\Box_y$ is, in an important sense, Eco's theory of literary interpretation. We will not explore this in detail here, but notice that since the FIC operator is implicitly two-layered, as discussed above, the representation in (6) has four layers: besides the actual world (the outer DRS) and the story world (the inner DRS under FIC), there are two distinct layers that both belong to the narrative periphery , that of the model author and that of the narrator (implicit in FIC). While this is somewhat hidden in the DRT representation, it is shown clearly in Eco's figure on the right-hand side of (6). Within this overall framework, Eco develops an analysis of (2):

> Who is – or rather, who are – those "we" who together have to bring back the memories and therefore make preparations for another journey into the past? Who are the "we" who have to do it now, "while the carriage is climbing" (while the carriage is moving at the same time as we are reading), and not then, "when the carriage was going," at the moment the narrator
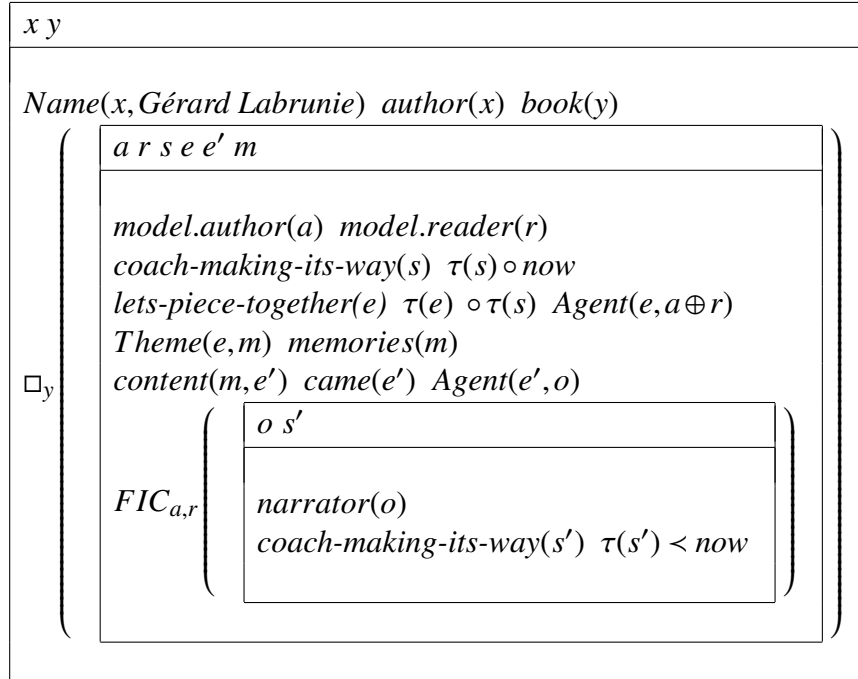
tells us that he was recollecting?

This is not the voice of the narrator; it is the voice of Nerval, the model author, who for a moment speaks in the first person in the story and says to us model readers: "While the narrator is going up the hills in his carriage, let us recompose (with him, of course, but you and I, too) the memories of the time when he would come so often to these places."

This is not a monologue but one part of a dialogue between three parties: Nerval, who surreptitiously enters the narrator's discourse; we, who have been called upon to participate just as surreptitiously, when we thought we could observe the event from the outside (we, who thought we had never left a theater); and the narrator, who is not excluded, since it was he who came to those places so often ("J'y venais si souvent," "I used to go there so often").

Eco's analysis, though not couched in DRT, relies on the same cascade of narrative universes, and can be translated as in (7), where some flaws are made apparent. Note that the empirical author is given Nerval's birth name, Gérard Labrunie.

