

# Serial Fiction, Continued

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*In 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', Andrew McGonigal presents new data that a theory of truth in fiction should account for, and argues that the data is best accounted for by his relativist view. I argue against McGonigal's relativist view and in favour of a more metaphysical view. The key feature of this view is that it is one on which the content of a work of fiction can change over time. Along the way I also argue against Ross Cameron's contextualist view.*

## 1. Introduction

In 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', Andrew McGonigal presents new data that a theory of truth in fiction should account for, and argues that the data is best accounted for by his relativist view.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I argue in favour of a more metaphysical view. In Section 2, I present the data and McGonigal's relativist view. I also present Ross Cameron's contextualist view.<sup>2</sup> In Section 3, I argue that their views do not provide a satisfactory solution to what I call *the contradiction problem*. Finally, in Section 4, I present a view that, I argue, accounts for the data and provides a satisfactory solution to the contradiction problem. The key feature of this view is that it is one on which the content of a work of fiction can change over time.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. McGonigal and Cameron

### *The Data*

Consider the movies known as *A New Hope* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983). Let's call them 'Hope', 'Empire', and 'Return', respectively. McGonigal presents the following case:

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- 1 Andrew McGonigal, 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', *BJA* 53 (2013), 165–179.
  - 2 Ross P. Cameron, 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist', in Christy Mag Uidhir (ed.), *Art and Abstract Objects* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 179–196.
  - 3 For a general defence of the claim that the content of works of fiction and other artworks can change over time, see Graham McFee, 'The Historicity of Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38 (1980), 307–324; Graham McFee, 'The Historical Character of Art: A Reappraisal', *BJA* 32 (1992), 307–319. For a reply to McFee's second paper, see R. A. Sharpe, 'McFee's Forward Retroactivism', *BJA* 34 (1994), 170–173. For a reply to the reply, see Graham McFee, 'Back to the Future: A Reply to Sharpe', *BJA* 35 (1995), 278–283. David Kaplan is sympathetic to the claim that works of fiction and other artworks can change over time. See David Kaplan, 'Words on Words', *The Journal of Philosophy* 108 (2011), 504–529, at 506–507. Guy Rohrbaugh argues for this claim. See Guy Rohrbaugh, 'Artworks as Historical Individuals', *European Journal of Philosophy* 11 (2003), 177–205, at 186–189. This paper is intended to be in the spirit of their work.

*Luke and Darth Vader*

In *Hope*, Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke Skywalker that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered his father. But, in *Empire*, Darth Vader tells Luke that he's his father and, in *Return*, Yoda also tells Luke that Darth Vader is his father. In an apparition in *Return*, Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke that his father became Darth Vader and that what he had said before—that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered his father—was true 'from a certain point of view'.<sup>4</sup>

Suppose that a girl—call her 'Little Girl'—is watching *Hope* in 1977. For some reason, Little Girl says:

(1) In that fiction, Darth Vader is Luke's father.

And suppose that a woman—call her 'Grown Woman'—is watching *Hope* (or at least doing what we would ordinarily think of as watching that movie) in 2013, after *Empire* and *Return* have been released.<sup>5</sup> Grown Woman also says (1). Intuitively, there is something bad about Little Girl's utterance of (1) in 1977. (Bear in mind that, when *Hope* was made, no one who was working on the movie—not even George Lucas—was harbouring secret thoughts about shocking revelations of family ties to come in any sequels). And, intuitively, there is something correspondingly good about Grown Woman's utterance of (1) in 2013. This is a case of *retroactive continuity* or *retconning*, in which later works of fiction in a series can appear to change previous works of fiction or our interpretations of them.<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, I assume that what is bad about Little Girl's utterance of (1) is that it is false and that what is correspondingly good about Grown Woman's utterance of (1) is that it is true. Here I agree with McGonigal and Cameron.<sup>7</sup> Others might disagree. For example, perhaps Little Girl's utterance of (1) in 1977 is true in virtue of what happened later, in 1980 and 1983.<sup>8</sup> If you think that Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1) are both true, then you're not going to like the view that I propose in Section 4, since

4 McGonigal, 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', 166.

5 It turns out that the assumption that what Grown Woman is watching is in fact *Hope* isn't innocuous (see section 3).

6 For further cases of this kind, see McGonigal, 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', 169, 172. See also Roy T. Cook, 'Canonicity and Normativity in Massive, Serialized, Collaborative Fiction', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71 (2013), 271–276.

