



Pythagoras' Theorem and Homer's Ulysses.

Giuseppe Bompreszi

University of Urbino "Carlo Bo"

giuseppe.bompreszi@istruzione.it

Fors'anche dovrei predicare da me a me ciò ch'ella mi dice
nella sua lettera: *c'est dommage que vous êtes sorti du sentier
de la raison, et que vous divaguez dans l'espace imaginaire.*
Ma spesso, la ragione non è che immaginazione, e la
immaginazione non è che ragione.

U. FOSCOLO, *Letters*, II, 354-55 (to the Countess of Albany).

Abstract

When people say that literature is similar to mathematics, they very often mean that both deal with ideal entities. But if something is ideal, it is not contingent. Therefore, it is hard to state that literature and literary objects are ideal entities, since it is very plausible that a sonnet, just to make an example, is created using some words, as well as a character or a fictional scenario. Indeed, whatever is created is also contingent. Now, if literature has nothing to do with the realm of platonic things, then we have to weigh up two possibilities: 1) literature and mathematics are completely different spheres, or 2) it is not necessary true that mathematics studies and handles ideal entities, and so it makes sense again to say that a literary object (for instance, Homer's Ulysses) and a mathematical one (for instance, Pythagoras' theorem) are similar. As it is anticipated by the title above, I will move on along this second path.

As everybody knows, Pythagoras' theorem says that the square one can construct on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal in area to the sum of the squares based on the other two sides. The content of this theorem is something that we can consider universally valid within Euclidean space; moreover, we can also be sure that it deals with some true properties of the right-angled triangle as such. When we speak about true properties, we mean some certain features as opposed to mere appearances. Homer's Ulysses, on the other hand, is one of the most known characters of Greek ancient myths; he is very important in the development of the *Iliad*, but in the *Odyssey* he is no less than the fulcrum of the whole story. He also appears in many subsequent literary tales and poems, from ancient times till today's international aesthetic production. So, what might these two realities have in common? It may seem that Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses share no relevant aspects, but it is not so. Indeed, first of all, they both "exist" in an unusual way, if compared to most daily things and facts. Secondly, if we consider them simply as tools in order to do something (in this case, respectively: to explain geometrical properties and to operate with them, to tell stories and suggest meanings), then we should admit that their *procedures of being* are again different from common devices.

1. Things and objects.

The things we usually deal with, as opposed to us, are considered *ob-jects*. An object is something that is projected out there and stands before us. On the other hand, we human beings are subjects, even if, in particular cases, I can consider someone else as an object for my reason, my feeling or will: it happens for instance when a person becomes the object of knowledge or of desire from someone else's point of view. According to Descartes, the logical rationality of the subject has the task of dictating its own rules to the object and hence to found (to lay the foundation of) the science of nature. The latter, in fact, is above all, a whole lot of material objects, or better – using Descartes' words – it is a set of *res extensae*. In short, the object as we understand it in our daily life is the Cartesian physical being, reduced to its own primary qualities: extension and movement.

It should be clear that we cannot speak about Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses in such terms, because they are not extended, even if the triangle has of course an extension in space as soon as we calculate its area in a specific case, and Ulysses could refer to a physical man, i.e. to an individual body that really occupied some space. The point is that, since both are creations of the mind, if we want to keep the analysis within Cartesian thought, we should speak of them as "intellectual things":

And we consider whatever objects come within our perception either as things, or as certain states of things; or else as eternal truths which have no existence outside our thought. [...] However, I do not recognize more than two principal kinds of things: one is intellectual or cogitative things, that is, things pertaining to the mind or to thinking substance; and the other, material things, or things pertaining to extended substance or body.¹

Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses seem to be objects more pertinent to the mind than to the body. Maybe the first could be considered as the expression of an eternal truth, but just because of this, it is not the truth as such. Expressions are of course contingent things. The Homeric character, on the other hand, can also be seen as the expression of a human type, namely the «hero of many turns» (*polytropos*)², in all the meanings of the phrase used. Hence, for the moment, I would suggest considering both of them as mental things. Nevertheless, it is apparent (or rather intuitive) that they are objects, not mere ideas or fancies, and so they clearly differ from the thinking subject.

2. Fictional objects.

Objects are those things we face. Just in front of me I can find a book, a table, a wall, a window, a tree outside the window, a cat and so on. In the book I may be able to find Pythagoras's theorem or else Homer's Ulysses. If this is the case, now I face one of those strange things whose being troubles our enquiring intelligence. However, or rather precisely for the same reason that we face them, I can say that Pythagoras' theorem and

Homer's Ulysses are objects. Now we must ask ourselves: what kind of objects are Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses?

They are really of another kind if compared to the things we deal with in our ordinary, empirical experience, even if there is no doubt that we somehow experience them too. It is quite evident that Pythagoras' theorem is a creation³ of the mind as far as it is a logical formulation of a numerical rule governing all right-angled triangles. According to Hartry Field⁴, the fact that we can use Pythagoras' theorem in order to do something successfully in the world does not entail our commitment to its autonomous existence and so we do not have to consider it in a platonic way. Pythagoras' theorem is what it is, but not independently from our mental activity. This proposal, called *fictionalism*, is the last step of development of mathematic ontology.

The fundamental ontological thesis that moves mathematic fictionalism, thus, regards mathematic entities at the same level as every other *fictional object*. Mathematic entities do actually exist intra-theoretically. It makes sense to wonder whether there is a prime number between 5 and 22, because this statement – 'there is a prime number between 5 and 22' – is a fictional statement, that is to say a mathematic statement that we have to place after an operator of fiction like 'in the story *m*', where *m* is the story of arithmetic.⁵

In other words, maths is certainly good and effective, but it is not *absolutely* true, because we must consider the system of its statements always inscribed in a fictional frame.

Homer's Ulysses is also – and maybe even more clearly – a creation of the mind. Considering him, we can notice for the first time that a *mental artefact* at the beginning seems to depend⁶ causally on a specific author's mind. Ancient Romans used to speak of *inventio* in order to describe all those procedures related to the construction of a mental reality, whether it be a logical argumentation or a proper tale. What can we learn from the Latin linguistic approach? I think that we can rediscover a basic feature of mental inventions: according to the meaning of the verb *invenire*, they are indeed something done and found at the same time. If it is so, then Homer is not really the cause of Ulysses, because the author finds the character, nonetheless the latter is not a completely independent reality as far as this finding is just the result of a creative

process. Such an inference is very important, but we will develop it more fully later, when we explore the interpretation of fictional objects. For the moment, we just have to recognize that narrative characters are objects and not nothing. Of course they are inventions, but this fact does not mean that they are empty names. According to Alexius von Meinong⁷, if a proposition like «golden mountains do not exist» makes sense and is true, then it must contain only terms that actually denote something. That is why the thing dealt with in the sentence just mentioned above, that is «the golden mountain», must refer to a “being” that, although it does not exist in our empirical world, has, however, some kind of objectivity and so we can say that it *subsists* as an ideal object. Leaving apart the golden mountains for getting back to Ulysses, we can also translate this argument in phenomenological terms, saying that any literary speaking is always intentional: it presupposes an object toward which the speech is directed. Of course some philologists may protest against my use of «literary»⁸ for Homer's work, but even considering the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as oral compositions the phenomenological argument is confirmed.