(7)

$$
\boxed{\begin{array}{l}
\hline
x\ y \\
\hline
Name(x, G\acute{e}rard\ Labrunie)\ \ author(x)\ \ book(y) \\
\Box_y \left(\boxed{\begin{array}{l}
\hline
a\ r\ s\ e\ e'\ m \\
\hline
model.author(a)\ \ model.reader(r) \\
coach\text{-}making\text{-}its\text{-}way(s)\ \ \tau(s) \circ now \\
lets\text{-}piece\text{-}together(e)\ \ \tau(e) \circ \tau(s)\ Agent(e, a \oplus r) \\
Theme(e, m)\ \ memories(m) \\
content(m, e')\ \ came(e')\ \ Agent(e', o) \\
FIC_{a,r} \left(\boxed{\begin{array}{l}
\hline
o\ s' \\
\hline
narrator(o) \\
coach\text{-}making\text{-}its\text{-}way(s')\ \ \tau(s') < now \\
\end{array}} \right)
\end{array}} \right)
\end{array}}
$$

On Eco's analysis, our example is interpreted at the level of the model author and reader. Its (simplified) semantics is represented by the conditions *coach-making-its-way*(s), *lets-piece-together(e)* and the associated temporal and thematic conditions.

By contrast, nothing is going on inside the fiction operator. The previous fictional discourse has established a state s' of the coach making its way up the hills, as shown in the embedded DRS, and the model reader's "While the coach is making its way up the hills" introduces an event s that picks up the fictional event, but *outside* the fiction operator.

Notice that there is an accessibility problem here: in DRT, s cannot refer anaphorically to s', because s' is not accessible in the universe of the model reader and author. At first sight, this looks like a theory-internal problem of the DRT translation: to capture Eco's intentions, model readers and authors must be able to talk about and negotiate, metafictionally but inside the scope of $\Box_y$, the meanings of narrated events. However, notice that on Eco's paraphrase, the model author and reader are *not* talking metafictionally about the narrated coach-ride, but rather equate the time of that coach-ride, with something that should happen in their own world. This is the transgression, and Eco is not completely explicit about how it happens.

One attractive option is to take the transgression at face value: the model author simply presupposes,[6] that the coach ride happens in their world. Modulo the trans-world identity or counterpart relation between s and s', this is the reading that (7) expresses. The reading is somewhat paradoxical, after all, the model author that the text constructs and the model reader that we aspire to be in reading the text must both know that the coach ride was only part of the narrated worlds. But perhaps this is the source of Genette's paradoxical effect: we – the model author and reader – pretend to do something at the same time as some other event that we know is not actually happening in our world.

Be that as it may, Eco's analysis suffers from fault which in our view is decisive. The model author/reader layer of (7) contains a condition $Agent(e', o)$. o here is the discourse referent for the narrator, but that discourse referent is not accessible in the universe of the model author/reader. The problem runs deeper than a technical DRT accessibility problem, however. Eco's paraphrase says this: "While the narrator is going up the hills in his carriage, let us recompose (with him, of course, but you and I, too) the memories of the time when *he* would come so often to these places." But the text speaks of "the times when *I* would come so often to these places". Since on Eco's analysis, these words are uttered by the model author, we would expect the indexical "I" to refer to the model author. But it makes little sense to assume that anything other than the narrator-protagonists' previous travels is meant. Eco notices this, of course, and therefore surreptitiously changes to *he* in his paraphrase. But this move is unjustified, we believe. No amount of poetic licence can allow for "I" referring to anyone other than the speaker in a language like French or English.[7] Moreover, on this analysis the "I" (= the narrator) would be distinct

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6 We assume that the *while*-clause in (2) is presupposed rather than asserted.

7 There are languages where "I" can undergo indexical shift, but that is clearly not relevant here.

from the first-person member of the "we" (= the model author), which would be particularly harsh.

There is as far as we can see only one strategy to deny this reasoning, namely by pursuing the idea that the model author and the narrator are in some sense the "same" person. This is not Eco's analysis, as he stresses the difference between the two, but it seems at least a possible approach, so we sketch an outline here.

Strictly speaking, the empirical author, the model author and the narrator can never be identical, as they belong to different ontological levels. Language tends to respect this. For example, (8-a) is true, but we cannot truthfully report indirectly as in (8-b); something like (8-c) is called for.