7 See McGonigal, 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', 175–176; Cameron, 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist', 192.

8 Thanks to Travis Kendall and Shieva Kleinschmidt for pushing this view. Jerrold Levinson is sympathetic to this kind of view at some times. See Jerrold Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is', *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), 5–28, reprinted (with additional notes) in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990; and Oxford: OUP, 2011), 63–88. See also Jerrold Levinson, 'Work and Oeuvre', in his *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 242–273. But Levinson is not sympathetic to this kind of view at other times. See Jerrold Levinson, 'Artworks and the Future', in Thomas Anderberg, Tore Nilstun, and Ingmar Persson (eds), *Aesthetic Distinction: Essays Presented to Göran Hermerén on His 50th Birthday* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988), 56–84, reprinted (with additional notes) in his *Music, Art, and Metaphysics*, 179–214.

This kind of view is akin to temporal externalism: the view that the meaning of an utterance at a time can depend in part on later linguistic practices. For an argument for temporal externalism, see Henry Jackman, 'We Live Forwards but Understand Backwards: Linguistic Practices and Future Behavior', *Pacific Philosophical*

it is designed to account for the difference in truth value between Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1). But then you are not going to like McGonigal's and Cameron's views either, since they too are designed to account for that difference. In the rest of the paper, then, I assume that we want a view that accounts for the difference in truth value between Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1). McGonigal's view, Cameron's view, and the more metaphysical view that I propose in Section 4 all account for that difference; however, I argue that the more metaphysical view is preferable on other grounds.

### *McGonigal's View*

Let's call the contexts that are relevant for interpreting Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1) *Little Girl's context* and *Grown Woman's context*, respectively. On McGonigal's view, (1) expresses the same proposition—namely, the proposition that, in *Hope*, Darth Vader is Luke's father—relative to Little Girl's context and Grown Woman's context.<sup>9</sup>

On McGonigal's view, the proposition expressed by (1) relative to Little Girl's and Grown Woman's contexts can be evaluated relative to different circumstances. Let's call the circumstances that are relevant for evaluating Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1) *Little Girl's circumstance* and *Grown Woman's circumstance*, respectively. On McGonigal's view, circumstances include parameters that specify which works of fiction are relevant.<sup>10</sup> In particular, Little Girl's circumstance includes a parameter that specifies that *Hope* is relevant, whereas Grown Woman's circumstance includes a parameter that specifies that what is relevant is something that we can call *the original trilogy*, an extended fiction that (roughly speaking) has *Hope*, *Empire*, and *Return* as parts.<sup>11</sup> On McGonigal's view, the proposition that (1) expresses is false relative to Little Girl's circumstance but true relative to Grown Woman's circumstance. McGonigal's view is a form of *semantic relativism*: it is *relativist* insofar as it says that the same proposition can have different truth values relative to circumstances that differ in some parameter other than the possible

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*Quarterly* 80 (1999), 157–177. For a reply, see Jessica Brown, 'Against Temporal Externalism', *Analysis* 60 (2000), 178–188. For replies to the reply, see Tom Stoneham, 'Temporal Externalism', *Philosophical Papers* 32 (2003), 97–107 and Henry Jackman, 'Temporal Externalism, Deference, and Our Ordinary Linguistic Practice', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 86 (2005), 365–380.

- 9 The framework employed in the text comes, of course, from Kaplan. David Kaplan, 'Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals', and 'Afterthoughts', in Joseph Almog, John Perry, and Howard Wettstein (eds), *Themes from Kaplan* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), 481–563 and 565–614, respectively. My thinking about contexts has been deeply influenced by Stefano Predelli's work. See, for example, Stefano Predelli, *Contexts: Meaning, Truth, and the Use of Language* (Oxford: OUP, 2005). See also notes 13, 30, and 32.
- 10 McGonigal, 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', 176. On the semantics that he proposes, a sentence like (1) is evaluated relative to 'a world *W* and set of salient fictional episodes *E*'. The view that I discuss in this article is one on which sentences are evaluated relative to circumstances that specify works of fiction, including extended fictions, rather than sets of works of fiction. Nothing hangs on this difference (see note 18).
- 11 It turns out that the assumption that the original trilogy has *Hope*, *Empire*, and *Return* as parts is not innocuous either (see section 3).