3. Differences between Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses: an interesting theoretical consequence

We said that Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses are both creations of the mind; however, it may be noted they are not the same kind of objects. Indeed, for Ulysses we depend on Homer's work, while for Pythagoras' theorem it is quite obvious that we can see the relationship of equivalence between the square constructed on the hypotenuse and the sum of the squares constructed on the other two sides even without knowing what picture Pythagoras had in mind, or better (in order to avoid the troubles of the ghost in the machine, which we are going to discuss in the fifth paragraph) what he had drawn when he actually demonstrated such theorem. Moreover, there are right-angled triangles everywhere, also outside Pythagoras' work (that, by the way, does not exist in the form of a book or a collection of books in which the author himself stored his knowledge and inventions)⁹.

It is true that, in order to create Ulysses, someone chose and set some aspects of a personality and then *instituted* the character, while the features of a triangle do not depend on one single mind. However, it should be clear that in both cases we are not dealing with personal or private ideas. In other words, it is not correct to think that Ulysses *could* be or not be, while Pythagoras' theorem *had* to be in any case. Ulysses is – here and now – as necessary as a right-angled triangle. See Leibniz¹⁰ in order to understand this point: even something done with the highest degree of freedom or even by chance, once done, is always referable to a mathematical order or rule.

Thus, let us assume, for example, that someone jots down a number of points at random on a piece of paper, as do those who practice of geomancy. I maintain that it is possible to find a geometric line passes through all the points in the same order in which the hand jotted them down.¹¹

By a logical point of view, the character of Ulysses, once traced in a text, corresponds to a mathematical function¹², whose values define every specified property of the fictional individual. On the other hand, we must side with those who might say that the right-angled triangle is a complete object (mathematically speaking, which is the only relevant point of view here), while Ulysses is definitely incomplete.

Indeed, literature always gives a partial model of (its) reality. That happens because, in order to follow Ulysses' story, it is not important to know whether or not he had a scar on his left shoulder or if he liked to hunt lizards on Mount Parnassus. The truth or the falsehood of such details are omitted in Homer's tale of the king of Ithaca's adventures. On the contrary, it is very important to know that he had a scar just over one of his knees and that once he hunted wild boars with Autólycos and his sons right on the Parnassus. On that occasion, he was wounded by a wild boar: this is how he got the scar on the leg. Of course all these details are important because, once back incognito on his island, Ulysses is recognized by his old servant Eurycleia because of that very scar¹³.

The fact that literature always gives an incomplete description of what is said is determined by its function of modelling reality: poems, plays and tales are not passive representations of what we can find in the world of space and time, but models and expressions of a fictional reality¹⁴. In other words, a literary work, first and foremost

speaks about itself, hence it does not have to represent anything faithfully. This same combination of words – “to represent faithfully” – makes no sense in literary theory, despite the fact that we can speak about realistic poetics and productions. That is why Plato's aesthetics is absolutely wrong, by my point of view. Inside a text, there is no proper mirroring of the outside¹⁵. Even if literature could reflect the world instead of being itself a world, the “copy” would still be partial or incomplete. Imagine that we have to draw a map of a country: we can never realize a consistent and complete map, if we want it to be both useful and faithful¹⁶.

All in all, it might seem that literature provides us with a poor world, or anyway with a reference that is of course poorer than our world in space and time. Indeed, what we do know of a character, for instance, is only what is actually written or suggested about him or her: there is no past and no future besides the narrative time, there is no geography except for what we can read on the page about the places where the story develops. Last but not least, the character has only a few, sometimes vague somatic features and we cannot fill all these gaps. Of course, if we like a strong ontology, we will forego literary fictionalism and seek to quench our thirst for knowledge in science. It is said that there are also gaps in science, but in this case they seem to depend on our investigative ability and technique, not on the topic discussed. Because of its specific and irremovable “fog effect”, undoubtedly, literature does not speak of so many particulars. But its ontology is not poor or weak in a negative sense. Since we can construct several different fictional objects instead of dealing with just one real thing, these entities – though incomplete – will nonetheless organize a world that is naturally wider than that of our scientific experience. By the way, pure maths seems to do the same¹⁷. Moreover, a literary world assumes as its own background (always, but not in its whole extension, depending on the genre involved) the real world, as Eco¹⁸ clearly explained. What is called the *fictional pact* also has the function of maintaining implicit so many explications of things and events that would disturb the proper aesthetic reception of a poem, a drama or a tale. Just to give an example, if in a novel we read that it is raining, we do not need to know that the drops are made of water and fall down from the sky, except for special cases of non-sense literature or science fiction. But also considering this presumption, we end up with a wider world than the effective world

itself, where – let's keep it in mind – we locate literature as a thing. Hence the paradox of an x containing something else (a y) that contains x .

4. Understanding Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses.

«There is no such thing as ghosts!», would say a modern philosophical Mr. Otis, like Carnap or the second Russell. However, just at the beginning of that famous Wilde tale, the original Mr. Otis complains to the Canterville ghost about the rattle of his chains and offers him some oil in order to have silence for the rest of the night. How can we complain to nothing and give something to nothing? In the *Manifesto* written by Marx and Engels, a spectre walks around Europe. Here the problem is double or perhaps triple: it is not only complicated to speak about a political movement or a party, but also to declare that it is nothing but a spectre, and finally to talk about Europe. At the end of Shakespeare's play, titled *The Tempest*, Prospero says:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.¹⁹

If we are listening to Oberon right now in a theatre, then should we conclude that we have just watched a nothing made by many nothings? The reference of a belief, the character of a tale or of a play, a social body, a cultural identity and a collective event are all immaterial things, but they are as solid as trees and stones. We will definitely be convinced of that, once we consider laws and institutions: so immaterial but at the same

time so solid and resistant to our preferences and desires. Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses are subsisting objects too²⁰. Since I put together mathematical theorems and literary characters it should be clear that I do not appeal to Ferraris' «weak textualism»²¹. Indeed, generally speaking, my thesis is much more similar to what the Italian philosopher calls «shy acosmism»²², even if I do not subscribe such a definition. Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses are constructions, just like laws and social bodies, but this does not entail that there is no difference at all among these things. Mathematical theorems are conceptual constructions which claim to be absolute; on the other hand, fictional characters are discursive and emotional constructions whose social dimension is normally recognized. In any case, they are not nothing, even if somehow they can be called *illusions* and we cannot run directly into them in the empirical world. In conclusion, we have never to forget that they are creations of the mind and “ideal”²³ objects.

Now, what does it mean to understand a mental creation? And how can we rightly interpret another mind's production?