(8)   a.   Melville wrote "Call me Ishmael."
        b.   #Melville wrote that we should call him Ishmael.
        c.   The narrator of *Moby Dick* says that we should call him Ishmael.

However, when talking about autofictions, i.e. fictions that are perceived as having a strong autobiographical component,[8] the switch from direct to indirect report is possible. Consider (9) from *The Guardian*.[9]

(9)   It was only in the third draft that Proust wrote that he had bitten into a soft little madeleine.

This is an indirect report corresponding to (10).

(10)   Proust wrote: "I bit into a soft little madeleine".

(9) therefore shows that the narrator-protagonist's "I" can be identified with the empirical author in this kind of fiction. Given that the model author, as opposed to the empirical author, is a theoretical construct, we do not have corresponding intuitions as to whether a similar identification is possible, but it does seem plausible. In this respect, it is important to notice that literary critics have found a number of autobiographical elements in *Sylvie*, although Eco himself stresses that the narrator and the model author are distinct. In any case, it seems dubious to us that the metalepsis on its own would *force* an autofictional analysis interpretation. Instead, we will pursue a different analysis in the next section.

2.3   Our analysis

We propose to take the clear reference of the first person indexical at face value: because we see that "I" refers to the narrator, we conclude that this must be the
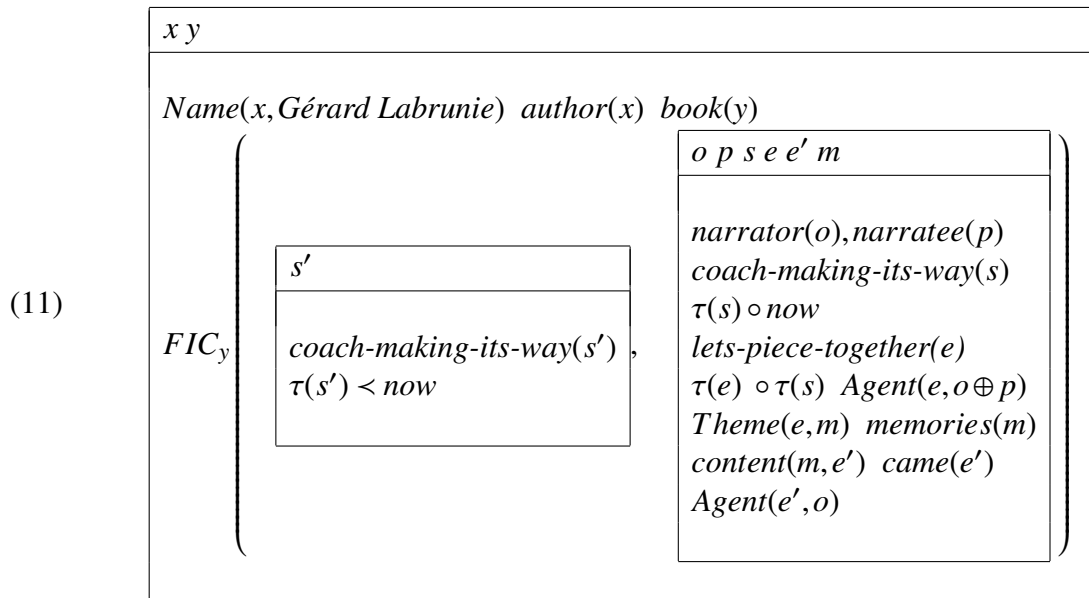
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8 Notice that we are not talking about autobiography proper, but of fictional texts.
9 https://tinyurl.com/4nmnpxvv

narrator speaking. This is what sets the *Sylvie* case apart from many other examples of metalepsis from texts with no previous mention of a narrator. Even in such cases, there *is* a narrator according to the Lewis view that we endorse, but there is nevertheless no *discourse referent* for the narrator, in a way that we will make clear in §3.3. Therefore, when a suddenly appearing "I" is in control of the narration, but is not part of the narrated events, it may be tempting to identify them with the author. We will discuss such cases in §3, but in *Sylvie*, at least, everything speaks for "I" referring to the narrator. This yields the analysis in (11) of the example in (2), repeated below. Notice that it would be possible to cast our analysis within Eco's narrative framework, with an extra layer for the model author and reader. But since that layer is irrelevant for metalepsis, we do not pursue this further here.