worlds parameter; and it is *semantic* insofar as it says that it is the content of a sentence that can be evaluated relative to those kinds of circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

On McGonigal's view, Little Girl's utterance of (1) is false, because it is represented for semantic purposes as (1) paired with Little Girl's context, and the proposition expressed by (1) relative to Little Girl's context is false relative to Little Girl's circumstance, which is the circumstance that corresponds to Little Girl's context.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, on McGonigal's view, Grown Woman's utterance of (1) is true, because it is represented for semantic purposes as (1) paired with Grown Woman's context, and the proposition expressed by (1) relative to Grown Woman's context is true relative to Grown Woman's circumstance, which is the circumstance that corresponds to Grown Woman's context. McGonigal's view thus accounts for the difference in truth value between Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1).

### *Cameron's View*

In 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist', Cameron presents a contextualist view that accounts for McGonigal's data.<sup>14</sup> We shall consider Cameron's view in more detail in Section 3, but a simplified version of his view will do for now.

On a simplified version of Cameron's view, 'that fiction' in

(1) In that fiction, Darth Vader is Luke's father,

refers to different things relative to Little Girl's and Grown Woman's contexts: relative to Little Girl's context, 'that fiction' refers to *Hope*; whereas, relative to Grown Woman's context, 'that fiction' refers to the original trilogy.<sup>15</sup> Because 'that fiction' refers to different things relative to Little Girl's and Grown Woman's contexts, (1) expresses different propositions relative to those contexts: relative to Little Girl's context, (1) expresses the same proposition as

(2) In *Hope*, Darth Vader is Luke's father,

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12 For this kind of relativism, see, for example, Max Kölbel, 'Motivations for Relativism', in Manuel García-Carpintero and Max Kölbel (eds), *Relative Truth* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 1–38. Some semantic relativists also say that the truth of a sentence depends on the context of assessment. For this kind of relativism, see, for example, John MacFarlane, 'Truth in the Garden of Forking Paths', in García-Carpintero and Kölbel, *Relative Truth*, 81–120. See also McGonigal, 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', 176. I ignore contexts of assessment in the text, since they are not needed to account for the difference in truth value between Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1) (see note 37), nor do they help solve the contradiction problem (see note 17).

13 Predelli speaks of 'a *representation* of an utterance for semantic purposes', which is needed to bridge the gap between utterances and sentence–context pairs. See Stefano Predelli, 'Intentions, Indexicals and Communication', *Analysis* 62 (2002), 310–316, at 311; his emphasis. On the distinction between utterances and sentence–context pairs, see Kaplan, 'Demonstratives', 522–523, and 'Afterthoughts', 584–585.

14 Cameron, 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist', 191–192, 194.

15 More carefully, what Cameron says is that the first work of fiction 'has *A New Hope* but not *The Empire Strikes Back* as a part' (see *ibid.*, 191. This is consistent with, but weaker than, the claim that the first work of fiction just is *Hope*. But nothing in this article hangs on the difference between these two claims.

whereas, relative to Grown Woman's context, (1) expresses the same proposition as  
 (3) In the original trilogy, Darth Vader is Luke's father.

Cameron's view is a form of *semantic contextualism*: it is *contextualist* insofar as it says that (1) expresses different propositions relative to different contexts; and it is *semantic* insofar as it says that it is a sentence, (1), whose content changes across contexts.<sup>16</sup>

On a simplified version of Cameron's view, the proposition expressed by (2) is false, whereas the proposition expressed by (3) is true. So, relative to Little Girl's context, the proposition expressed by (1) is false; whereas, relative to Grown Woman's context, the proposition expressed by (1) is true. On a simplified version of Cameron's view, Little Girl's utterance of (1) is false, because it is represented for semantic purposes as (1) paired with Little Girl's context, and the proposition expressed by (1) relative to Little Girl's context is false. Conversely, Grown Woman's utterance of (1) is true, because it is represented for semantic purposes as (1) paired with Grown Woman's context, and the proposition expressed by (1) relative to Grown Woman's context is true. A simplified version of Cameron's view thus accounts for the difference in truth value between Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1).