Let's even say that Pythagoras and Homer are responsible for their creation, in spite of all that, these “things” are not exclusive properties of their “inventors”²⁴. It is not only the author who has rights to the fictional object, but everyone who is involved in its *Wirkungskreis* (sphere of effects). As semiotics points out, a fictional object of maths or of literature is an interpersonal reality²⁵, it is a matter of culture²⁶. Indeed, it is something that we can communicate. When we communicate something to someone else, we share the common reality of that “something”. Of course I do not mean that we share a ready-made reality, because on the contrary it is the very result of a negotiation. It is clear, anyway, that every negotiation is inscribed in a social frame, and that is why we can admit that fictional objects are social things, at a manifest or hidden level.

A tenacious objector could protest that the negotiation involved in understanding an argument or a tale is much more like a progressive approximation to the original appearance of the object: the social activity of understanding consists in coming closer and closer to the objective manifestation of the source's intentions. Only that should be considered the truth of the object, and of course to understand an object which has been created by someone else means to reach its truth.

That is an old idea. Its best formulation (that exceeds also some similar Aristotelian ideas) dates back to the 17th century, when Johannes Alsted answered the question about the truth saying that it is «what by which the *ens* convenes with its own intellect, that is the intellect it depends on. Indeed, natural, moral and supernatural things depend on God's intellect, artificial ones depend on their maker's intellect»²⁷.

Well, we can also accept this definition, because it seems in accord with common sense and coherent with the existence of something we cannot deny (generally speaking): instruction booklets. There are instruction booklets precisely because we believe that they dwell upon the real plan of a thing, thus they would provide us with essential precepts about its correct use. Imagine that you come across a mysterious box of well-assembled electronic components; you may ask yourself «what is it for?» or «how does it work?». If the box is accompanied by an instruction booklet, then you know that you have nothing to worry about: some competent people edited the booklet and used it as a vehicle of their knowledge in order to give you the best answers to every question you may formulate. We might consider this is a technical habit, so that it relates to science. On the contrary, it is always a creed, because it is based on a passive trust: the *Bible* is from this angle the instruction booklet of the world considered as a production. Celebrating the instruction booklets, we rely on the makers of the things we are interested in, and so our trust easily becomes a faith.

But then, assuming the *death of God*²⁸ as a real and relevant event, we must conclude that to understand something means to challenge and at the same time to enjoy the labyrinth²⁹: what we can call the “*artifex* free comprehension” is a disorientated falling to every side, a radical freedom before the being, considered as a text. But precisely because we are so free, we have to answer for our decisions. We can no longer avoid the hermeneutic responsibility, because God, our last tutor and trustee, is dead and every transcendent authority died with him. Nowadays, in fact, we are well aware that the comprehension of natural things is God free (physics and physicians do not need a theological hypothesis in order to explain physical reality, they do not need the *Bible* as booklet of the universe). However, given these metaphysical premises, it follows that a hermeneutic commitment is implied always and everywhere. In fact, if it is natural for literary and social studies, now we have recognized that it is decisive also in physics, since reading the book of Nature is not incommensurable with the readings

of a literary text. But some hermeneutical remark affects mathematics as well, especially when we recognize that it is «a business with made and not found ideograms», as pointed out also by Brian Rotman³⁰. Indeed, since God was traditionally the source of the truth, as soon as we gave up to build our knowledge upon him, we started having to do only with human opinions, but a world of opinions entails interpretation. This admission, although disconcerting, is consistent with the fact already mentioned that we don't need to know the mathematician's mind in order to understand a mathematical object which he or she has formulated. Indeed, if knowledge can survive without God, who was considered the ultimate Maker and the supreme Intelligence of everything, then all the more reason you can put aside³¹ Pythagoras in order to work with his theorem. Likewise, the comprehension of an artefactual aesthetic thing – like a novel, a poem or a painting – must be free from the author's useless³² interference.

Otherwise, we could face this paradox: in order to understand something fictional, we ought to understand the intention of its author, but he or she is the only person who knows for sure what he or she wanted to do; thus the truth of an artefact is undetectable for everybody else³³, even if it is still necessary.

Normally, when we listen to a musical composition, we are able realize if it is sad, or happy, or static or energetic and so on, but we do not need to check the composer's intentions. The features we are interested in are right in the object. In order to understand Pythagoras' theorem we do not need to put ourselves in Pythagoras' shoes: the relevant features of that kind of triangle and of those squares are in the formulation of the theorem itself³⁴. When we try to understand Ulysses, it is almost the same process: as a real character, he lives on the page, not in the author's mind. Besides, both Pythagoras and Homer are very fuzzy people from a historic standpoint, and it is even possible that they are not the authors of what we consider as their works. If it were so, all the more reason for us to wonder how we might attempt to establish some sort of contact with their minds!

In conclusion, if we do not want to deal with confusing concepts, we should try to understand the others' communication frameworks and contents not by addressing their intentions, because it would be impossible and also useless to get inside their minds: the only thing we can do is to get inside the work that the author left³⁵.

5. The problem of the mind and the construction of meaning in ordinary life and literature.

Let's start this paragraph with a linguistic comment: an interpretation is not only the action of explaining the meaning of something, but also the way in which a performer expresses a creative work. It is true that, if we have a text, it is by interpretation that we understand it, but when we say that, we must consider both the meanings of the word as mentioned above. Imagine you have the score of a piece of music that you have never heard before: it is a written text expressing something, but its content is still unknown to you. If you want to understand this text's message, then you have to sit at a piano (or pick up a guitar and so on) and try to play the music, assuming that you are able to read the score. But now let's hypothesize that you are able to recognize the signs of the notes by their position in the score, but not their length; moreover, you cannot read the rhythm and the tempo: it is clear that very probably you will not play the same music written on the score, but something else. In order to say that, we need to postulate a comparative activity and a "touchstone". The problem here is that the music written on the score is unknown, so you realize that probably you are playing something else, but you will never be sure of it. Indeed you compare your performance with nothing. Anyway, as an interpretation is not a private event, we are not so interested in this solitary game. So, let's imagine that there are some people standing behind you, who are listening to you and watching the score, at the same time. Of course they may be cheating, for instance pretending to know more about music than they actually do, but normally you can understand that you are playing the score well thanks to their positive reactions. The meaning of all the signs in the score that are still mysterious will thus be inferred by checking the (supposed competent) public's reactions. With such feedback, now you can interpret the whole text and reach its truth. After all your attempts, it is very probable that you can state that you have understood the score. Now the question is: can you even say that you have come into contact with the composer's original idea? It is important to answer this question because as we

mentioned above, it is widely believed that makers know the truth of their productions better than any other interpreter.

Before formulating an answer, however, let's consider another example in which we can check what is at stake in the text, besides some meanings that may or may not correspond to the source's intention. When we are engaged in oral communication on a very practical level, we find ourselves more or less in the same position as before: we do not know what lies behind the words pronounced, and so it is always possible that we are interpreting something other than the true message. Moreover, in order to be masters of the situation and consider speech as something crystal clear, we are convinced that we should get a special key to the speaker's mind³⁶.

Considering people's reactions to what is said, in the light of a coherent tradition of meaning, we normally infer something about their mind. For many reasons (such as politeness, care or irony), the utterance itself can lead us astray from the aim of understanding others and perhaps even conceal the real ideas of our interlocutor. However, his or her true intention may be revealed by his or her general behaviour. This solution is based on a form of reductionism applied to the problem of meaning. In his masterpiece, *The Concept of Mind*, Gilbert Ryle paved the way for such conclusions, unmasking the dogma of the *ghost in the machine*.