(2)   (The narrator is going from Paris to Loisy on a coach. The coach is starting to go uphill.)

Pendant que la   voiture monte.PRS les côtes, recomposons.IMPER les
while   that the coach   go up   the hills, let us recompose   the
souvenirs du temps où   j' y   venais   si souvent.
memories of times when I there visited.IMPF so often
'While the coach is making its way up to the hills, let us piece together the memories of the days when I often visited these parts.'

(11)

$$
\boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
x\ y \\ \hline
Name(x, \textit{Gérard Labrunie})\ \ author(x)\ \ book(y) \\
FIC_y \left(
\boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
s' \\ \hline
\textit{coach-making-its-way}(s')\ , \\
\tau(s') < now
\end{array}
}
\ \
\boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
o\ p\ s\ e\ e'\ m \\ \hline
narrator(o), narratee(p) \\
\textit{coach-making-its-way}(s) \\
\tau(s) \circ now \\
\textit{lets-piece-together}(e) \\
\tau(e)\ \circ \tau(s)\ \ Agent(e, o \oplus p) \\
Theme(e, m)\ \ memories(m) \\
content(m, e')\ \ came(e') \\
Agent(e', o)
\end{array}
}
\right)
\end{array}
}
$$

As before, we see that the previous discourse has made available a past state s' of a

coach mounting the hills. And as in Eco's analysis, the *while*-clause introduces an state s that refers back anaphorically to s'. We do not represent this identification in the DRS itself, but assume, following Partial Compositional DRT (Haug 2014) that anaphora resolution is part of pragmatic enrichment of the truth-conditional content. In terms of classical DRT (Kamp & Reyle 1993), we could imagine adding a condition $s = ?$ to the right-hand box, followed by subsequent resolution to $s = s'$.

Unlike in Eco's analysis, all this happens inside the narration itself, so there is no transgression. Nor is there any problem with the reference of the indexicals: "I" refers to the narrator, and "we" to the narrator and the narratee. The narrator asks the narratee to join in recomposing (e) the narrator's own memories while the coach is going up the hill (s).

There is however a temporal paradox, since we know (from the present tense of the *while*-clause) that s overlaps with *now*, but we also know from the previous discourse that s' precedes *now*. So if s and s' are the same state, it must both overlap with and precede *now*. This creates a temporal inconsistency.

One way to look at this is that the narrator sets up this temporal paradox in order to force us to another interpretation; he is in effect asking us to equate narration time and narrated time; to join him, the narrator, in recollecting his memories while the protagonist – who is, after all, identical to him – is travelling on the couch. This creates a cinematic effect: story time and narration time are collapsed into one, and we are asked to imagine that the narrator joins his younger self to narrate what happens as the events unfold.[10]

Notice that the derived reading is also inconsistent, since it involves two different time-slices of the same individual being present at the same event. But somehow, it is easier to imagine and visualize the simultaneous presence of two temporally distinct instances of the protagonist-narrator than to imagine the same event happening at two distinct times.

Another way to resolve the paradox, suggested to us by Andreas Stokke (p.c.), is to invoke pretense and assume that the narrator pretends to be at the scene of the events he is narrating and therefore is justified in using the present tense. We find this suggestion compelling, though do not want to take a stance on which pragmatic resolution is more viable. For the purposes of this paper, what is crucial is that the semantic analysis in (11) provides a literal representation of (2) that can serve as the starting point for further pragmatic reasoning. An important consequence of our proposed analysis is that it solves the linguistic puzzles surrounding metalepsis: (i) the present tense is required because the point of the construction is to equate story time and narration time, (ii) in first person narrations, the same individuals inhabit those worlds, and hence, no transgression between worlds needs to be assumed.[11]

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10 Thanks to Patrick Bray (p.c.) for discussing the cinematic effect with us.