### 3. The Contradiction Problem

#### *The Problem*

Here are three claims that seem true:

- (A<sub>1</sub>) *Hope* is a part of the original trilogy.
- (A<sub>2</sub>) The original trilogy doesn't contradict itself.
- (A<sub>3</sub>) *Hope* contradicts the original trilogy.

It seems that the original trilogy is an extended fiction that has *Hope*, *Empire*, and *Return* as parts. So (A<sub>1</sub>) seems true. (A<sub>2</sub>) and (A<sub>3</sub>) are a bit more complicated, since they rely on an account of what it is for a work of fiction to contradict itself or for two works of fiction to contradict each other.

Let's start with (A<sub>2</sub>). Intuitively, a work of fiction *contradicts itself* if and only if a proposition and its negation are both true in that work of fiction. Consider, for example, the proposition that Darth Vader is Luke's father and its negation, the proposition that Darth Vader is not Luke's father. Let's call them 'DAD' and 'NOT DAD', respectively. One might think that DAD is true in the original trilogy but that it's not the case that NOT DAD is true in the original trilogy. After all, in *Empire* and *Return*, Darth Vader, Yoda, and Obi-Wan Kenobi all say that Darth Vader is Luke's father; and, if one thinks that it's true in the original trilogy that Darth Vader is Luke's father, one might think that it's not also true in the original trilogy that Darth Vader is *not* Luke's father. So (A<sub>2</sub>) seems true.

Consider (A<sub>3</sub>) next. Intuitively, one work of fiction *contradicts another* if and only if some proposition that is true in the first work of fiction is such that its negation is true in the other.

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16 Cameron explicitly describes his view as contextualist (see *ibid.*).

One might think that DAD is true in the original trilogy but that NOT DAD is true in *Hope*. After all, although in the sequels characters say that Darth Vader is Luke's father, in *Hope* Obi-Wan Kenobi says that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered Luke's father. So (A<sub>3</sub>) seems true.<sup>17</sup>

Together, (A<sub>1</sub>)–(A<sub>3</sub>) entail that *Hope* is a part of an extended fiction that doesn't contradict itself but that it nonetheless contradicts. That seems, if not contradictory, at least weird.<sup>18</sup> It would be a bit like a consistent set of propositions being inconsistent with one of its subsets. Let's call this problem *the contradiction problem*. What we want, then, is a view that not only accounts for the difference in truth value between Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1), but also provides a satisfactory solution to the contradiction problem.

### *Interpretation*

McGonigal and Cameron would both deny (A<sub>3</sub>) as a matter of interpretation. For example, McGonigal doesn't say that NOT DAD is true relative to Little Girl's circumstance. Rather, he makes the weaker claim that it is not the case that DAD is true relative to Little Girl's circumstance.<sup>19</sup> This is Cameron's interpretation of *Hope* as well. On his interpretation, DAD (or something like it) is neither true nor false in *Hope* and so, presumably, for NOT DAD too.<sup>20</sup> Speaking of the Darth Vader and Luke characters in *Hope*, Cameron says that the movie 'leaves it open if there is any familial relationship between those characters in exactly the same way it leaves open what [the Darth Vader character in *Hope*] has for breakfast according to the fiction' and that it 'does not settle the issues of Luke's parentage'.<sup>21</sup>

But this isn't an adequate solution to the contradiction problem. First, this interpretation of *Hope* is incorrect, since (despite his protestations to the contrary in *Return*) Obi-Wan Kenobi tells Luke in *Hope* that Darth Vader betrayed and murdered his father.<sup>22</sup> And, second, there are other examples that give rise to the same problem. For example,

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17 If we wanted to be more formal, we could say that *Hope* contradicts the original trilogy in the sense that some proposition that is true relative to an appropriate circumstance that specifies that *Hope* is relevant is such that its negation (or some proposition that is the negation of) is true relative to an appropriate circumstance that specifies that the original trilogy is relevant. For example, one might think that DAD is true relative to Grown Woman's circumstance, which specifies that the original trilogy is relevant; whereas NOT DAD is true relative to Little Girl's circumstance, which specifies that *Hope* is relevant.