It [i.e. the dogma] maintains that there exist both bodies and minds; and that there occur physical processes and mental processes, and that there are mechanical causes of corporeal movements and mental causes of corporeal movements. I shall argue that these and other analogous conjunctions are absurd; but, it must be noticed, the argument will not show that either of the illegitimately conjoined propositions is absurd in itself. I am not, for example, denying that there occur mental processes.³⁷

For Ryle, talking about minds is nothing but speaking about bodies and their processes. Every description of mental states depends upon information physically and practically provided by the body. Thus there is no inner self to be found. Relying on common sense, which holds that interpretative correctness lies in the mind's intention (that is a psychological referent), we now discover that we have to deal with concrete phenomena and not with ideas or fuzzy mental contents.

Ryle believes that a proposition in which we find terms referred to inner mental states can be translated into another proposition containing only visible dispositions or action frames. Hence, understanding is not the result of a mere *dictionary process* of knowledge focused on the single components at issue, but first of all it is the outcome of an *encyclopaedic narrative ability*.³⁸

The case of literary criticism is in some ways similar, but there are important differences. It is clear that, assuming the general point of view of ordinary people, by reading a text, I want to know the author's mind, or better, that part of his or her mind concerning the text. Common sense suggests that only that is the correct meaning of a literary work. But, if we accept Ryle's view, we should find this mind only by operating physically and observing the body of the text and its mechanism. Looking at the body of the text means examining the message and its structures from a philological standpoint³⁹. But philology is not the reification of the letter, rather it is an active reconstruction of the sense, resorting to all the cultural recurrences involved within literary communication. That is more or less what we can read for instance in Angelo Marchese's critical observations:

The poetic message expresses an informative substance through the code (the language) and the sub-code (literary and rhetoric tradition) peculiar to the author and with reference to his or her cultural world (ideology). The act of deciphering the message, or the critical reading, must pay attention to the fact that also the addressee has got at least his or her code and his or her ideology, that are different of course from the writer's ones. An accurate interpretation demands, therefore, by the reader's side, a process of conforming to the author's code and ideology, what is possible to obtain only with a minute historicist reconstruction of the writer's cultural world by means of different philological applications (linguistics, stylistics and rhetoric, cultural history). It follows that the critic must steer clear of adapting the text to his or her own code and to his or her own ideology or even to cast on the text ideas and contents that belong to his or her cultural world (= interference), because otherwise the author's authentic message will be distorted.⁴⁰

In any case, we had better beware. If the right interpretation lies first of all in avoiding interference, then there is only one right interpretation. Indeed, since $A=A$, $B \neq A$, and it is impossible that $A=A=B \neq A$, then every single reader and every generation

of readers aiming at the right interpretation should reach, at least in principle, the same hermeneutic conclusion. This does not actually happen. That is why we must correct the statement of literary criticism, maintaining the certainty that we must analyse the body of the text in order to get in contact with its mind (the meaning), but also avoiding the paradoxes of the archetypal return.

Since the author's code is by definition different from the reader's, we should conclude that we can never really know the author's mind, with the solipsistic consequences already seen. But precisely because we do understand texts from the ancient times or other cultures, perhaps it is better to change something within the premises: it is not completely true that there is such a sharp difference between the source's code and the receiver's⁴¹. Moreover, it is not true that we look at the body of the text as a mere fact. Merleau-Ponty warns us that, if we want to consider all things from a philosophic standpoint, our relationship with being «is not the frontal attitude that the spectator has for the spectacle, it is instead a kind of complicity, a slanting, clandestine relationship»⁴². Even staying within the analytic attitude of thought, we can accept a similar conclusion. As James pointed out, we are not just spectators of being, because what we call "facts" are indeed realities shaped by our concerns and expectations. Especially when we are going to know something, it is very important what we actually want or hope to do. Understanding is a creative activity and always involves an element of interpretation. Thus we can state that we know nothing of a text with absolute certainty, except for those things which are true by definition. What we can do is just to build up a reasonable narration of the sense.

Let's now get back to the example of the conversation we used at the beginning of this paragraph. We said that understanding our interlocutor's intention means reasonably guessing a meaning by observing his or her behaviour and other physical aspects of the situation. If I misinterpret a proposition, then my interlocutor can entrust the true meaning of the message to a corporal reaction or to the incompatibility of the sense I acquired with the reality of the situation, but he or she can always resort to a verbal specification, although misunderstanding is once again possible. For literature it is different: literary communication does not have this kind of immediate and direct feedback. As Derrida pointed out, literature is a linguistic interchange that happens *in absentia*⁴³.

The writer as a concrete person has no special rights to his or her own text, once it has been written. That is also why Eco in 1992 spoke about literature (in general, including even philosophical production) as sending a message that is «put in the bottle»⁴⁴. It is not a matter of staying by the concrete reader's side. It is the reader who activates the interpretation and actualises the sense of the text, but we must consider the reader as a *strategy of meaning* instead of as a real person.

The model reader of a story is not the empirical reader. The empirical reader is you, me, anyone, when we read a text. Empirical readers can read in many ways, and there is no law that tells them how to read, because they often use the text as a container for their own passions, which may come from outside the text, or which the text can arouse by chance. [...] It is not at all forbidden to use a text for daydreaming, and we do this frequently, but daydreaming is not a public affair; it leads us to move within the narrative wood as if it were our own private garden.

One must therefore observe the rules of the game, and the model reader is someone who eager to play such a game. [...] Who lays down these rules of the game and these limitations? In other words, who is it that constructs the model reader? "The author," my little listeners will immediately say.

But after making the distinction between the model reader and the empirical one with such difficulty, should we think of the author as an empiric entity who writes the story and decides which model reader he or she should construct, for reasons that perhaps cannot be confessed and are known only to his or her psychoanalyst? I'll tell you at once that I couldn't really care less about the empirical author of a narrative text (or, indeed, of any text).⁴⁵

The reader starts the engine of the text, but the meaning is not completely in the reader's hands. Both the empirical author's intention and the empirical reader's intention do not count for much, on the contrary, the empirical intention of the text is fundamental⁴⁶.

Now, here is the last question: is this empirical intention of the text a reality we can liken to the *Ding-an-sich* matter? Are we once more prisoner of a primary ground thought?