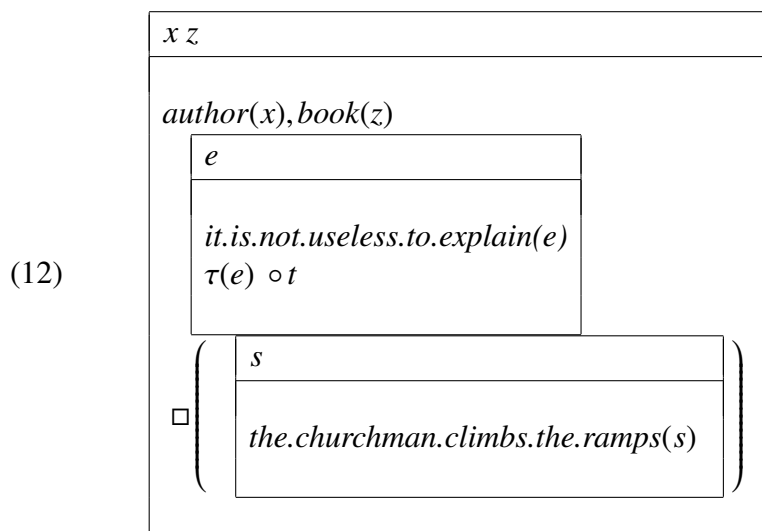11 Note that we don't thereby endorse the view that metalepsis never involves transgression. As

3   Analysis of third person temporal metalepsis

Let us now turn to the third-person example of metalepsis in (1), repeated below.

(1)   Pendant que le   vénérable ecclésiastique monte   les rampes d'
      while   that the venerable churchman   climb.PRS the ramps of
      Angoulême, il n'   est pas inutile d' expliquer . . .
      Angoulême it not is   not useless to explain
      'While the venerable churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême, it is not
      useless to explain. . .'

3.1   Analyzing the "while"-clause with an implicit modal

One very intuitive paraphrase of examples like (1) is to prefix the "while"-clause
with an implicit modal operator. Schematically, that would yield the DRS in (12),
using □ for the implicit modal operator.

(12)

$$\boxed{\begin{array}{l} x\ z \\[4pt] \hline \\[-6pt] author(x), book(z) \\[4pt] \boxed{\begin{array}{l} e \\ \hline \\[-6pt] it.is.not.useless.to.explain(e) \\ \tau(e) \circ t \end{array}} \\[4pt] \Box \left(\boxed{\begin{array}{l} s \\ \hline \\[-6pt] the.churchman.climbs.the.ramps(s) \end{array}} \right) \end{array}}$$

To make this DRS explanatory, we need to: (i) make explicit where the time t comes
from, and (ii) give a meaning to □. (i) and (ii) are interrelated. A first attempt would
be to say that □ just is the fiction operator ('While *in the fiction* the churchman
climbs the ramps. . .'). However, this does not make accessible a time in the matrix
clause: the time of the churchman climbing the ramps exists only in the fiction, and

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discussed at the outset, it is hard to analyze *The Neverending Story* in any other way but as involving
transgression. Such examples of metalepsis, however – while interesting for many literary reasons –
are not linguistically interesting; the laws of physics in the world of such fictions are simply quite
different from ours.

it is unclear how this time could be identified with a time outside the fiction.[12]

Another variant would understand □ as an intensional operator of imagination, yielding roughly 'while we imagine the churchman climbing the ramps...'. However, this account would predict that we could use a past tense in the *while*-clause to express 'while we imagine that the churchman was climbing the ramps...', because the time denoted by the *while*-clause would not, on this analysis, be dependent on the time of the verb.[13] Rather, it would be dependent on the time of the implicit, embedding propositional attitude. However, as a matter of fact, past tense is in fact never found in such metaleptic sentences. For example, as observed by (Bücking 2023), we could not replace (1) with (13).

(13) ??While the venerable churchman climbed the ramps of Angoulême, it is not useless to explain...'