Appealing to contexts of assessment rather than circumstances of evaluation doesn't seem to make a difference here (see note 12). *Hope* also contradicts the original trilogy in the following sense: DAD is true when assessed from a context in which the original trilogy is relevant; whereas NOT DAD is true when assessed from a context in which *Hope* is relevant.

18 Using sets rather than extended fictions doesn't seem to make a difference here (see note 10). If we used sets, would get the result that *Hope* is a member of a set of movies that does not contradict itself even though *Hope* contradicts it. That still seems weird.

19 McGonigal, 'Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction', 176.

20 On the need for the parenthetical qualification, see below.

21 Cameron, 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist', 192, 194.

22 Thanks to Alexandre Tremblay here.

the proposition that Darth Vader literally betrayed and murdered Luke's father (and not merely figuratively, or from a certain point of view) is true in *Hope*, but its negation is true in the original trilogy.<sup>23</sup>

### Characters

Cameron would deny (A<sub>3</sub>) on other grounds. On Cameron's view, 'Luke' refers to different fictional characters relative to Little Girl's and Grown Woman's contexts, as does 'Darth Vader'. Relative to Little Girl's context, 'Luke' and 'Darth Vader' refer to fictional characters that he calls 'Luke<sup>-</sup>' and 'Darth Vader<sup>-</sup>', respectively; whereas, relative to Grown Woman's context, 'Luke' and 'Darth Vader' refer to fictional characters that he calls 'Luke<sup>+</sup>' and 'Darth Vader<sup>+</sup>', respectively.<sup>24</sup> On Cameron's view, there is no such thing as the proposition that Darth Vader is Luke's father. Instead, there are (at least) two propositions: that Darth Vader<sup>-</sup> is Luke<sup>-</sup>'s father and that Darth Vader<sup>+</sup> is Luke<sup>+</sup>'s father.<sup>25</sup> Let's call those propositions 'DAD<sup>-</sup>' and 'DAD<sup>+</sup>', respectively. Consider their negations, the propositions that Darth Vader<sup>-</sup> is not Luke<sup>-</sup>'s father and that Darth Vader<sup>+</sup> is not Luke<sup>+</sup>'s father. Let's call those propositions 'NOT DAD<sup>-</sup>' and 'NOT DAD<sup>+</sup>', respectively. On Cameron's view, *Hope* doesn't contradict the original trilogy: DAD<sup>-</sup> is false in *Hope*, but NOT DAD<sup>-</sup> is neither true nor false in the original trilogy; and DAD<sup>+</sup> is true in the original trilogy, but NOT DAD<sup>+</sup> is neither true nor false in *Hope*.<sup>26</sup>

A consequence of this way of denying (A<sub>3</sub>) is that (A<sub>1</sub>) is false too: *Hope* is not a part of the original trilogy, since *Hope* is about Luke<sup>-</sup> and Darth Vader<sup>-</sup>, whereas the original trilogy is about Luke<sup>+</sup> and Darth Vader<sup>+</sup>. More mereologically, Luke<sup>-</sup> and Darth Vader<sup>-</sup> are parts of *Hope*; so, if *Hope* were a part of the original trilogy, then Luke<sup>-</sup> and Darth Vader<sup>-</sup> would be parts of the original trilogy too. But Luke<sup>-</sup> and Darth Vader<sup>-</sup> are not parts of the original trilogy. So neither is *Hope*.<sup>27</sup> What is a part of the original trilogy is instead a duplicate of *Hope*—a movie that we can call '*Hope*<sup>+</sup>'—that is about Luke<sup>+</sup> and Darth Vader<sup>+</sup> rather than Luke<sup>-</sup> and Darth Vader<sup>-</sup>.

But denying (A<sub>1</sub>) doesn't seem to fit with our experience of watching movies. It seems that Little Girl and Grown Woman are watching the same movie and, indeed, that Little Girl could rewatch that movie when she grows up. This might be what McGonigal has in mind when he says:

23 Here is another example: the proposition that Sherlock Holmes died at Reichenbach Falls is true in 'The Final Problem' (1893), but its negation is true in the Holmes canon (in part because its negation is true in 'The Adventure of the Empty House' (1903)).