6. The problem of “being-as-such” and beliefs.

Since the text is a social object and interpretation a social fact, we could say with Searle that we move in the field of observer–dependent reality:

Many things that we think of as real nonetheless only exist relative to observers, in the form of reality that they have. We need to distinguish those features of the world that we might call ‘observer-independent’ from those features that are observer-dependent. Observer-independent features are those that, so to speak, don’t give a damn about human observers, and here I am thinking of things like mountains and molecules and galaxies and processes like photosynthesis and mitosis and meiosis. All of these phenomena are observer-independent. But in addition to them, there are lots of other phenomena in the world whose existence depends on being treated or regarded in a certain way by human agents. Observer-dependent phenomena would include such things as chair and tables and glasses and money and property and marriage. So, we need a general distinction between those phenomena whose existence is observer-independent and those whose existence is observer-relative.⁴⁷

It is obvious that, considering all the creations of the mind, we deal with observer-dependent entities. What in my opinion is not to be taken for granted is rather that such a distinction between observer-dependent reality and observer-independent reality marks a sharp difference of things. As a social object can be defined by having a function⁴⁸, we should say that DNA is not an observer-independent reality. But DNA is a molecule of deoxyribonucleic acid, and so, according to Searle, it should be considered as an independent-observer reality. Searle states that «it is only against the background of the presupposition of normativity that we can discover such facts as the fact that the function of the heart is to pump blood»⁴⁹. But I think that mountains (something he considers as observer-independent reality) are mountains against the background of my cultural *Da-sein* with all its rules of recognition-acceptance-acknowledgment at work; otherwise mountains would be only stacks of rocks, earth, trees, animals, snow etc, but not mountains. It is a human being (or better an intellect) that sees a mountain in a mountain, just like it is a human being (or again an intellect) that sees a seat in a simple stump.

Thus, it is fundamental to underline the intentionality of fictional objects and facts, and it is necessary to recognize it as a collective intentionality. Every hermeneutic object is institutional: somehow we created it, even if it does not depend on me or on you individually. That is why a story, for instance Ulysses' story, is an observer-dependent reality and at the same time a social thing, whose truth is not completely in my hands, or in Homer's hands either. As we have already said, fictional beings are social beings, and so they belong to everybody but never exclusively.

Searle also claims that «you can't have an institutional reality without an underlying brute physical reality»⁵⁰. Money is a kind of invention of the social mind, but it is not a mere collective idea. We can have gold coins or ingots, silver coins or ingots, notes (paper), cheques (paper again), credit cards (plastic and magnetic tracks) and so on. All right, but what about a fictional object such as a triangle (always according to Hartry Field) or as a literary character? If they are social objects in the sense of Searle's argumentation, then they must have a physical *hypokeímenon*. The problem is that we know that a triangle is not based on a physical triangle-shaped thing. Moreover, what is the physical substratum in the case of that rascal of Bart Simpson?

As I have already said, I do not deny that there is an intention in social events and objects, but I state that 1) it is not grounded on some physical reality; 2) it is impossible to know the original and contingent author's set of ideas; 3) even if this set were knowable, it is however useless or of very little use. The proper intentionality of every *interpretandum* is not the source's mind (even when the source performs a constitutive rule, making exist what we then try to understand), but the structural mechanism of the object itself, i.e. the software immanent within the physical body of the *interpretandum* as such. Continuing with the computer example, I can say that we have to aim the programme but not the stream of thoughts that have directed the elaboration of the programme.

We can only postulate such an original private mind, but it is just a metaphysical assumption and we have to carry on our interpretative task even without it. The object of fiction is in general the text we actually deal with, not the text-in-itself (for instance, in a Platonic sense). This sentence also means that we mustn't consider the objects of fiction as simple over-structures. Indeed, we have to question also the supremacy of physical realism. Real things keep on being even without us – they say –, creations of

the mind do not. That is why real things are supposed to have much more “being” than fictional things. In classical terms, the being is eternal and necessary, on the contrary phenomena are here and now, and just for us. Fictional things are observer-dependent realities, thus they are phenomena. Thus they are not being-in-itself. So fictional objects should be less real than physical ones. It seems already evident at the level of social objects. For example, a coin is less real than a piece of metal, because a coin exists for us and the piece of metal keeps on existing even without us. Again, a chair is less real than the wood it is made of because the chair is a chair for us, while the wood is wood even without us. Finally, from a rigorous fictional standpoint, a text should be less real than a brute fact (for instance the fact it speaks about, in case of realistic or expressive literature), because the text is what it is just because we can consider it as a text, while the brute fact happens whether we notice it or not. Now let's get back to Pythagoras' theorem and Homer's Ulysses. Regarding the former, you could say that the formulation of the theorem is fictional, but the mathematical core, i.e. the relationship between the squares considered, is real. So the theorem would be less real than the fact it speaks about. If all of mankind disappeared at once, there would be no mathematical tradition and no formulas, but the fact that the theorem expresses would still be there in the universe. Indeed for many people the sentences of Pythagoras' theorem describe a simple fact, i.e. that the relationship the theorem is about is out there in the world, just as real things are. I am also convinced that what is expressed by the theorem depicts an impersonal situation, but what I want to underline is that it is illogical to affirm that the theorem is an *absolute* truth, namely a relation which is always valid in any geometrical system. We can only say that we *believe* and we are supported by reasonable conviction that it is so. The ontological statement is a belief and so it is a social reality, not a physical one. The if-clause, in fact, does not suggest that being will disappear with us, but in any case shuts us out of the “world”, leaving no possibility of getting in touch with it, so that we could never check its structure and composition the day after our hypothetical disappearance. More than Berkeley, this argument should call to mind Hume⁵¹. In conclusion, fictional things are more real than the so called factual ones, because the former are entities we are sure of as long as they depend on our intelligence; the latter are always conjectural even if very probable. In classical words, we could say that some representations are more real than anything else. It is a kind of revival of

Vico's philosophy (the distinction between God's intelligence and human beings' knowledge, and the affirmation that only what one can produce is true – *verum ipsum factum* – so that we can never speak of truth about physical knowledge as long as physical reality is not our production, but only about maths and humanities)⁵².

Precisely because there is no zero degree⁵³ of language and representation, in my opinion it makes no sense to look after (*sorgen*) being as such (*Ding-an-sich*). Which is not the same as saying that a *Ding-an-sich* does not exist. Hermeneutic representations are the matter of our being and of the whole being we can consider. Therefore all knowledge is metaphorical and fictional⁵⁴. And so no fact is really a brute fact. Every being can be adequately thought as the (co-)product of our rationality and so as a mind-dependent thing. Of course different beings will have a different degree of dependence and some of them may also seem «unemendable» in all respects. However, the assertion according to which we always deal with constructed or semi-constructed objects is more reasonable than saying the contrary. It owes its strength not to an improper extension of the character of *fiat* things to *bona fide* realities⁵⁵, as someone might think. Rather, it is the consequence of recognizing the world as something extremely complex, fluid, and which never provides two phenomena that are absolutely equal. In this framework, any act of ontological identification and any discovery of a regularity (be it a law of nature or a norm of aesthetics) cannot be but the effects of some decisions which in the end are arbitrary, even if effective⁵⁶.

7. Conclusions

What I have tried to propound here may have sounded like the revenge of the *conceptual a-priori* over the *material a-priori*⁵⁷, but what it is for sure is just a philosophy of interpretation that I myself recognize as very pervasive. Since everything is interpretation (or at least interpretation too), if we want to discuss the being beyond all appearances, then we are condemned to deal with nothing more than *super-doxai*. It is quite silly to rid oneself of the phenomena to touch being directly, just like it is not so clever to saw down the branch on which you sit. Hence considering the text (whatever it

might be: a “fabric” of words or a structure of mathematical signs or even something else – the world?)⁵⁸ we can do our utmost with a fictional, constructive ontology⁵⁹.