This observation is an important motivation for Bücking (2023) to seek an alternative analysis of (1) to which we now turn.

3.2 Bücking's analysis

Bücking (2023) argues that metalepsis involves both parafiction and metafiction. Parafiction is talk about story content as it unfolds in the story, such as "In the novel *Illusions perdues*, a churchman climbs the ramps of Angoulême". Metafiction is talk about the story content in predications that applies in the real world, such as "Balzac wrote a book where a churchman climbs the ramps Angoulême". Notice that parafiction and metafiction can be combined and we can have anaphoric reference between them, as noted by Bücking (2023)

(14) Emil$_i$ is a fictional character. In Emil and the detectives, he$_i$ travels to Berlin.

Bücking's analysis of metalepsis incorporates facets of para- and metafiction. Very roughly speaking, he analyses the *while*-clause in (1) as parafictional, and the matrix clause (*It is not useless...*) as metafictional. However, he also notes that they differ from standard para- and metafiction: Present tense in standard parafiction is timeless and incompatible with adverbs like *now*, whereas the present tense in metalepsis actualizes the event and is compatible with *now*. And metafictional predicates are

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12 One reply could be to turn □ into an 'intensional *while*', i.e. basically an operator that equates the times of two events happening in different worlds. However, one problem is that we could name these two times with different rigid designators, raising further questions which we leave open for future research. Thanks to Ofra Magidor and Louis Rouillé (p.c.) for discussing this possibility with us.

13 Indeed, the prediction is that any tense could be used in the *while*-clause.

abstract properties of fictional entities, whereas metalepsis treats the fictional event as actual.

To account for these properties, Bücking (2023) proposes an analysis in terms of dot-types (Asher 2011). Glossing over details here[14], the key insight is an extension of Recanati (2018)'s analysis of fictional entities as dot-objects that we can refer to qua abstract artefacts in metafictional statements and as physical objects in parafiction. Crucially, the abstract artefact and the physical object are two sides of the same complex object, which means that anaphora is licensed in (14) in the same way as in (15), where *it* refers to lunch qua event but refers anaphorically an NP that refers to lunch qua food.

(15)   Lunch was delicious, but it took forever. (Asher 2011: 11)

Asher captures such sentences in a framework where nouns like *lunch* have a complex (dot) type, in this case consisting of lunch *qua* food and lunch *qua* event. Equipped with this apparatus of dot-types, then, Bücking claims that fictional events have a "pretense-event" aspect that we can refer to in the real world. Paraphrasing our sentence, then, we would say that there is in the actual world a dot-type fictional event of the carriage mounting the hills which takes place qua event inside the story and there is a time in the actual world which coincides with this event qua "pretense-event", and that time is what the matrix clause refers to. In other words, metalepsis is both parafiction about the event and metafiction about the pretense-event (which, unlike the abstract event *can* be actualized), and crucially those two are aspects of the same complex dot-object. Hence, metalepsis involves copredication like (15).

(16)

$$e \; s : \text{ABSTRACT} \bullet \text{EVENT} \bullet \text{PRETENSE-EVENT} \; s' : \text{PRETENSE-EVENT}$$

$$it.is.not.useless(e), churchman.climbs.the.ramps(s), o\text{-}elab(s', s)$$
$$\tau(e) \circ now, \tau(e) \circ \tau(s')$$

$$FIC \left(\begin{array}{|l|} \hline s'' : \text{EVENT} \\ \hline o\text{-}elab(s'', s) \\ \hline \end{array} \right)$$

Bücking's analysis is a more sophisticated version of the modal analyses that we considered in the previous subsection. Like those analyses, and our analysis, it relies on a modal operator to produce a layered semantics. The intuition that many have

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14 Dot-types were originally motivated to represent a lexical item with an overdetermined type. Formally, Asher (2011) assumes an operation on types which takes two distinct types and combines them into a complex type: if t_1 and t_2 are types, then so is $t_1 \bullet t_2$ (even if the meet of t_1 and t_2 isn't defined).

had is that in temporal metaleptic structures, the *while*-clause belongs to the lower layer and the matrix clause to the higher layer, and the contribution of the dot type analysis is to better motivate how the *while*-clause can be raised to the higher layer qua a pretense event, in order for the two clauses to "meet", thereby making their discourse referents accessible for anaphora.