24 See Cameron, 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist', 191–192.

25 Let's ignore two other propositions: that Darth Vader<sup>+</sup> is Luke<sup>-</sup>'s father and that Darth Vader<sup>-</sup> is Luke<sup>+</sup>'s father.

26 Cameron says that DAD<sup>-</sup> is neither true nor false in *Hope*, but I think he's wrong about that (see above). That interpretation of *Hope* needn't be built into Cameron's view.

27 Cameron says that *Hope* is a part of both of the relevant works of fiction. See Cameron, 'How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist', 191. He calls the relevant works of fiction '*Star Wars*' and '*Star Wars*<sup>+</sup>', respectively (see also note 15). However, this seems to contradict his claim about the referents of 'Luke' and 'Darth Vader'.

It is *prima facie* desirable to be able to account for our sense that we can watch the *same* film again, even when new, salient episodes intervene. The type of straightforward contextualist account sketched above does not obviously have the resources to address this. ... it is ... a considerable cost to the contextualist if she has to parse ‘watching the same film’ as ‘watching a visual and sonic duplicate of the film’.<sup>28</sup>

If *Hope* were a part of the original trilogy, then Cameron could say that, although Little Girl and Grown Woman are not watching exactly the same thing, Little Girl is at least watching something that is a part of what Grown Woman is watching, so Little Girl is watching something that she could (along with other things) watch when she grows up. But, if *Hope* is not a part of the original trilogy, then Little Girl and Grown Woman aren’t watching the same thing, not even in part. I take this to be a reason to seek another solution to the contradiction problem.

#### 4. Work Contextualism

##### *The View*

It is common to compare artworks with sentences: they both express things—namely, contents—relative to contexts. For example, Jerrold Levinson says, ‘what a sentence, work, or other vehicle centrally says, means, or expresses is a function both of its inherent features and of its context of production and projection’.<sup>29</sup> If an artwork is like a sentence and, at different times, the contexts that are relevant for interpreting a sentence might be such that, relative to them, that sentence expresses different propositions, then, at different times, the contexts that are relevant for interpreting an artwork might be such that, relative to them, that artwork has different contents too. In this way, a change over time in which context is relevant for interpreting an artwork might bring with it a change in content.

Imagine an installation piece that consists of an inscription of

(4) I am not here in this gallery with you now,

on a gallery wall.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the artwork is called *The Absence of the Artist*.<sup>31</sup> Suppose that Einar is viewing *The Absence of the Artist* on Monday and that Neoma is viewing it on Tuesday.

28 McGonigal, ‘Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction’, 173; his emphasis. McGonigal discusses a contextualist view, but he doesn’t explicitly attribute it to Cameron. See *ibid.*, 171–174. Cameron, however, does explicitly attribute the data he discusses to McGonigal. See Cameron, ‘How to Be a Nominalist and a Fictional Realist’, 191. The second of McGonigal’s objections, which is about cross-temporal anaphora, applies to Cameron’s view. (See McGonigal, ‘Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction’, 173). But it doesn’t apply to the view to be discussed in Section 4, even though it is contextualist in some ways.

29 Levinson, ‘Work and Oeuvre’, 244. It is tempting to read ‘its inherent features’ as referring to the artwork’s character, in Kaplan’s sense. (See note 9 and below in the text.) Elsewhere, Levinson compares artworks with the contents of sentences rather than with sentences themselves. (See Levinson, ‘What a Musical Work Is’, 22–23, and ‘Artworks and the Future’, 192). According to the view presented in this section, that is not the right analogy.

30 See Stefano Predelli, ‘I Am Not Here Now’, *Analysis* 58 (1998), 107–115; *Contexts*, 43–46; ‘I Am Still Not Here Now’, *Erkenntnis* 74 (2011), 289–303.

31 Or, more likely, *untitled (artist)*.



The context that is relevant for interpreting the artwork on Monday is such that, relative to it, (4) expresses one proposition, a proposition about the artist and the gallery to the effect that she is not there with Einar on Monday; whereas the context that is relevant for interpreting the artwork on Tuesday is such that, relative to it, (4) expresses a different proposition, one about the artist and the gallery to the effect that she is not there with Neoma on Tuesday. This is a change in the content of the artwork over time.