Note

¹ DESCARTES (1644, 21), part I, par. 48.

² Cf. PUCCI (1987). See also VAN NORTWICK (2009).

³ Maurizio Ferraris – one of the most important Italian philosopher of aesthetics – would not agree: he believes that the theorem is eternal (like every other mathematical concept) and independent of the formulations of the mind. FERRARIS (2008), 476.

⁴ Cf. FIELD (1980).

⁵ BOCCUNI (2008), 576. Translation mine.

⁶ On this subject, see the paragraphs 4 and 5.

⁷ Cf. MEINONG (1904 and 1920).

⁸ That is not the case of Pietro Pucci. cf. PUCCI (1987, 27).

⁹ The important fact here is that we can't recognize Ulysses in general without Homer's work which first (at the state of facts) established the king of Ithaca as a literary character, but on the other hand we can recognize a specific right-angled triangle and all its properties even if Pythagoras didn't deal with those specific realities. In other words, we can apply Pythagoras' theorem to every right-angle triangle, but in order to apply the features which we consider as peculiar to Ulysses, we must have them in advance, what is possible first of all thanks to Homer's work. Furthermore, we can't apply the features that we do consider as typical of Homer's Ulysses to every individual character with the same name that we can possibly find on the page: just because Ulysses' identity depends at first on Homer's literary production, what the Greek poet actually reported as relevant for the character has to be found again (entirely or mostly) in every new token of Ulysses. By this point of view, even if the contest is quite different, the case of Ulysses can be analysed as that of Moses reported by WITTGENSTEIN (1964, 41-42, par. 79). On the other hand, the mathematical property of the squares constructed on the sides of a right-angled triangle have to be found in every occurrence of a right-angled triangle, but it is patent that they don't depend on Pythagoras's work. In addition, even because of what I have contended few lines above, it is clear that there could be some individuals with the same name in different literary texts, or also in the same one (see, for instance, the case of the two heroes called Argus in the *Argonauts* by Apollonius of Rhodes), while there cannot be two or more Pythagorean theorems involving the squares constructed on the sides of a right-angled triangle, because the relation at stake is just one. Literary homonymy, just because it deals with proper names, works differently from the type reference of mathematical concepts. To analyse better such a matter, see KRIPKE (1972). For the rest, it is clear that it makes no difference the fact that we have not Pythagoras' own text, because we all know that the case of Homer is not less puzzled, as little better specified in the following paragraph.

¹⁰ A possible that has been actualised is no more a mere possible, but it is what it had to be. «Since we cannot know the true formal reason for existence in any particular case because it involves a progression to infinity, it is therefore sufficient for us to know the truth of contingent things *a posteriori*, that is, through experience, and yet, at the same time, to hold, universally or in general, that principle divinely planted in our mind, confirmed both by reason and experience itself (to the extent that we can penetrate things), that nothing happens without a reason, as well as the principle of opposites, that that which has the more reason always happens»: *On contingency* [1686?], (LZ, 29, 15). See also *Prima Veritates* [1686?] (LZ, 31, 5). Of course, in standard modal logic we can't affirm $\Box\alpha$ from α , except where α is a theorem, i.e. if α has been demonstrated without any assumption. It is true that if Plato is a philosopher, that doesn't imply that he necessary is a philosopher, but in this world he actually is a philosopher and at the present time the situation cannot be otherwise (so to say, it is empirically irrevocable that Plato is a philosopher). Likewise, it is formally true that Ulysses could be created or not, but since he was created and we share the world where this fact has happened, his having-being-actualized is irrevocable.

¹¹ *Discourse on Metaphysics* [1686] (LZ, 39, 6). I know that the principle "nihil est sine ratione" in Leibniz does not get back to a strong necessity, precisely to the extent that it explains why something exists or happen, pointing out that it could have been otherwise. Cf. *The Monadology* [1714] (LZ, 217, 32): «we can find no true or existing fact [...] without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us». However, getting back to the case described in the quotation above, also modern Chaos Theory seems to suggest that we do have a cause, although the latter may seem strange and even incomprehensible at first sight. Cf. GLEICK (1987).

¹² That is why someone says that it would be better to speak of possible worlds about geometry, and of fictional worlds about literature. See DOLEŽEL (1998, 22- 23). A possible world is ontologically complete (even if there is no reason for its being also epistemologically complete) and so it is decidable in principle in every hidden aspects, but a fictional world is always incomplete and so it is never fully decidable. What we don't know about a fictional entity cannot be compensated by a deeper and deeper research, because literature is a special speech act that makes its objects being as far as it shows them on the page. On this performing aspect of literary texts, see DERRIDA (1992) and ATTRIDGE (2004). I will mention no

more this difference between literary and ideal entities, because it is possible to consider the fictional world as an ontologically complete object *in itself*, but epistemologically non-decidable for us. About the incompleteness of fictional objects, see also BARBERO (2008, 628-633).

¹³ *Odyssey*, book XIX, vv. 349-508. Consulted edition: HOMER, *The Odyssey*, Cambridge (MA) – London: Harvard University Press, 1995, vol. II, pp. 260-271.

¹⁴ Cf. SWIRSKI (2007, 41-67). Of course a model does work as far as it is not a complete reproduction of what is out there, but just a useful reduction of it. The consequence is that all models provide incomplete representations of the things they deal with. «Reduction [...] is a technique for compacting the world to manageable proportions, ideally in the form of independent (controlled) and dependent (studied) variables. Without it neither science, philosophy, nor literature could express the experience of the world into the intellectual orbit circumscribed by our finite processing resources» (these lines are at page 47).

¹⁵ Cf. CRITTENDEN (1991, 151): «The facts about the character are very different from those about the real person. Even if amazingly the [fictional] events are just those of the real person's life, the [fiction] is about a created character and not about a real individual».

¹⁶ Cf. ECO (1982, 157-163). See also ECO (1997, 55-56), reprinted in ECO (2005, 104-117); in this second edition, the passage I referred to is at p. 109.

¹⁷ Cf. GOWERS (2002, 4): «Mathematicians do not apply scientific theories directly to the world but rather to *models*. A model in this sense can be thought of as an imaginary, simplified version of the part of the world being studied, one in which exact calculations are possible». Perhaps also that branch of mathematic that is called “pure physics” works in such way: consider for instance the constructions of the Theory of Strings. See for example GREENE (1999). How much is fictional and how much is not fictional in their theorems? Clearly, I don't mean that the assertions of pure physics are not rigorous. They simply seem to lack a close commitment to the world of experience, which indeed they treat as a portion of the being among the many others we can derive by solving certain equations. The point is that there is no reason for saying that only the solutions connected to our reality are acceptable, and thus there should be many other universes, so that our own becomes just like one of the possible worlds of fictional theory.

¹⁸ ECO (1994, 83-93).

¹⁹ *The Tempest*, act IV, vv. 151-161. Consulted edition: W. SHAKESPEARE, *The Tempest*, London: Methuen, 1954 (1611), pp. 103-104.