By contrast, our analysis instead argues that the matrix clause should be interpreted low, under the fiction operator. In *Sylvie*, this is required by the reference of the first person indexical, but we would like to argue that it is implausible on independent grounds to interpret the matrix clause high. While statements like "It is not useless to explain...", "Let us piece together", "We have time for a digression" etc. are not parts of the storyline, they are part of the fictional universe. It is simply implausible, we think, that these involve the empirical author speaking directly to the empirical reader, but this is what accounts like Bücking's predict when they interpret the matrix clause in the actual world.[15]

Bücking (p.c.) suggests that one way to avoid the commitment that the empirical author and reader are involved is to embed his analysis under a fictional layer between the actual and story-world, similar to what we argue is implicit in Lewis' analysis. The idea would be to say that the dot-types can handle any transgression between narrative layers and are not restricted to transgressions into the actual world. We think this is an interesting idea which merits further exploration, but the issues are highly nontrivial. The motivation in terms of meta- and para-fiction is explicitly about transgression to the actual world, and it is far from clear that types like ABSTRACT and PRETENSE-EVENT are appropriate in the fictional periphery where the narrator lives.

3.3   Our analysis extended

The analyses in the last two subsections assume that the *while*-clause and the matrix clause in temporal metalepsis are interpreted at different ontological levels: the modal or fiction operator, in conjunction with the dot-types in Bücking's analysis, provide an embedding, and the *while*-clause is interpreted inside this embedding fiction, and the matrix clause outside it. This high interpretation of the matrix clause makes it impossible to interpret an "I" in this clause as referring to the narrator. For that reason, such analyses fail to account for cases like *Sylvie*.[16]

Let us now consider how our analysis could be extended to account for third-

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15 Bücking's analysis seems to be more plausible for a type of examples that were brought to our attention by Ad Neeleman (p.c.). Consider a case when I, immersed in the reading of a Sherlock Holmes story ask my friend 'While Sherlock Holmes is talking to Watson, can you make dinner?'. Here the matrix clause is clearly interpreted in the actual world.

16 In fairness, they were also only developed to account for metalepsis in third-person narrations.

person examples of metalepsis like (1). Assuming this is possible, as we now proceed to show, we will then have offered a holistic analysis of temporal metalepsis.
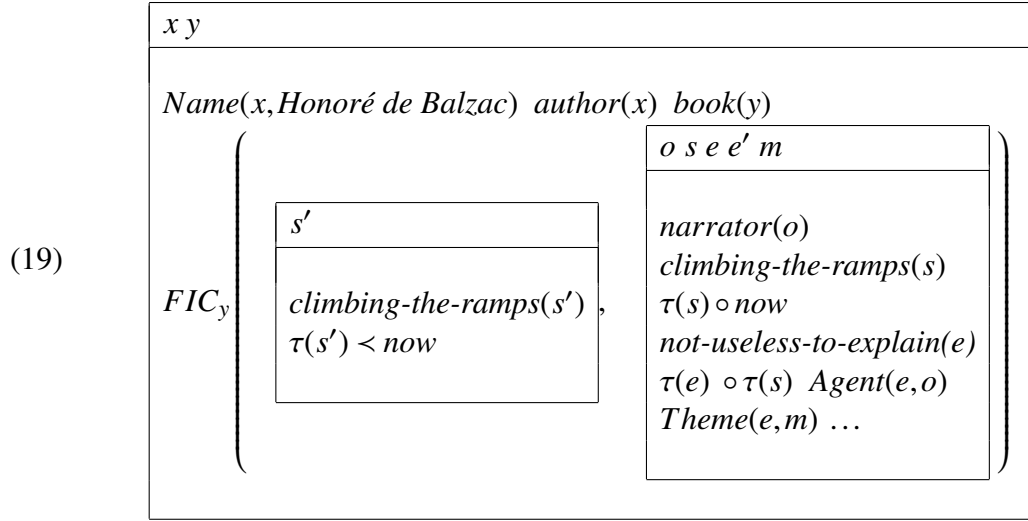
Our point of the departure is to take seriously the distinction between heterodiegetic narration in (1) and homodiegetic narration in (2). With respect to the former, we follow Altshuler & Maier (2022) and assume that there is no discourse referent for an omniscient narrator. We propose that this is what makes it unclear for whom it is "not useless to explain." A helpful analogy is the well-known 'missing marble' example, attributed to Barbara Partee:

(17)   Exactly nine out of the ten marbles are in the living room. #It is in the bedroom (modified from Heim 1982).

This example shows that a third person pronoun requires an antecedent discourse referent and (17) does not supply one for the missing marble, even though it logically entails that there is one. The analogy to heterodiegetic narration is that the omniscient narrator is there in all worlds compatible with the fiction (that's what it means to be fiction!), just like the marble. Yet it can't be referred to by a pronoun, because the DRS lacks a discourse referent representing the intended antecedent. We can, however, accommodate a missing marble with enough descriptive content (Roberts 1989), as the following example shows:

(18)   Nine out of the ten marbles are in living room.
         a.   I've been looking for hours and . . . hey wait, there it is!
         b.   {The missing marble/the red one/the bloody thing} is in the bedroom.

Altshuler & Maier 2022 propose that analogous to the missing marble, an narrator can be accommodated if there is enough descriptive content, often signaling that the seeming omniscient narrator is actually unreliable and first-person like. This can happen explicitly with the use of an indexical, e.g. "I will explain. . . ". However, there are other means (the use of subjective predicates, exclamatives, etc.). We propose that metalepsis is one such way. In particular, we propose that in (1), the metaleptic "It is not useless to explain" provides enough descriptive content to accommodate the narrator as the implicit subject of *explain*, as shown in (19). The intrusion of the narrator breaks the storyline, and yields a much more abrupt effect than the metalepsis in *Sylvie*.

(19)

$$
\boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
x\ y \\[4pt]
\hline
Name(x, Honoré\ de\ Balzac)\ \ author(x)\ \ book(y) \\[4pt]
FIC_y
\left(
\boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
s' \\
\hline
climbing\text{-}the\text{-}ramps(s') \\
\tau(s') < now
\end{array}
}
,
\boxed{
\begin{array}{l}
o\ s\ e\ e'\ m \\
\hline
narrator(o) \\
climbing\text{-}the\text{-}ramps(s) \\
\tau(s) \circ now \\
not\text{-}useless\text{-}to\text{-}explain(e) \\
\tau(e)\ \circ \tau(s)\ \ Agent(e,o) \\
Theme(e,m)\ \ldots
\end{array}
}
\right)
\end{array}
}
$$

4   Conclusion

This paper explored a phenomenon, metalepsis, that hasn't been discussed in linguistics until only recently, but is important because it sheds new light on the semantics of fiction and paradoxical statements. Previous analyses of metalepsis have focused on third-person examples, e.g., (1), leading to incorrect predictions for first-person examples, particularly those that use the indexical 'I', e.g., (2).

We proposed that temporal metalepsis is interpreted at face value, uttered by the narrator in the fictional world. This gives rise to an inconsistency: the narrator is asking the narratee to equate narration time and narrated time. In (2), the narrator is the older version of the protagonist, and when the time of story and of the narration are equated, the two collapse, creating a cinematic effect: we are asked to imagine that the narrator joins his younger self to narrate what happens as the events unfold. Another possibility is that pretense is invoked: the narrator pretends to be at the scene of the events he is narrating and therefore is justified in using the present tense. In (1), we accommodate an impersonal, omniscient narrator who intrudes into the narrative to talk to the narratee. His intrusion breaks the storyline, thereby triggering an aesthetic effect that is different from (2).

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