Perhaps what the Luke and Darth Vader case suggests is that we shouldn't think of a work of fiction as a set of propositions. Rather, we should think of a work of fiction as something that, relative to a context, has a set of propositions as its content. In this way, we should think of a work of fiction as an indexical expression, as a vehicle that has a character in Kaplan's sense: that is, a linguistic meaning that, together with context, determines content. Relative to different contexts, a work of fiction can have different sets of propositions as its content. In the Luke and Darth Vader case, one thing that the 1980 release of *Empire* and the 1983 release of *Return* did was change which context is relevant for interpreting *Hope*. Relative to the context that was relevant for interpreting it in 1977, *Hope* has as its content a set that does not include DAD; whereas, relative to the context that is relevant for interpreting it now, *Hope* has as its content a set that does include DAD.<sup>32</sup> According to this view, the content of the movie thus changes across contexts. Let's call this view *work contextualism*. The view is contextualist insofar as it says that the content of a work of fiction can change across contexts; and it is distinguished from semantic contextualism insofar as it says that it is a work of fiction, rather than a sentence, whose content changes across contexts.

For indexicals like 'I', we have functional descriptions of their characters. For example, the character of 'I' is something that determines a function that maps each context to the agent of that context. The same is true of works of fiction. For example, the character of *Hope* is something that determines a function that maps each context to the set of propositions that are true in *Hope* at the time of the context. If the content of *Hope* can change over time in retconning cases, then one thing we know about the character of *Hope* is that, for some works of fiction and times after 1977, it is sensitive to what is true in those works at those times.<sup>33</sup>

For indexicals like 'I', we can also describe their character as a rule: for example, "'I" refers to the speaker or writer'.<sup>34</sup> But, for works of fiction, it might be difficult to describe their character as a rule. Perhaps the following rule would work: '*Hope* refers to the set of propositions that are true in it.' But perhaps that isn't informative in the way that "'I" refers to the speaker or writer' is. It would not be surprising if it turned

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32 Compare Predelli's views on fiction and the aural profile of musical works. On fiction, see Stefano Predelli, 'Talk about Fiction', *Erkenntnis* 46 (1997), 69–77, and *Contexts*. On the aural profile of musical works, see Stefano Predelli, 'The Sound of the Concerto. Against the Invariantist Approach to Musical Ontology', *BJA* 46 (2006), 144–162. But, for a different view about fiction, see Stefano Predelli, 'Modal Monsters and Talk about Fiction', *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 37 (2008), 277–297.

33 It's plausible that only some post-1977 works of fiction are relevant. On the distinction between *canonical* and *non-canonical* works of fiction, see Cook, 'Canonicity and Normativity in Massive, Serialized, Collaborative Fiction'.

34 Kaplan, 'Demonstratives', 505.

out to be difficult to informatively describe the character of a work of fiction as a rule. For, even before we get to retconning cases, it is difficult to come up with ‘principles of generation’ that take us from the features of a work of fiction to what is true in that work.<sup>35</sup> Coming up with principles that can handle retconning cases would only be harder.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Data*

Work contextualism can account for the difference in truth value between Little Girl’s and Grown Woman’s utterances of

- (1) In that fiction, Darth Vader is Luke’s father.

According to work contextualism, (1) expresses the same proposition—namely, the proposition that, in *Hope*, Darth Vader is Luke’s father—relative to Little Girl’s and Grown Woman’s contexts. But, because the content of *Hope* changes over time, that proposition changes in truth value over time. In 1977, the content of *Hope* didn’t have DAD as a member, so the proposition that, in *Hope*, Darth Vader is Luke’s father was false in 1977; whereas, in 2013, the content of *Hope* does have DAD as a member, so the proposition that, in *Hope*, Darth Vader is Luke’s father is true in 2013.

According to work contextualism, Little Girl’s utterance of (1) is false, because it is represented for semantic purposes as (1) paired with Little Girl’s context, and the proposition expressed by (1) relative to Little Girl’s context was false in 1977, which is the time provided by Little Girl’s circumstance, the circumstance that corresponds to Little Girl’s context. Conversely, according to work relativism, Grown Woman’s utterance of (1) is true, because it is represented for semantic purposes as (1) paired with Grown Woman’s context, and the proposition expressed by (1) relative to Grown Woman’s context is true in 2013, which is the time provided by Grown Woman’s circumstance, the circumstance that corresponds to Grown Woman’s context. Work contextualism thus accounts for the difference in truth value between Little Girl’s and Grown Woman’s utterances of (1).<sup>37</sup>

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35 See Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundation of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 138–187.