²⁰ According to this statement, my proposal (especially for maths) is not a version of pure fictionalism, but looks like a neo-Meinongian thesis that accepts the epistemological argument of Balaguer and is interested in Yablo's theory of the game-framework. Compare BALAGUER (2008) and YABLO (2001), but see also YABLO (2005, 98): in certain circumstances, a sentence can be considered as «an utterance that represents its objects as being like so: the way that they need to be to make the utterance ‘correct’ in a game that it itself suggests». If someone objects that Meinongism and fictionalism are two different theories and therefore I shouldn't mix their arguments together, I will reply that it is possible that there is a “Complementary Principle” for fictional objects as well as for some physical particles: so, we could think that fictionalism and Meinongism can be assumed as “complementary” theories of the same fictional entities, just like the wave-like and the corpuscular views provide a double description of the nature of light. Of course, this is just a conjecture, but it seems rich of heuristic implications.

²¹ FERRARIS (2009, XIII, but also 153-154 and 176-177).

²² FERRARIS (2009, 372): *Transcendental Fallacy*, note 1.

²³ The word “ideal” is not good enough, since it is improper to refer to a fictional character as if it were an idea or a Platonic reality, even if there is someone who seems to believe the contrary (cf. HILLIS MILLER, 2002, 14-15). Maybe we could consider both mathematical and literary objects as abstract entities, developing what is discussed in ZALTA (2004). But also the concept of abstraction has its flaws, because a fictional object is much more than a type, it has some specific features which cannot be generalized. For example, when a character is a character and not only a mask, of course it is abstract but it is not an abstraction, because it has its own personality.

²⁴ Moreover, we are not even sure that these inventors did exist as the individuals we normally refer to. Once more, the case of Homer is very similar to that one of Pythagoras, because both are somehow mythical personalities. See, for instance, GRIFFIN (1987, 3-4) and KAHN (2001, 1-8).

²⁵ Cf. BARA (2003). Let's remember that a theorem is not the sole statement we use to recall when we deal with it. Pythagoras' theorem, for instance, is the sum of the thesis mentioned here so many times (“the square constructed...”) and its demonstration, otherwise we should speak of a mere mathematical conjecture. Demonstrations depend on personal creativity and social rules, because they are valid if we conform our thoughts to the reasonableness of the community of the experts, therefore mathematical theorems are interpersonal realities, or at least interpersonal realities *too*. If we could dismiss our collective reason and believes, mathematical theorems would turn into mere extravagant speeches. Cf. VALESIO (1980). A generally compatible argument (in spite of the particular distinction that it emphasizes between mathematic entities and literary ones) is available in ECO (2000, 11): «These literary entities of

literature are among us. They were not there from the beginning of time as (perhaps) square roots and Pythagoras' theorem were, but now that they have been created by literature and nourished by our emotional investments in them, they do exist and we have to come to terms with them. Let us even say, to avoid ontological and metaphysical discussions, that they exist like a cultural habitus, an idea, a disposition».

²⁶ Cf. LOTMAN (1977).

²⁷ ALSTED (1630). Quoted in FERRARIS (2003, 83).

²⁸ Cf. NIETZSCHE (1882, 119-120), aphorism 125.

²⁹ Cf. CALVINO (1962, 91-97).

³⁰ ROTMAN (1993, 11). For the link between the holding off from God and the development of a semiotic view of mathematics, see also ROTMAN (2000, 127).

³¹ Because of this independence of the theorem from the historic intentions of the mathematician at issue (independence empirically confirmed by the many versions available of the theorem, some of which are clearly explicated at the web address <http://www.jimloy.com/geometry/pythag.htm>) others – as we already said – use to stress the difference between mathematical objects and *stricto sensu* fictional things. Of course, it is true that a mathematic item seems to subsist even without anyone who manipulates it, but for me it is much more important that it always subsists without its “inventor”.

³² Useless, because the archaeological constraints imply a limited set of semantic actualizations, so that the literary text should become communicatively inert, sooner or later. On the other hand, pointing out that in critical understanding the risk is that of a useless interference of the author, I mean that there is also a useful interference of him or her: it is what we can find as communicative sediment in his or her concrete work. For further details, see the following paragraph.

³³ The paradox is even worse if we agree with Freud, Nietzsche or Marx, saying that the author *ipse* may not even know what he or she wants to do or to say.

³⁴ As I have already said, some people think that these features are in the theorem's objective substratum, not in its formulation. At last, it is the matter of difference between *material* and *conceptual a-priori*.

³⁵ Of course, this getting inside the work left by the author must be considered as coming into play in a given text, and so playing along with the rules of the text as system of signification. It is a matter of proper behaviors in response to the text, more or less like when we play chess, or some other game. It goes without saying that the second Wittgenstein is the main reference of the idea just expressed. Cf. WITTGENSTEIN (1964).

³⁶ THOMPSON (1995, 98-99): «I ask someone, whom I have invited to dinner that evening, if he likes strawberries. He replies that he does. If he is telling the truth, and I believe him, then I know at least one thing about his own private tastes. He could, however, be saying that he likes them in order to be polite (seeing that I am returning home with a punnet of strawberries in my hand when I ask him the question). I need to ask myself if, from my past experience of him, he is someone who is straightforward about his views, or if he is always anxious to please and agree with people. If the latter is the case, then I am really no nearer knowing if he really does like strawberries. I could observe him at the dinner table that evening. Does he savour the strawberries, or swallow them quickly? Does he appear to be enjoying himself, or does he suddenly turn rather pale and excuse himself from the table? Do I subsequently observe him buying and eating strawberries?».

³⁷ RYLE (1949, 23).

³⁸ The distinction between a *dictionary process* of understanding and an *encyclopaedic narrative ability* is based on some special features of human cognitive possibility: we can improve our knowledge of a statement, giving the translation of that sentence word by word and, if a word is still mysterious, then we can also explain it describing its extension; on the other hand, we have an encyclopaedic narrative hermeneutics when the gain to knowledge is expressed also by a whole set of procedures, speaking of what we can or have to do with the unknown reference. In this last case, it is clear that we can understand also a metaphorical use of an expression, because the meaning is no more in the mere equivalence of some terms, but in some basic plots implied by the term at stake. Cf. ECO (1997, 150-163), cap. III, par. 3.4.3-3.4.6.

³⁹ Cf. SCHOLÉS (1982); it could be enough even just p.14.

⁴⁰ MARCHESI (1983, 11), translation mine.

⁴¹ Cf. LOTMAN (1970, 58): «In order to let the artistic communication happen, it is necessary that the author's code and the reader's one form two intersecting sets of structural elements» (translation mine). See also the pages that follow this quotation, which are about the concept of information *entropy*.

⁴² MERLEAU-PONTY (1953, 24-25), translation mine.

⁴³ DERRIDA (1988, 8): « To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten. When I say “my future disappearance”

[*disparition*: also, demise, *trans.*], it is in order to render this proposition more immediately acceptable. I ought to be able to say my disappearance, pure and simple, my non-presence in general, for instance the non-presence of my intention of saying something meaningful [*mon vouloir-dire, mon intention-de-signification*], of my wish to communicate, from the emission or production of the mark. For a writing to be a writing it must continue to “act” and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written “in his name”. [...] The situation of the writer and that of the underwriter [*du souscripteur*: the signatory, *trans.*] is, concerning the written text, basically the same as that of the reader».

⁴⁴ ECO (1992, 67).

⁴⁵ ECO (1994, 8-11).

⁴⁶ ECO (1992, 25): «I have suggested that between the intention of the author (very difficult to find out and frequently irrelevant for the interpretation of a text) and the intention of the interpreter who (to quote Richard Rorty) simply “beats the text into a shape which will serve for his purpose”, there is a third possibility. There is an *intention of the text*».

⁴⁷ SEARLE (2009, 7).

⁴⁸ SEARLE (2009, 8): «all functions are observer-relative. It is only relative to agents, only relative to observers, that something can be said to have a certain function».

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ SEARLE (2009, 6).

⁵¹ Cf. POPKIN – STROLL (1986, 273-274): «to be ‘reasonable’ is operating on the basis of the set of mental habits which we call ‘normal’. The person who believes that fire will burn, that $2+2=4$, that the sun will rise tomorrow, that there are external objects which exist even when not experienced, and that there is some sort of internal continuity to his/her experience, called ‘him/herself’, has the ‘normal’ set of beliefs, and is considered a reasonable human being. Someone else, operating with different mental habits and customs, who thereby has a different set of beliefs, is ‘abnormal’ and ‘unreasonable’. But which of the two has true knowledge? Which of the two believes something that actually corresponds to what is going on in the world? As Hume pointed out, we can never answer these questions. Any beliefs that we have only show what mental quirks we operate by. There is no justification for believing one thing rather than another, except that we find that we have a strong feeling or tendency to do so. When we try to find a reason for, or evidence for, believing something, we discover that we can find none, and can only report that our minds work in the curious manner that we think that the belief is true».

⁵² VICO (1710, 51-52): «the true is what is made; [...] the first truth is therefore in God, because God is the first Maker; and [...] it is complete, because it makes manifest to God since He contains them, the elements of things, extrinsic and intrinsic alike. Furthermore, to know is to arrange these elements. Thought is therefore proper to the human mind, but understanding proper to the divine mind. [...] Let me illustrate my point by a simile: divine truth is a solid representation of things, like something moulded; human truth is a line drawing or two-dimensional representation, like a picture. And just as divine truth is what God orders and produces as He comes to know it, so human truth is what man arranges and makes as he knows it. In this way knowledge is cognition of the genus or mode by which a thing is made, and by means of which, as the mind come to know the mode, because it arranges the elements, it makes the thing» (*De antiquissima Italorum sapientia*, I). See also LILLA (1993, 29-32): «The nature of the true is that it has been made. [...] If, as Vico contends, all knowledge is a *post facto* collection of elements used in creation, then clearly man is permanently barred from complete knowledge of anything he encounters in the natural world. [...] Cause is what unites making and knowing. Things exist because they are caused to be by the Supreme Maker; they are known by God because he understands those causes, and understands *through* those causes. Cause is the *negotium*, the operation by which knowing and making are joined. “If the true is what is made,” Vico writes, “to prove the true by means of causes is the same as to effect it. Thus *causa* and *negotium* will be the same (the operation) while the true and what is made will be the same (the effect).” A cause is that which both needs no other source to produce an effect and has all the necessary elements within itself. In this sense God is the First Cause of the existence of the physical world and the only one capable of having absolute knowledge (*scientia*) of it. Man has been barred from this knowledge. If this theory of cause explains why man is denied divine understanding of the world, it also opens another possibility to him. It might indeed imply that there is a realm in which he can be said to “cause” things to be and, consequently, a realm in which he would be capable of knowing something about them. Two, radically opposed, alternatives are opened by Vico’s equation of cause with knowledge. To deny man any knowledge by cause would lead us to the sceptical conclusion that man lives inescapably in a world of appearances, in which he can claim no sure knowledge. Yet to extend the

verum-factum corollary of the cause principle to man himself opens the possibility not only that man can obtain knowledge, but also that he is, in some sense, like God. Vico insists that *verum-factum* can be extended to man in the mathematical realm [...] By treating mathematics as pure contemplation of divine entities, many metaphysicians before Vico had ignored its true foundations. If we accept that mathematics is a species of making, and not of divine contemplation, we will learn that this activity mimics God's in important ways. [...] The only things we can be said to make – fully make within ourselves, not simply reconstruct externally from God's creations – are the mathematical abstractions that do not involve physical body. [...] Man invents from within himself the fictions of point and unit, and from them derives a world of shapes and numbers. In this world he is the cause. But it is a fictive world; he can know it, but what he knows will bear no necessary relation to anything corporeal». Lilla's analysis points out that, according to Vico, maths is fictional, but forgets to treat the fictionality of literature and law. Of course, for the Neapolitan philosopher, what applies to science applies to humanities too. Whatever is based on language is made of human beings' creations, namely concepts and metaphorical images. For example, Vico states that the first poetry «was born, as the supreme fable must be, wholly ideal, [since] the idea of the poet gives things all the being that they lack», VICO (1725, 152). Therefore, every rhetorical speech, from theology to law, from lyric to narrative or drama, is, «as the masters of the art of poetry say it should be, entirely imaginary, like the work of a painter of ideas, and not representational, like that of a painter of portraits. Hence, through this resemblance to God the creator, the poets were called 'divine'» (*ibidem*). This kind of constrain of our discursive knowledge to a fictional a-priori is well recognized for instance by BRYAN (1986, 255-265).

⁵³ Cf. HESSE (1993).

⁵⁴ ANTISERI (2011, 35-36). Cf. FERRARIS (1996, 14-15).

⁵⁵ Cf. SMITH (2001). For an object to be a *bona fide* entity means – roughly speaking – to be *given* in the external world, independently of any human *fiat*. In my opinion, however, such a givenness must be considered as an extreme theoretical case, a limit – I would also say – of our apprehension of reality. As Smith recognizes, «external reality, too, is in a certain sense tailored to fit our linguistically generated expectations. We apprehend the world as consisting of pairs of shoes, bundles of string, fleets of ships, of bombings, butterings and burnishings, and in each case fiat boundaries are at work in articulating the reality with which we have to deal. Thus if I say 'John built mud pies in the sand', then the real-world correlate of the object of this sentence is a complex plurality (fiat object) whose constituent unitary parts are comprehended through the concept *mud pie*. If I say 'John embarrassed Mary', then the real-world correlate of the verb of this sentence is a complex dynamic affair (a fiat process) which is comprehended through the transitive verb *embarrass*» (*ivi*, pp. 141).

⁵⁶ Cf. AN TOMARINI (2007, 6 and 17-18 and 40).

⁵⁷ It is possible to understand better my thesis considering it as finally rooted in Dilthey's view, cf. DILTHEY (1989), but generalizing his theoretical position so that it absorbs the empiric world as far as it is lived (*erlebt*).

⁵⁸ Cf. FERRARIS (1985).

⁵⁹ Cf. FERRARIS (2003, 34-35).

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