36 Thanks to Jeff Speaks and an anonymous referee here.

37 Semantic relativists who appeal to contexts of assessment (see note 12) might say that Little Girl’s utterance of (1) is false when evaluated by her mother in 1977, that Little Girl’s utterance of (1) is true when evaluated by Grown Woman in 2013, and that Little Girl’s utterance of (1) is neither true nor false when evaluated simply at a world and not at a context of assessment. See McGonigal, ‘Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction’, 176. Work contextualists say that, relative to Little Girl’s and Grown Woman’s contexts, (1) expresses a proposition that was false in 1977, when her mother evaluated Little Girl’s utterance; that is true in 2013, when Grown Woman is evaluating Little Girl’s utterance; and that is neither true nor false when evaluated simply at a world and not at a time. It doesn’t seem that appealing to contexts of assessment would give semantic relativists any advantage over work contextualists here.

Work contextualism and McGonigal's relativist view agree that (1) expresses the same proposition relative to Little Girl's and Grown Woman's contexts. And they agree that that proposition has different truth values relative to circumstances that differ in some parameter other than the possible worlds parameter.<sup>38</sup> One thing they disagree about is what those circumstances are like.<sup>39</sup> On McGonigal's view, those circumstances include parameters that specify which works of fiction are relevant; whereas, according to work contextualism, those circumstances need not include parameters that do that, provided that they include times. But perhaps the most important difference between work contextualism and McGonigal's relativist view is that work contextualism is a metaphysical view on which the content of works of fiction changes over time, whereas McGonigal's relativist view is not.

### *The Problem*

Finally, work contextualism offers a straightforward solution to the contradiction problem: (A<sub>3</sub>) is false. *Hope* doesn't contradict the original trilogy. DAD was false in *Hope* in 1977, and NOT DAD was true in *Hope* in 1977. But, insofar as the original trilogy existed in 1977, DAD was false in it in 1977, and NOT DAD was true in it in 1977. So *Hope* didn't contradict the original trilogy in 1977. DAD is now true in the original trilogy, and NOT DAD is now false in the original trilogy. But the same goes for *Hope*: DAD is now true in *Hope*, and NOT DAD is now false in *Hope*. So *Hope* doesn't contradict the original trilogy now either.

Some contradictions remain. For example, *Hope* as it was in 1977 contradicts the original trilogy as it is now, since NOT DAD was true in *Hope* in 1977, and DAD is true in the original trilogy now. But that's okay. It's okay for something to now lack a property that one of its parts had but no longer does. And *Hope* as it was in 1977 contradicts *Hope* as it is now. But that's okay too. Indeed, it's exactly what one would expect in a case of genuine change.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike other ways of denying (A<sub>3</sub>), work contextualism doesn't require misinterpreting *Hope* or denying (A<sub>1</sub>). Work contextualists can say that *Hope* is a part of the original trilogy. Little Girl and Grown Woman can both watch *Hope*, and Little Girl can rewatch it; it's just that the content of the movie has changed between 1977, when Little Girl is watching it, and 2013, when Grown Woman is watching it and Little Girl is rewatching it.

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38 So, in this sense, work contextualism is an instance of one kind of relativism (see note 12). But there are still significant differences between work contextualism and McGonigal's relativist view. See below.

39 They might also disagree about the semantic role of contexts of assessment (see note 12).

40 Also, 1977 contradicts 2013 insofar as the proposition that DAD is true in *Hope* is true relative to a circumstance that provides 2013, but its negation—the proposition that it's not the case that DAD is true in *Hope*—is true relative to a circumstance that provides 1977. But that's okay. When *Hope* loses being such that NOT DAD is true in it and gains being such that DAD is true in it, it's to be expected that the times before and after the change would contradict each other.

We thus have a reason for preferring work contextualism to McGonigal's and Cameron's views: unlike those views, work contextualism can account for the difference in truth value between Little Girl's and Grown Woman's utterances of (1) and provide a satisfactory solution to the contradiction problem.<sup>41</sup>

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